Background paper
Committee: Human Rights
Topic A: Should restrictions on social media platforms be considered a legitimate tool for maintaining national stability, or are such bans constitutionally a violation of fundamental freedoms that justify civil unrest
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Social media has become a primary space for communication, political expression, community organization, and information exchange. Governments argue that these platforms may also be used to spread misinformation, coordinate violence, or destabilize national institutions. As a result, some states have implemented temporary or permanent restrictions on certain platforms or online content. The question facing the international community is whether such restrictions are a valid method for protecting national stability, or if they represent an unacceptable limitation on civil liberties and democratic participation.The challenge lies in determining whether restrictions on social media protect citizens from harm or suppress legitimate political expression. The international community continues to debate how to establish clear boundaries between security measures and human rights violations.

Over the past two decades, several global events have shaped this discussion. During the protests following the 2009 elections in Iran, the government limited online access in response to widespread demonstrations. In the Arab Spring of 2011, social media played a significant role in organizing mass gatherings and sharing real-time updates from the streets. These events led some governments to argue that platform restrictions are necessary to prevent the rapid spread of unrest. Meanwhile, there have also been cases where harmful or inflammatory content online contributed to violence, such as in Myanmar. These situations have encouraged debate about the role of regulation, the responsibilities of technology companies, and the limits of state control.

At the same time, international human rights frameworks recognize freedom of expression as a fundamental right. Treaties allow governments to place restrictions only under specific and clearly justified conditions, such as protecting national security or public safety. Human rights organizations emphasize that restrictions often target not violence, but criticism, activism, or opposition groups. Many citizens rely on social media as their primary space to participate politically, especially in places where traditional media is limited or controlled. Because of this, social media regulations may feel less like security measures and more like censorship.

Governments, civil society organizations, technology companies, and citizens all approach this issue from different perspectives. Governments focused on maintaining stability may support temporary shutdowns or content limits. Civil liberties advocates argue that such actions can silence communities and weaken long-term trust in institutions. Technology companies face the

challenge of moderating vast amounts of content while also responding to national laws. Citizens and social movements often view access to online platforms as essential for fair representation and collective action.

The core difficulty is finding a balance between security and freedom. Regulation must be clear, temporary, and limited, rather than broad or indefinite. Decisions should be transparent and subject to review. Delegates are encouraged to consider how to protect both public safety and democratic freedoms when evaluating this issue. The goal is not to choose one value over the other, but to develop practical solutions that recognize the complexity of modern communication and the importance of human rights.

There are also economic and social effects to consider. Short-term shutdowns of major social media platforms can interrupt daily communication and digital work. In countries where small businesses rely heavily on social media advertising and messaging platforms, restrictions can seriously impact income and access to customers. Research from regions that experienced prolonged shutdowns shows losses in local economies, slower access to emergency communication, and reduced trust in government institutions. These outcomes raise questions about whether restrictions intended to maintain stability may unintentionally create new social tensions.

What began as a Gen Z-led social media movement against the lavish lifestyles of "Nepo Kids" led to the ousting of a prime minister and the **deadliest social unrest** Nepal has seen in years. Now comes the complicated question of what happens next. Plumes of dark smoke towered above soldiers enforcing a curfew on the quiet streets of Kathmandu Wednesday morning as rumors swirled about a possible meeting between the leaderless Gen Z movement, the army and the president.

"The buildup of the frustration was what led to this movement," Sareesha Shrestha, who attended the protests, describing the social media ban as the "last straw." The unemployment rate for youth aged 15-24 in Nepal was 20.8% in 2024, according to the World Bank, forcing many young people to move abroad to find work. More than a third (33.1%) of Nepal's GDP came from personal remittances, according to the World Bank, a number that has steadily risen over the past three decades.The protests quickly spiraled out of control when some of the protesters surged towards the parliament building and began climbing up the gate, clashing with police. Police used live ammunition, water cannons, and tear gas against the protesters, according to Reuters news agency. Nearly 19 people were killed and hundreds were wounded in the clashes Monday, according to Nepali authorities."We all felt very hopeless and helpless at that point," Shrestha said. Several government ministers, including the home minister, resigned in the wake of the violence, which sparked widespread outrage, both within Nepal and internationally.

From there, the unrest escalated. Protesters smashed windows and looted local businesses and set government buildings on fire. The country's main international airport reopened on Wednesday after being shut for 24 hours because of the violence, spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal, Gyanendra Bhul, told CNN. The Supreme Court and the Singha Durbar, a sprawling palace complex in Kathmandu which houses Nepal's government ministries, were both set on fire.

Real-world cases show how differently governments apply these measures. India, for example, has implemented both national and regional internet shutdowns during protests or elections. Government officials argue that these measures prevent violence. Civil society organizations respond that the shutdowns prevent the public from documenting abuses or coordinating peaceful gatherings. In Nigeria, the temporary ban of Twitter in 2021 followed criticism of government actions. The event sparked national and international debate over whether political accountability should depend on the approval of state authorities. These examples illustrate that platform restrictions often happen during moments of political pressure, which makes it difficult to separate public safety measures from the restriction of dissent.

Legal frameworks also vary greatly. Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects freedom of expression, including the right to receive and share information. The same article allows states to restrict this right only when the restriction is lawful, necessary, and proportionate. The challenge is defining what counts as necessary and proportionate. Some argue that governments should present clear evidence of imminent harm before applying platform restrictions. Others argue that waiting for harm to occur may be too late.

There is also the question of how algorithms shape public discussion. Social media platforms are designed to highlight content that generates strong reactions. This can increase polarization and speed up the spread of extreme viewpoints. Some policymakers argue that regulation should focus on platform design rather than access. Civil liberties groups suggest that increasing algorithmic transparency could reduce the need for broad restrictions. Technology companies have acknowledged the problem but have struggled to create consistent global standards.

All of these factors show that the debate is not simply about being for or against restrictions. It is about deciding how to protect both public safety and open political participation in a world where communication is fast, global, and difficult to control. Delegates should consider whether solutions should involve temporary measures, legal oversight, platform responsibility reforms, digital education, or international cooperation on standards. The long-term goal is to support societies that remain stable without weakening the voices of the people who live in them.