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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CONDEMS INTERNET SHUTDOWN IN ERITREA

16 May 2019

The Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria is deeply concerned about the reported blocking of social media by the government of Eritrea to curb an impending demonstration ahead of the country's Independence Day commemorations

Eritrea is due to celebrate its 26th Independence Day on 24 May 2019. Citizens are resorting to Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to circumvent the restriction and access social media networks. This state-ordered restriction on social media is against democratic norms and violates the exercise of the rights to freedoms of peaceful assembly and of association. It also infringes on freedom of expression in the digital age and compromises the right of access to information.

The Centre for Human Rights notes with concern the challenges and restrictions in digital spaces and the shrinking civic space in Africa, especially in the context of elections and public protests, online and offline. Such justifications as national security and maintenance of public order are used by governments to order internet shutdowns and this impacts on fundamental freedoms that enable the exercise of democracy. These retrogressive developments are happening at a time when the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Clément Voule has been holding consultative meetings on the rights to freedom of association and assembly in the digital age. Challenges identified in these [meetings](#) include network disruptions and internet shutdowns. Out of these meetings [recommendations](#) were proposed to promote freedoms of assembly and association in the digital space.

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This current social media restriction is part of the ongoing systematic and widespread repression and denial of human rights to the people of [Eritrea](#) that has been ongoing for two decades. In light of this and that digital information facilitates the realization of human rights and promotes democracy, the Centre for Human Rights calls upon the government of Eritrea to respect the human rights of its citizens and desist from targeting and blocking social media platforms.

For more information, please contact:

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