

Speech by Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, at the session on Economic Growth and Development of the London Conference on Cyberspace, 1 November 2011

Ladies and gentlemen,

To me, to the Dutch government, internet is all about hope.

Why?

The internet is big, and growing.

On the e-intensity index of the BCG, the Netherlands ranks 5th in the world, With a 24 billion euro turnover, after Denmark, South Korea, Japan and Sweden. We expect the internet economy to grow even more – and quickly - over the coming years.

The global internet economy is now bigger than the entire economies of Spain and Canada. These are data from the McKinsey Global Institute, so I am certain Mr Manyika will agree. And the internet has enormous potential for rapidly growing economies like China, Brazil and India and shows an exponential growth.

From Microsoft I have heard amazing projections on the shear acceleration of computer technology within three to five years to come.

Second, it's open. Had the internet been restricted and strongly regulated, such economic impact would never have been possible. From the start, it was a product of bottom-up innovation and an open space where ideas flourished. This is essential to successful online economic activity: it is the product of smart and creative innovators. Top-down rules would discourage that entrepreneurial spirit.

Thirdly, the internet connects global markets. This may seem like stating the obvious. But let me stress that we need that connection. Particularly in these times of severe economic and financial crisis. One way to strengthen the global economy is to increase trade. We should trade our way out of the crisis. So the trade links that the internet provides are not just nice to have, they are a vital necessity. We need catalysts like the internet. Now more than ever.

Importance of the Multiple Stakeholders Model

So, ensuring that the internet is open, free, innovative and accessible to all is essential. In fact, the internet was developed by stakeholders of all sorts from the beginning. The involvement of multiple stakeholders is in the internet's very DNA.

The essence of the internet's creative power would be undermined if any of these stakeholders became too dominant. Or if a special agenda were imposed on it. So we must make sure that the multi-stakeholder model prevails in all our discussions about the internet's future. Companies, civil society, the science and technology community and governments – we need to involve them all.

Internet regulation

We also need to involve multiple stakeholders in internet regulation. Our starting point in the Netherlands is: self-regulation whenever/wherever possible, legislation if necessary. We live in a fast-moving world, so legislation will soon be lagging behind. But we cannot have a free-for-all. We have to take the concepts of shared responsibility and early warning seriously. We need to respond quickly and effectively to intrusions. This is crucial for governments, companies, governmental organizations and individual citizens alike.

In the Netherlands, the certificate authority Diginotar was recently compromised by a hacker and fraudulent digital certificates were issued. As a result, the online privacy of 300.000 people abroad was jeopardized. Let me stress that this case proved very clearly that we should count on private companies to detect intrusions at an early stage. It also underscored our shared responsibility for prevention, detection and response.

Conference on internet freedom

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Dutch government considers internet freedom to be a top priority on the human right catalogue. The developments in the Arab world show what this actually means. There it has been underlined that internet freedom is essential for people to exercise their freedom of expression. The Netherlands supports persecuted bloggers and cyber dissidents. We also support embattled NGO's through the Lifeline Fund. And we engage in dialogue with companies about their responsibility. We will continue to look for new initiatives to support internet freedom. And we want to join forces with other governments that have similarly ambitious agendas.

That is why I am convening a high-level conference on internet freedom in The Hague on 9 December. Together with ministers from like-minded countries, companies like Google, and NGOs, we want to commit ourselves to concrete actions. We need to raise our ambitions a step higher. This means joint efforts for citizens' access to a free and open internet, for example by making server capacity available. It means taking a stand against censorship and restrictions. And deepening our dialogue with the private sector on how they take responsibility. For example by adopting codes of conduct. Like the Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy developed by the Global Network Initiative.

Bill Gates once said that 'the internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow'. Today, I believe that it is more than that. We need the internet's creative power. As a catalyst for our economies and to kick-start global trade. We need the contribution of the business community, ngo's and not in the least our citizens, whether they are on the consensual note or voice dissident opinions. Free access to the internet is all about trust, both in the public and corporate sectors, trust is crucial to internet. A free, secure and open internet is our shared responsibility and our common interest.

Thank you.