



Companies, Human Rights Groups, Investors, Academics and Technology Leaders to Address International Free Expression and Privacy Challenges

A diverse group of companies, academics, investors, technology leaders and human rights organizations announced today its intention to seek solutions to the free expression and privacy challenges faced by technology and communications companies doing business internationally.

The process - which aims to produce a set of principles guiding company behavior when faced with laws, regulations and policies that interfere with the achievement of human rights – marks a new phase in efforts that these groups began in 2006.

Last year, Google, Microsoft, Vodafone and Yahoo!, with the facilitation of Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) and advice from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, initiated a series of dialogues to gain a fuller understanding of free expression and privacy as they relate to the use of technology worldwide.

At the same time, the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) was also convening technology leaders, investors and human rights advocates to discuss how to advance civil liberties on the Internet in the face of laws that run contrary to international standards for human rights.

Both processes benefited from dialogue, research and policy expertise on internet filtering and surveillance practices from the OpenNet Consensus, a coalition of academic institutions including the University of California Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism and School of Law-Boalt Hall, the Berkman Center and others.

The new combined group, in addition to developing the principles, seeks to advance their effectiveness by establishing a framework to implement the principles, hold signatories accountable and provide for ongoing learning.

"Technology companies have played a vital role building the economy and providing tools important for democratic reform in developing countries. But some governments have found ways to turn technology against their citizens -- monitoring legitimate online activities and censoring democratic material," CDT Executive Director Leslie Harris said. "It is vital that we identify solutions that preserve the enormous democratic value provided by technological development,

while at the same time protecting the human rights and civil liberties of those who stand to benefit from that expansion."

BSR CEO Aron Cramer said that the discussions over the past year have already proven valuable.

"Thanks to the extraordinary commitment of the companies and other participants in this process we've already learned a great deal about the obstacles we face and the ways business and other stakeholders can join forces to address those challenges," Cramer said. "This important dialogue reflects a shared commitment to maximize the information available via the internet on the basis of global principles protecting free expression and privacy. This dialogue could prove a key step in unlocking the communications potential of the internet."

Members of the group plan to complete the process in 2007. The following companies and stakeholders have agreed to participate:

- Amnesty International
- Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School
- Boston Common Asset Management
- Business for Social Responsibility (Facilitator)
- Calvert Group
- Center for Democracy and Technology (Facilitator)
- Committee to Protect Journalists
- Domini Social Investments LLC
- Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Enterprise Privacy Group
- F&C Asset Management
- Google, Inc.
- Human Rights First
- Human Rights in China
- Human Rights Watch
- International Business Leaders Forum
- International Council on Human Rights Policy
- International Human Rights Law Clinic and Samuelson Law, Technology, & Public Policy Clinic, Boalt Hall School of Law, UC Berkeley
- Microsoft
- Reporters Without Borders
- Trillium Asset Management
- United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary-General on business & human rights (Observer status)
- Vodafone
- Yahoo! Inc.

More information

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About Business for Social Responsibility

Since 1992, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) has been providing socially responsible business solutions to many of the world's leading corporations. Headquartered in San Francisco and with offices in Europe and China, BSR is a nonprofit business association that serves its 250 member companies and other Global 1000 enterprises. Through advisory services, convenings and research, BSR works with corporations and concerned stakeholders of all types to create a more just and sustainable global economy. For more information, visit www.bsr.org.

About Center for Democracy and Technology

The Center for Democracy and Technology works to promote democratic values and constitutional liberties in the digital age. With expertise in law, technology, and policy, CDT seeks practical solutions to enhance free expression and privacy in global communications technologies. CDT is dedicated to building consensus among all parties interested in the future of the Internet and other new communications media. For more information, visit www.cdt.org.