

## **Terrorism, Democracy and the Internet**

Thursday, March 10; 11:00- 12:30

Moderator: **Marko Ahitasaari**, Insight and foresight unit of Nokia, Nokia Ventures Organization

Panelists:

**John Gage**, chief Researcher and Director, Science Office, Sun Microsystems, Inc.

**Rebecca MacKinnon**, TV Correspondent, USA

**Noriko Takiguchi**, President, Fortune Magazine, Japan

**Dan Gillmor**, Technology columnist, San Jose Mercury News, USA

**Martin Varsavsky**, President, Safe Democracy Foundation and Varsavsky Foundation, Spain

This lively panel was originally convened with the purpose of studying how internet abuse by terrorists could be curtailed, while still preserving the advantages and freedoms that it offers. However, after listening to the opening comments of the participants, it became obvious that their overwhelming and passionate consensus, after much time and research, was that the internet should not be controlled; and that the only way to offset the evils of internet is to combat them with more openness, more information, and more participation.

John Gage, Chief Researcher and Director, Science Office, Sun Microsystems, Inc., pointed out that while the press had been prevented by state security officials from attending the panels, there were people in the audience blogging the panel contents onto the internet in real time, which billions of people could potentially have access to. He added that an open internet, because its inclusive nature, could help offset terrorism, whose cause is often attributed to feelings of alienation.

Martin Varsavsky, one of the main organizers of the panel, agreed with him and emphasized how the power of internet is able to cut through barriers which seem insurmountable. "Internet even manages to cut through censorship. In Spain, there are two main newspapers, El Pais and El Mundo, where two opinions are expressed." he continued, "but what about the people who demand more than these two opinion? Now, with internet publishing they have access to millions of opinions."

He added that one of the biggest barriers to the open internet being part of the solution to terrorism, is the digital divide. With respect to internet, the power for the time being remains in the hands of wealthier democratic countries. He suggested that instead of spending 100 billion dollars on bombs, the third world could be connected to internet and Democratic opinion for around 4 billion dollars.

Rebecca Mackinnon, television correspondent in the US, revealed that she had formerly worked as a correspondent for CNN, but had become disillusioned by the fact that her editors had no real interest in informing the American public why the rest of the world might be angry with them. "Now, with open dialogues on the internet, someone can log on and read the ordinary aspirations of a person for peace and an ordinary life." adding, "the strongest and most democratic way to involve people in the fight against terrorism, is to involve them. "

The day of the term netsurfer is over said Martin Warsavsky, the novelty is gone. Internet is the domain of everyone. "It is not a question of us defending *our* domain." insisted Dan Gilmore, a technology journalist from San Jose Mercury news. "Open internet and the free flow of information are vital for the survival of developing democratic countries." He went on to

emphasize that internet should only be regulated with extreme caution and warned, "Terrorists do not have the capacity to destroy the internet, but overregulation can. And with respect to the attempt to put an end to the anonymity of internet users," he cautioned, "This action will do little to stop a terrorist or hardened criminal, but will certainly put an end to political exchanges among people living under authoritarian governments whose lives could be in danger."

Gage explained that there are two ways that terrorist utilize the net: terrorist to terrorist for planning and financing terrorist campaigns, and terrorist to world to promote terrorism in the world. His suggestion was that because it is impossible with current technology to positively identify internet users so that control was a mere symbolic gesture, and that in fact that using internet it was more possible to follow the trail of terrorist. As for terrorist education over the internet, the best way to eradicate it is with access to democratic ideas and more education.

It was agreed by all members that transparent governments are more secure; and through the openness of free internet, the secret/closed ways of governments could be overcome. It was agreed that the openness, dialogue, decentralisation and participation that the open internet offers are the best way for Democracy to fight terrorism. Ethan Zuckerman, research fellow for the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, inserted that Democratic values are perfectly aligned with openness on the internet, and are part of the solution to the problem of terrorism. But wondered aloud whether the fact that everyone could have access to internet was a feature or a bug?

Louise Richardson, professor at Harvard, launched a criticism from the audience, reminding the panel that although their enthusiasm for the open internet is compelling, she has serious concerns. "Whereas a few years ago, there were only a few terrorist websites in existence, now there are more than 4000. Terrorists could not function without the internet." She warned that unless serious dilemmas like this are addressed, their findings would not be taken seriously.

Other concerns surrounding the open internet were raised from the audience. The following points were raised: Internet is a horizontal medium which is unmediated, although it claims to be an alternative medium, it is still basically controlled by the same big business interests that control other mediums, and until now the internet has been used much more for exhibiting pornography than for the free exchange of ideas. The panel answered saying that unfortunately the open internet is only a mirror of the imperfect actual society that we live in, but that controlling it would not solve this problem and would make it impossible to develop its potential as an instrument of democracy.

It was revealed that the preliminary findings of the panel would be posted on the open internet and that three months from now, after examining all the comments made on the document, a final document will be posted on the [www.safe-democracy.org](http://www.safe-democracy.org) website.



