



**19th session of the Human Rights Council
High –Level Segment**

**Panel of Freedom of Expression on Internet
Delivered by Renate Bloem**

Thank you Mme President,

CIVICUS welcomes the convening of this important panel and expresses appreciation first to the Government of Sweden for leading this process and to all panelists for continuing the debate on Freedom of Expression on the Internet, initiated last year by Frank La Rue's report to the Council.

Like never before the internet has become a key instrument for the exercise of the right of freedom of expression thus contributing positively to the democratic credentials of several countries. Governments have a responsibility to protect the basic rights of their citizens. The right of freedom of expression goes beyond simply prohibiting interference with the means of communications but includes a positive obligation on the state to make available those means of communication which are particularly important.,

In complete violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes the right to receive and share information either orally, in print or form of art, many governments continue to block access to information on democracy and human rights by preventing access to specific URLs and remove websites from host web servers. There are a number of documented cases in which both authoritarian and democratic states dedicate resources to manipulate and fabricate online content to paint themselves in a favourable light. .

Governments continue to stifle free speech by using advanced technology and soft ware to distort content on social networks and other websites posted by dissidents and bloggers. They use other citizens who are well conversant with new technologies to alter realities on the ground and or confuse debates through abusive and deceptive means.

We have seen repeated attempts by governments in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Syria, Russia, Iran, China and Saudi Arabia to use technology to monitor the activities of internet users, block access to information and monitor emails. Bloggers, dissenters and online activists have been insulted online, attacked physically and given lengthy sentences for simply expressing their opinion through online platforms. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan particularly, citizens involved in political debates online have reported repeated abuse against critics and in Kazakhstan, the government has used high tech and PR skills to defend the regime and denigrate leaders of the opposition and other dissenters.

CIVICUS therefore urges the Council to continue this debate and strongly supports Freedom of Expression through any means, including on the Internet. Thank you, Madame President