

# Statement by APC Opposing Actions Against the Online Presence of Middle East News Agency, Al-Jazeera

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay -- APC opposes actions against the online presence of Al-Jazeera. The Internet must be allowed to freely perform its unique and vital role as a promoter of "freedom of expression" and content diversity, especially in times of conflict.

APC opposes censorship on the Internet and states in its Internet Rights Charter[1] that "the Internet must be protected from all attempts to censor social and political debate". The Internet Rights Charter argues that "the Internet is an ideal space for the recording and promotion of culturally and politically diverse content".

This is consistent with Article 19 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[2] which states that the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information is a recognised human right and must be protected.

## The Case of the Al-Jazeera Website:

APC is concerned to note that a prominent online Middle Eastern news and information source - the Al-Jazeera website - has been the target of hacker attacks, domain name hijacking and the withdrawal of hosting services all within the first few weeks of the war on Iraq led by the United States.

Called "an unusually independent voice in the Arab world" by the Associated Press wire service, the Al-Jazeera satellite TV network launched its English-language web site on Monday March 24, attracting significant media coverage.

However, instead of news articles from an Arab perspective, visitors to the Al-Jazeera website on Thursday March 27 were greeted by the image of the United States' flag and a message proclaiming "Let Freedom Ring". The Al-Jazeera website address [www.al-jazeera.net](http://www.al-jazeera.net) had been hijacked so that visitors who attempted to read either the English or Arab language sites were unable to do so as their browsers were automatically "redirected" to the pro-U.S. page.

Al-Jazeera has also had to contend with denial of service (DOS) attacks from so-called "patriotic" hackers. These attacks artificially increase the levels of visitor traffic to a site until the server hosting the site cannot cope with the traffic any longer and crashes, knocking the site offline.

Al-Jazeera's US-based Internet service provider has also just cancelled their contract with Al-Jazeera. It is understood that Al-Jazeera has found a new provider in Europe, however in the meantime on April 2 (the estimated date of the contract cancellation) the Al-Jazeera sites were unreachable.

The computer hacks, online vandalism and the canceling of Al-Jazeera's web hosting contract all interfere with the UN declared right to "receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

Diversifying our News and Information Sources:

The Internet is a valuable tool for the diversification of media sources, especially for citizens of the countries that make up the invading coalition forces.

"One could watch the US television networks around the clock for a week and not realise the extent of public opposition and disquiet [to the war] ... Why is the unease and disaffection of the American public so invisible? The answer is that it's only invisible if you're looking for it in the mainstream media. It's there all right - but it's on the net," wrote John Naughton of the British newspaper, the Observer[3].

In the second week of the war, the most searched on word in various search engines was "Al-Jazeera" and other variants. A considerable number of subscribers have joined their English language news service and North American readers in huge numbers are actively seeking outside media sources on the war, according to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life project[4].

As online information and communication pioneers, APC and APC members - groups which have facilitated the use of the Internet for social justice, development and peace to civil society since the late 1980s - believe that the Internet must be allowed to freely perform its unique and vital role as a promoter of "freedom of expression" and a multiplier and diversifier of information sources, especially in times of conflict.

English Language Information Resources from the Arab-Speaking World:

Besides Al-Jazeera, there are several English-language news sites that present an Arab perspective. Ra'ida Al-Zubi, member of the APC Women's Networking Support Programme recommends Al-Hayat <http://english.daralhayat.com>, The Jordan Times [www.jordantimes.com](http://www.jordantimes.com) and Lebanon's Daily Star [www.dailystar.com.lb](http://www.dailystar.com.lb). An Arabic-English translation tool which translates web pages for a fee is considered the best Arabic translation tool online

(<http://tarjim.ajeel.com/ajeel/default.asp?lang=1>).

[1] <http://rights.apc.org/charter.shtml#2>

[2] <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cpr.html>

[3]

<http://www.observer.co.uk/business/story/0,6903,925333,00.html>

[4] <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=87>