

## Is Internet Access a Human Right? Mark Zuckerberg Thinks So.

The Digital Divide continues throughout the world. A 2015 paper from the [Center for Technology Innovation at Brookings](#) notes that although 3.1 billion people have Internet access, there are still 4.2 billion people on this planet, or 58 percent of the world, that do not.

This gap exists due to several factors including (but not limited to) taxes, policies, and operational issues in these countries, making the Internet too expensive for many consumers, and inaccessible to the rest of them. Some of the countries are merely lacking the necessary infrastructure to support Internet. The realization of this inequity in the human experience is almost inconceivable to all of us to whom the Internet seems so common, natural, and to be frank - expected.

Since digital connectivity to the benefits of the internet are impossible for many around the world, the current efforts to make the Internet accessible to everyone has focused on proving how the Internet has become a human right.

The Office of the High Commission for Human Rights at the United Nations has defined [human rights](#) as:

*“... rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.”*

To ensure that human rights are upheld, the U.N. law is used as the vehicle to bring about some necessary change. As the United Nations has noted, “International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.” For example, the [European Union](#) has examined how technology and communication platforms offer a way to assist those in need and develop new opportunities for them.

In this case, it would make sense to show, as Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, did in his [UN Address](#) on September 26<sup>th</sup> that it is the obligation of international human rights law and governments around the world to make the Internet accessible to everyone. Zuckerberg also called on the technology leaders of the world to get involved in this global issue as he outlined Facebook’s own efforts to help expand Internet access to the 4.2 billion still living without this human right.

Zuckerberg noted that technology companies have previously left it up to the politicians to handle these types of world affairs. Technology has never played a critical role in global or even local economies as it now does, providing new careers and jobs that previously did not exist.

Businessmen and leaders are visiting technology hubs, like Silicon Valley, to learn more about digital issues and opportunities, to invest in and partner with the technology startups, and to hear from market leaders and thought leaders that live in these hubs. With the [power and responsibility](#) that comes with and from the ability to connect to each other and even connect directly to world leaders, as Zuckerberg has shown the technology community,

comes the thought processes and debates which need to be looked at in the light of day. Zuckerberg pointed out that insuring everyone has access to the Internet is the only way to achieve global justice. He even laid claim that the Internet can solve world hunger...well, solve "extreme poverty," are the words he used.

Is the Internet a "basic human right, like access to healthcare or water," as Zuckerberg claims? Certainly he is not being entirely altruist in this endeavor, but does this fact make his quest any less compelling?

Zuckerberg says that there's so much more we can do and took time to show one of his co-founders several new challenges (he) Facebook is working on including "Aquila," which is a drone that runs on solar power, and a laser that can stream videos. Possibly these inventions can be used to help those countries that lack the infrastructure for wired Internet or one of these inventions may provide a way to forge a partnership between technology companies and the countries in need of the access, making way to build out the necessary infrastructure, (and maybe mend fences while they're at it?).

Either way, those of us in the tech community now have a privilege and the power to do the right thing by providing this human right to more people. Zuckerberg gave us a lot to think about, as he usually does, and maybe Facebook *can* be a leader in this effort. But, can Facebook overcome the huge outcry against the Internet.org, backlash in India that started last April? If even *some* of these FB ideas can be applied to the process of lifting poverty in different parts of the world - surely this is worth the effort to overcome the obstacles.

I liked the idea that connectivity would help refugees "better access support from the aid community and maintain their links to family and loved ones." Facebook seems poised and ready to move in this positive direction if it is allowed to accomplish their goals. It's a lot like the [80/20 rule in business](#) and they are going to try and own 80 percent. FB is also in a unique position to help grow and maintain this lifeline - as they have claimed.

It would be nice to see where the cited study came from that claims if you give people access to the Internet, one in ten will be lifted from poverty. Would that this be true. Do we carry out more research on this issue, or would we be wiser to spend the time, effort and money to begin building the resources for all people to have the Internet? If we build it, will they come? If we build it, will it make a difference? Do we have the right to wait and find out if the Internet will make that much difference to the few, or the many? Or, should we just get busy supporting those who are willing and able now - to carry the torch to those that don't have the light?

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