Consumers International, the Centre for Internet and Society, India, and Center for Technology and Society of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, Brazil, are presenting a workshop at this year's Internet Governance Forum on its opening day, 14 September, titled "Freedom of expression or access to knowledge: are we taking the necessary steps towards an open and inclusive Internet?"

Although cyber-utopian visions have long been discredited, the promise that the Internet contains as a tool to work towards democratisation and greater social justice has not yet lost its attraction. This workshop will consider what kind of Internet architecture is needed, what kind of 'openness' and Internet 'freedom' is required to ensure that such visions can actually translate into reality. While the importance of freedom of expression has been fairly widely acknowledged, a concerted approach to many more Internet governance issue is urgently required if those who are at the forefront of struggles for social justice online are to continue to do their important work. The interplay between access to knowledge (including access to information and access to culture) on the one hand and human rights on the other, too, for example, requires our urgent attention.

The aim of this workshop will be, then, to come to a more in-depth and more rounded understanding of what issues impact the democratising potential of the Internet and how exactly they do so, so that we can also start communicating about these with greater clarity. To reach this aim, the workshop will bring together activists, researchers and other stakeholders with expertise on different regions of the world and, consequently, at times diverging opinions on what the problems and solutions with regard to Internet governance are, and will bring them in debate with each other.

The workshop will be organized in a roundtable format in order to increase the involvement of the participants. Initial remarks of the speakers will be followed by debate, and active moderation will ensure that the discussions are dynamic. The issues raised by the speakers will be grouped under several axes, including: (i) Civic empowerment online: towards a new public sphere?; (ii) governmental and private control over information and personal data; (iii) Cases of tension between copyright protection and access to knowledge online. Cases such as the adoption of laws following the three strikes model and the adoption of open data regulations will be taken into consideration.

If you can make it to Vilnius, Lithuania on 14 September than you are welcome to attend this free workshop. If not, check back to this blog entry after 14 September for a report on how it went.
Consumers International (CI) is the only independent global campaigning voice for consumers. With over 220 member organisations in 115 countries, we are building a powerful international consumer movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere. For more information, visit www.consumersinternational.org.