

Oral Statement Delivered Under General Debate Item 3

UN Human Rights Council 40th Session
8 March 2019

Speaker: Gayatri Khandhadai

Thank you Mr. President.

The Association for Progressive Communications echoes the deep alarm expressed by the Secretary-General at the opening of this session over the shrinking of civic space online.

In every region of the world, restrictive laws are being applied online to censor independent voices, squash dissent and create a chilling effect on civil society through pervasive surveillance. New ICT laws are being adopted that are not compliant with international law or constitutional guarantees. Cybersecurity measures are being adopted that undermine both security and human rights.

We highlight the disturbing trend of internet shutdowns, particularly in Africa and Asia, which, in violation of international law, restrict a range of rights and harm communities, often at critical, political moments.

On International Women's Day, we express deep concern about the online backlash against feminist voices, the extension and amplification of misogyny, discrimination and violence online, and coordinated campaigns (sometimes state-supported), which aim to silence, discredit and intimidate women. Female journalists and women human rights defenders, in particular, are targeted in this manner.

We call on all states, including India and Pakistan, to end the use of blasphemy-related laws and release all individuals jailed for exercising their human rights online. We implore the government of Egypt to release Alaa Abd El Fattah from prison as planned on 17 March. Mr. Fattah, an Egyptian blogger, software developer and political activist, and countless human rights defenders and free-thinkers in Egypt, have been wrongfully detained for exercising their rights.

Thank you Mr. President.