

PUBLIC INTEREST TECHNOLOGY

Uncensored

This transcript is from a video featuring peace studies practitioner and social justice activist Berhan Taye Gemedra. It's part of the *Public Interest Technology* series, celebrating Ford-supported visionaries working at the intersection of art, design, and technology to help shape a future that serves justice and the public interest.

Transcript begins.

BERHAN TAYE GEMEDA: Censorship and surveillance online has become so rampant that it affects every aspect of your life. It's like telling people, "You're not allowed to read a book" or "You're not allowed to read this page of the book, but you're allowed to read the other page because, you know, this one is not relevant for you."

[Berhan Taye Gemedra, Ford-Mozilla Open Web Fellow, Research Action Design. A Black woman with short hair and glasses, wearing silver hoop earrings and a sleeveless denim dress.]

[An animation sequence shows an open book. The left page reads, "Net Neutrality ... is the Internet's guiding principle. It preserves our right to communicate freely online." Right-hand page says, "Net Neutrality ... means an Internet that enables and protects free speech." The text is then blocked out and stamped with the words, "This content has been censored."]

Berhan Taye Gemedra, take one.

I'm from Ethiopia. My lived reality is censorship and surveillance. It affects every aspect of your life, where you have to think twice before you tweet something—whether it's positive or negative about a certain group or a certain ruling party—which really decreases the spaces that you have for civic engagement.

We've had too many incidents of internet shutdowns. When Twitter and Facebook are closed down and there's a massive protest happening in your country, and you want to understand what's happening on the ground—you want to verify the number of people that have been killed, the number of people that have been arrested, where your friend is that you haven't been able to reach. You can't call them, you can't find them online.

My access to information is a right. My right to express myself freely is also a right. And being on the internet is also not a privilege—it is a right. The internet should be held as a public utility or be governed by the public for the public because it was created with that notion, right? So what we should be doing is to fight furthermore to make sure that the internet is open, is

accessible and affordable to the millions and millions of people that need information. That's how we'll be able to solve the world's problems.

[Ford Foundation logo: a globe made up of a series of small, varied circles. Mozilla logo.]

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End of transcript.