

Forum: Economic and Social Council**Issue: Media Censorship and Social Development****Student Officer: Ayala Ples****Position: Chair of the Economic and Social Council****Introduction**

In some parts of the world, the government controls the media. This means that no one can broadcast or publish anything a government considers immoral or harmful, or that threatens the country's "stability" (which usually means the government's own power base). This is what we usually think of when we hear the word censorship. Censorship is a matter of removing or withholding information from the public by a controlling group or body. It is typically done by governments, religious groups, corporations or the mass media; although other forms of censorship exist as well. The concept of censorship existed amongst human society for thousands of years; it is common a part of human societies.

Quite often, a higher position (such as a dictator) finds it appropriate or beneficial to suppress information from the public. Censorship has followed the free expressions of men and women like a shadow through history. In ancient societies, such as those of Israel or China, censorship was considered a legitimate instrument for regulating the moral and political life of the population. In China, the first censorship law was introduced in 300 AD. The origin of the term *censor* in English can be traced to the office of censor established in Rome in 443 BC. However, in the modern age, with the advanced technology that is available, information is shared a lot more easily and a lot more quickly. It is very simple to be aware of issues and controversies from countries all over the world; news channels and websites provide us with credible articles and statistics.

We are conscious of various defects of certain governments, while we hear and read about economic, political or cultural issues. We are informed of strikes that occur around the world, strategies that different governments decide to use and futuristic plans that will be implemented.

Furthermore, one could argue that the amount of information available to us is infinite; the internet allows us to access any type of information in our desire. However, how can we be so certain that all of the 'facts' we read about are true and real? It is possible that the figures publishing these are not completely honest and prefer not to reveal the entire picture.

On another note, one should not assume that censorship only takes place in controlled economies. Although it is undertaken under more extreme measures in countries under a communist or authoritarian regime; censorship is also carried out in Democratic countries. Although these countries often take pride in following the principle of freedom of speech; in a market economy there is another controlling power at work – the power of money. Even though people are free to say and write as they wish, with some carefully defined exceptions, most mainstream publications depend on two income sources: subscription and advertisers. They both influence decisions about content. Readers must find the content relevant, interesting, tasteful, and entertaining, or they will drop their subscriptions. And advertisers will cancel their accounts if they consider the content to undermine or challenge their messages about the products they sell.

Key Terms Defined

Moral censorship

The elimination of materials and resources that are obscene or otherwise considered morally questionable. For example, pornography is often censored under this principle; especially child pornography which is illegal and censored in many jurisdictions in the world.

Military censorship

The process of keeping military intelligence and tactics confidential and away from the enemy. This is used to counter espionage (spying), which is the process of collecting military information. Very often, militaries will also attempt to conceal politically inconvenient information even if the information has no actual intelligence or combat-tactical value.

Political censorship

When governments hold back information from their citizens. This is often done to exert control over the public and prevent free expression that might generate rebellion. Another version of censorship is the phenomenon of disinformation which uses “red herrings” to distract people from some other controversial issue.

Religious censorship

The means by which any material considered objectionable by a certain faith is removed. This often involves a dominant religion forcing limitations on less prevalent ones. Alternatively, one religion may reject the works of another when they believe the content is no appropriate for their faith.

Corporate censorship

The process by which editors in corporate media outlets intervene to disrupt the publishing of information that portrays their business or business partners in a negative light or intervene to prevent alternate offers from reaching public exposure.

Propaganda

The organized dissemination of information or allegations to assist or damage the cause of a government, movement, etc. Moreover, it is the deliberate wide-spreading of information, ideas or rumors that are meant to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution or nation.

Factionalism

A grouping of individuals, such as a political party, a trade union, or another group with a political purpose. These will usually have a common aim; they will wish to criticize certain policies or strategies implemented by a body such as the government.

Market Economy

An economic system in which economic decisions and the pricing of goods and services are guided solely by the aggregate interactions of a country's citizens and businesses and there is little government intervention or central planning.

Planned Economy

An economic system in which the government controls and regulates production, distribution, prices, etc.

General Overview of the Topic

The ancient view of censorship, as a benevolent public service in the best interest of the people, is still upheld by countries such as China, and was advocated by the rulers of the Soviet Union (USSR), responsible for the longest lasting and most extensive censorship of the 20th Century. Strict, harsh and extreme censorship was commonly implemented by governments in Eastern Europe throughout the 20th century. The various ministries of culture held a tight rein on any form of expression; whether it was visual art, music, literature, theatre or dance. Propaganda was used heavily in order to force the public to support the state and to frighten them from breaking any type of rule. Freedom of speech, religion and even thought and conscience were banned and any form of factionalism was punishable. The Stalinist period in the USSR, (1922 – 1953) which followed the Leninist period, employed severe, intense and tremendous policies which completely outlawed any freedom of speech and eliminated people's individualities. It was believed that the people's role was merely to do what the state required and not ask any questions. People who were intelligent, intellectual and knowledgeable were feared because of their advantage over the government and therefore they were sent to concentration camps or were simply hanged during public purges.

Weather forecasts were changed if they had the slightest nerve to suggest that the sun might not shine on May Day. Under *Nicolae Ceaușescu* in Romania, weather reports were doctored so that the temperatures were not seen to rise above or fall below the levels which dictated that work must stop. Independent journalism did not exist in the Soviet Union until *Mikhail Gorbachev* became its leader; all reporting was directed by the Communist Party or related organizations. *Pravda*, the predominant newspaper in the Soviet Union, had a monopoly. Foreign newspapers were available only if they were published by Communist Parties sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The *People's Republic of China*, which continues Communist rule in politics, if not in the controlled economy, employs about 30,000 'Internet police' to monitor the internet and popular search engines such as *Google* and *Yahoo*.

Under the dictatorship of *Saddam Hussein*, Iraq was controlled through techniques of press censorship similar to those of Romania under *Nicolae Ceaușescu* but with greater potential violence. Furthermore, Cuban media is operated under the supervision of the *Communist Party's Department of Revolutionary Orientation*, which “develops and coordinates propaganda strategies”. One of the implications of such severe control is the fact that connecting to the internet is illegal for the Cuban population.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved and Their Positions

North Korea

North Koreans, leading their lives under a Communist rule, live in the most censored country in the world, a new analysis by the Committee to Protect Journalists has found. *Communist North Korea* has no independent journalists, and all radio and television receivers sold in the country are locked to government-specified frequencies. North Korea has wedded the traditional Confucian ideal of social order to the Stalinist model of an authoritarian communist state to create the world's deepest information void. All domestic radio, television, and newspapers are controlled by the government. Content is supplied almost entirely by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Cuba

The Cuban constitution grants the Communist Party the right to control the press; it recognizes "*freedom of speech and the press in accordance with the goals of the socialist society.*" The government owns and controls all media outlets and restricts Internet access. News is carried on four television channels, two news agencies, dozens of radio stations, at least four news Web sites, and three main newspapers representing the views of the Communist Party and other mass organizations controlled by the government. The media operate under the supervision of the Communist Party's Department of Revolutionary Orientation, which develops and coordinates propaganda strategies. Cuba remains one of the world's leading jailers of journalists, second only to China, with 24 independent reporters behind bars.

China

As China becomes a major player in the global economy, authorities in Beijing are trying to balance the need for more information with their goal of controlling content and maintaining power. CFR Senior Fellow Elizabeth C. Economy says the Chinese government is in a state of "schizophrenia" about media policy as it "goes back and forth, testing the line, knowing they need press freedom--and the information it provides--but worried about opening the door to the type of freedoms that could lead to the regime's downfall." Although President *Hu Jintao* was expected to be more liberal than his predecessors, his administration has pursued a media policy that involves increased regulations as well as the arrest and prosecution of journalists.

Burma

The junta (aka *the State Peace and Development Council* in Burma) owns all daily newspapers and radio, along with the country's three television channels. Media dare not hint at, let alone report on, antigovernment sentiments. Burma's few privately owned publications must submit content to the Press Scrutiny Board for approval before publishing; censorship delays mean that none publishes on a daily basis. In 2005, the junta took control of *Bagan Cybertech*, Burma's main Internet service and satellite-feed provider. Citizens have been arrested for listening to the BBC or Radio Free Asia in public. Entry visa requests by foreign journalists are usually turned down except when the government wants to showcase a political event.

Turkmenistan

President Niyazov (elected in 1991 and declared as President for Life in 1999) has isolated the country from the rest of the world and created a cult of personality declaring himself "Turkmenbashi," father of the Turkmen. The state owns all domestic media and Niyazov's administration controls them by appointing editors and censoring content. Niyazov personally approves the front-page content of the major dailies, which always include a prominent picture of him. In 2005, the state closed all libraries except for one that houses the president's books, and banned the importation of foreign publications. The state media heap fulsome praise on Niyazov as they ignore important stories on AIDS, prostitution, unemployment, poverty, crime, and drugs.



Turkmen marchers carry a giant portrait of President Saparmurat Niyazov during Independence Day ceremonies in Ashgabat.

Libya

Libya's media are the most tightly controlled in the Arab world. The government owns and controls all print and broadcast media. Satellite television and the Internet are available, but the government blocks undesirable political Web sites. The Internet is one of the few avenues for independent writers and journalists, but the risks are exceedingly high. *Dayf al-*

Ghazal al-Shuhaibi, who wrote for London-based opposition Web sites, was found shot in the head in Benghazi last year. No one has been charged with the murder, which has sent an unmistakable message to would-be critics.

Uzbekistan

President Karimov has re-established a Soviet-style dictatorship that relies on brutal political intimidation to silence journalists, human rights activists, and the political opposition. Karimov's regime uses an informal system of state censorship to prevent the domestic media from reporting on widespread police torture, poverty, and an Islamic opposition movement.

Syria

The media are under heavy state control and influence. Some newspapers and broadcast outlets are in private hands but are owned by regime loyalists, or are barred from disseminating political content. Some private and party newspapers offer mild criticism of some government policies or the Baath party, but they are largely powerless. State papers and broadcasters remain daringly supportive of the regime. The press law maps out a range of restrictions against the media, including a requirement that periodicals obtain licenses from the prime minister, who can deny any application not in the "public interest."

Belarus

Most broadcast and print outlets are owned by the government, and they are effusive in their praise of their President, *Lukashenko*. Nominally independent radio and television stations avoid politically sensitive subjects. The state has shuttered dozens of independent newspapers in recent years, and the few that remain have been subjected to a government onslaught: Lukashenko's administration has pressured state printing houses not to print critical newspapers, barred the post office and state newspaper distributor from distributing independent publications, seized entire press runs of independent newspapers, and set prison penalties of up to five years for criticizing the president.

National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)

This is an alliance of fifty-two participating organizations and is dedicated to protecting free expression and access to information by providing educational resources and advocacy support to individuals and organizations responding to incidents of censorship; educating and empowering the public to fight censorship; documenting and reporting on current

copyright issues; expanding public awareness of the prevalence of copyright and suppression of information; working to influence judicial opinions about free expression and access to information by submitting *amici* briefs.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

UNESCO works to create the conditions for dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based upon respect for commonly shared values. It is through this dialogue that the world can achieve global visions of sustainable development encompassing observance of human rights. Moreover, UNESCO is a major contributor in many studies which concern media censorship; especially in Africa and the Pacific Islands. It is involved in conferences conducted by the Human Rights Council and has an effect on resolutions made in attempt to improve or solve the situation of media censorship.

Organisation des Médias d’Afrique Centrale (OMAC)

This organisation was established in 2001 by a wide range of media stakeholders in the region of Central Africa, including journalists, press media owners and press freedom associations was an attempt to enable national media to draw on regional strengths. With backing from UNESCO and other international organizations, OMAC issues alerts on abuses against the press, as well as providing training and support for journalists in the region.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1981. It promotes press freedom worldwide by defending the rights of journalists to report the news without fear of reprisal. CPJ conducts various researches over many authoritarian countries which are controlled through censorship; this helps in the creation of statistics concerning levels of censorship implemented. Through their research, they are able to construct an accurate image of how censorship exists in today’s world, which is evaluated in order to find possible solutions to such issues.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all. Their supporters are outraged by human rights abuses but inspired by hope for a better world; they therefore work to improve human rights through campaigning and international solidarity. Amnesty International submitted these several written statements to the fifteenth session of the UN Human Rights Council, which will take place in Geneva from 13 September to 1 October 2010. Between the addressed topics, Amnesty International wrote about violations by National Intelligence and Security Services in Sudan.

Timeline of Events

1543 – The Catholic Church declared that no book could be printed or sold without permission of the church.

1563 – Charles IX of France decreed that nothing could be printed without the special permission of the king. Soon other secular rulers of Europe followed suit, and scientific and artistic expressions, potentially threatening to the moral and political order of society, were brought under control through systems of governmental license to print and publish.

1683 – The burning of the entire collection of the University of Oxford library in England on direct orders from the king.

1766 – Sweden is the first country to abolish censorship and introduce a law guaranteeing freedom of the press. Denmark and Norway follow in 1770.

1787 – The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States is established, guaranteeing freedom of speech as well as of the press. It is regarded as the root of the comprehensive protection of freedom of expression in western countries.

1789 – French National Assembly state: *"The free communication of thought and opinion is one of the most precious rights of man; every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely."*

1885 – Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" first banned in the Concord Public Library.

1938 – In Germany, the Nazi regime conducted pyres in which they burned books as one of their many brutal methods of censorship.

1991 – The Serbian government banned Albanian as a language of instruction at all levels of education. During this period, all libraries were subjected to the burning or destruction of the Albanian-language collections, according to reports from UNESCO, Council of Europe and IFLA/FAIFE Kosova language collections.

1998 – The establishment of the UN Human Rights Act.

2002-2003 – The Censorship Review Committee in Singapore of 1992 set broad principles and guidelines. Over the years, these principles were constantly fine-tuned in consultation

with the MDA's advisory panels and community groups to reflect general values and the spirit of current society.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions and Events

- **Human Rights – Act 1998 – 12 Freedom of Expression**
<<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/section/12>>

This is an Act of Parliament which aims to give further effect to the rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Act makes a remedy for breach of a Convention right, without the need to go to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Moreover, it completely abolished the death penalty in UK law. Furthermore, the Act makes it illegal for any public body to act in a way which is incompatible with the Convention.

- **Human Rights – Act 1998 – 13 Freedom of Thought, conscience and religion** <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/section/13>>

The UN has been actively involved in Censorship; here are a few selected UN activities in promoting progress in the Censorship domain:

- **UNESCO PRESS CONFERENCE on ‘10 most Censored countries’**

“Statistics on the number of journalists killed, imprisoned or harassed each year were important barometers for press freedom, which was essential for democracy, free and fair elections and the oversight of Governments.” This was mentioned by Ann Cooper, the Executive Director of the Committee to Protect Journalists during a Headquarter press conference in 2006 sponsored by the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a non-profit, bipartisan organization, works to defend journalists and press freedom all around the world. To mark World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, the CPJ launched a report on the “*10 Most Censored Countries*”, thereby focusing on the consequences for the public when there is no free press. “What is it like for citizens in countries where all media is controlled by the State, where the Internet is either unavailable or censored, where foreign news broadcasts are jammed by the Government?” Ms. Cooper asked. People in countries like that were kept uninformed by “authoritarian rulers who muzzle the media and keep a chokehold on information through restrictive laws, fear and intimidation”.

It was said that the report showed that people in North Korea were the most isolated people in the world, living in the most censored country and in the “deepest information void”. The Government there controlled all local media. The official Korean Central News Agency offered a “steady diet of fawning coverage of dear leader Kim Jong Il” while ignoring the 1990s famine. Other countries on the list were Burma; Turkmenistan; Equatorial Guinea; Libya; Eritrea; Cuba; Uzbekistan; Syria; and Belarus.

She said the list had been compiled by regional staff which had looked at dozens of countries and had rated the degree of censorship against 17 benchmarks, including prior censorship, jamming of foreign new broadcasts and the degree of State control of media. Each country on the list used at least 9 of the 17 censorship benchmarks. In all 10 countries, print and electronic media were under very heavy State control. Most of the 10 countries were ruled by one man who remained in power to a large degree by controlling media. In some cases, such as in North Korea, Turkmenistan and Equatorial Guinea, the media were actively used to foster a personality cult around the country’s autocratic leader.

There was also zero tolerance for negative coverage in countries such as Uzbekistan, Belarus and Cuba, she said. The report underscored how those Governments, who censored so heavily, showed a cynical disregard for people’s welfare. “By any international standard, the practices of these Governments are unacceptable. We call on the leaders of these most censored countries to join the free world by abandoning their restrictive actions and allowing journalists to independently report the news and inform their citizens”, Ms. Cooper said in conclusion.

- **The UN welcomes Sudanese order to lift censorship on newspapers**

On the 29th of September 2009, the United Nations welcomed the reported decision by President Omar Al-Bashir to immediately lift censorship on Sudanese newspapers. “This decision will advance the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and is an important step towards creating an appropriate environment for the multi-party elections scheduled for April 2010,” the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) said in a statement.

- The UN is not always seen as a promoter of liberalization, in a world of growing complexity, where the balance between freedom of speech and security is a challenge; barriers are easily crossed.

- **United Nations Resolutions Justify Censorship**

In March 2008, The Human Rights Council passed two resolutions that limit freedom of expression rather than protect it, say numerous human rights organisations. Despite objections from 40 rights organisations from around the world led by ARTICLE 19 and the

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution on the 28th of March, 2008 that turns the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression into a “prosecutor”. The protesting rights groups, including 21 organisations from Islamic states, say the amendment changes the focus from protecting freedom of expression to limiting it.

Possible Solutions

Regulate, not censor. Censorship is a complex topic with no black and white answers. With the dynamic changes in technology and the impact of internet and social networks on human behavior, the manner in which censorship is carried out has to evolve. Some trends include:

To recommend refinements to existing content standards and guidelines to reflect societal and technological changes since the last CRC, while recognizing the need to protect the young and respect racial, religious and social sensitivities:

- (i) To study whether there is a need to introduce additional content standards and guidelines that would be relevant to the emergence of new technologies and new media platforms;
- (ii) To recommend avenues to improve community engagement and public education in content standards and guidelines.

Press freedom could be institutionalized through laws that protect journalists, independent media regulatory bodies, journalists’ associations and media monitoring bodies.

Extremes should be avoided in what can be published; broadcast and review of content issues across the spectrum of broadcast, films, videos, publications, audio materials, the arts and new media. If authorities were a great deal more discerning, they would be able to differentiate governance from control.

Bibliography

Amnesty International. UN Human Rights Council Fifteenth Session: Amnesty International Written Statements. September 2, 2010.
<<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/IOR41/022/2010/en>>

Committee to Protect Journalists. 10 Most Censored Countries. August 24, 2010.
<<http://cpj.org/reports/2006/05/10-most-censored-countries.php>>

Council on Foreign Relations. Media Censorship in China. August 26, 2010.
<http://www.cfr.org/publication/11515/media_censorship_in_china.html>

Department of Public Information, News and Media Division in New York. PRESS CONFERENCE on '10 Most Censored countries'. August 28, 2010.
<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2006/060502_Cooper.doc.htm>

Dictionary.com Unabridged. Planned economy. August 26, 2010
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/planned_economy>

Freemuse – Freedom on Musical Expression. “United Nations resolutions justify censorship”. August 26, 2010. <<http://www.freemuse.org/sw26285.asp>>

Labidi, Kamel. “Is Jordan the latest enemy of press freedom online?” Guardian. 21 August 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/aug/21/jordan-cyber-law-press-freedom-online>>

Media Awareness Network. Censorship in the Media. August 24, 2010.
<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/tobacco_advertising/censorship_in_media.cfm>

National Coalition Against Censorship. What We Do. September 1, 2010.
<<http://www.ncac.org/what-we-do>>

Newth, Mette. “The Long History of Censorship”. August 29, 2010.
<http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/about_project/history.html>

Richter, Andrei. Post-Soviet Perspective on Censorship and Freedom of the Media. August 29, 2010.
<<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001537/153744e.pdf>>

The UNESCO Courier. Sense and Censorship. August 25, 2010.
<http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=37610&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html>

UNESCO. The Organization’s History. September 1, 2010.
<<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/>>

United Nations Meeting Coverage - Department of Public Information, News and Media Division in New York. World Press Freedom Day. September 1, 2010.

<<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/obv875.doc.htm>>

US News Centre. UN welcomes Sudanese order to lift censorship on newspapers. August 29, 2010.

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32351>>

Wachtel, Jonathan. "U.N. Rights Council Backs 'Censorship' Watchdog, Elevates U.S. Foes." Fox News. June 18, 2010.

<<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/06/18/suffers-blow-united-nations-council-backs-censorship-watchdog/>>