
Virtual Rights: Constituting a Global and Local Information Society

www.virtualrights.org

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Contents:

Introduction.....	Page 2
Targets.....	Page 3
The First Step.....	Page 3
Concepts and Ideas.....	Page 3
Creating a Network.....	Page 5
Appendix (A): Ethical Implications.....	Page 7
Appendix (B): Internet Governance.....	Page 8
Appendix (C): practical examples.....	Page 9
Frequently Asked Questions.....	Page 10

Virtual Rights

Virtual Rights is the right to choose to have a Virtual Identity, and the right to choose not to have a Virtual Identity.

Original spanish text: Identidad Virtual: Para un ente, informacion actualizada, actualizable, registrada, registrable, e imputable a un centro de interes juridicamente relevante.

A Virtual Identity, for any being, is information that is compiled, categorised, and which can be updated so that it can represent, extend, and provide continuity of the identity of that being. A Virtual Identity allows for relevant legal entities to interact with the holder of that Virtual Identity.

Introduction.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) offer great potential for human development; however ICT, in the public imagination, is also sometimes perceived as a threat to human freedom. Popular art, such as science-fiction novels and films, have depicted technocratic nightmare scenarios in which automated cybernetic architectures of social organisation deprive individuals of free will, agency and democratic participation.

Virtual Rights recognise both ends of this spectrum, in a search for workable solutions, to a world rapidly changing as a consequence of the impact of new technologies. Virtual Rights contain values or norms that are either implicit or explicit in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in part, function as means to help realise and secure existing rights in a contemplation of new possible fourth generation human rights, adequate for the creation of a Global Information Society.

Virtual Rights support existing human rights and ensure that human freedom can continue to unfold.

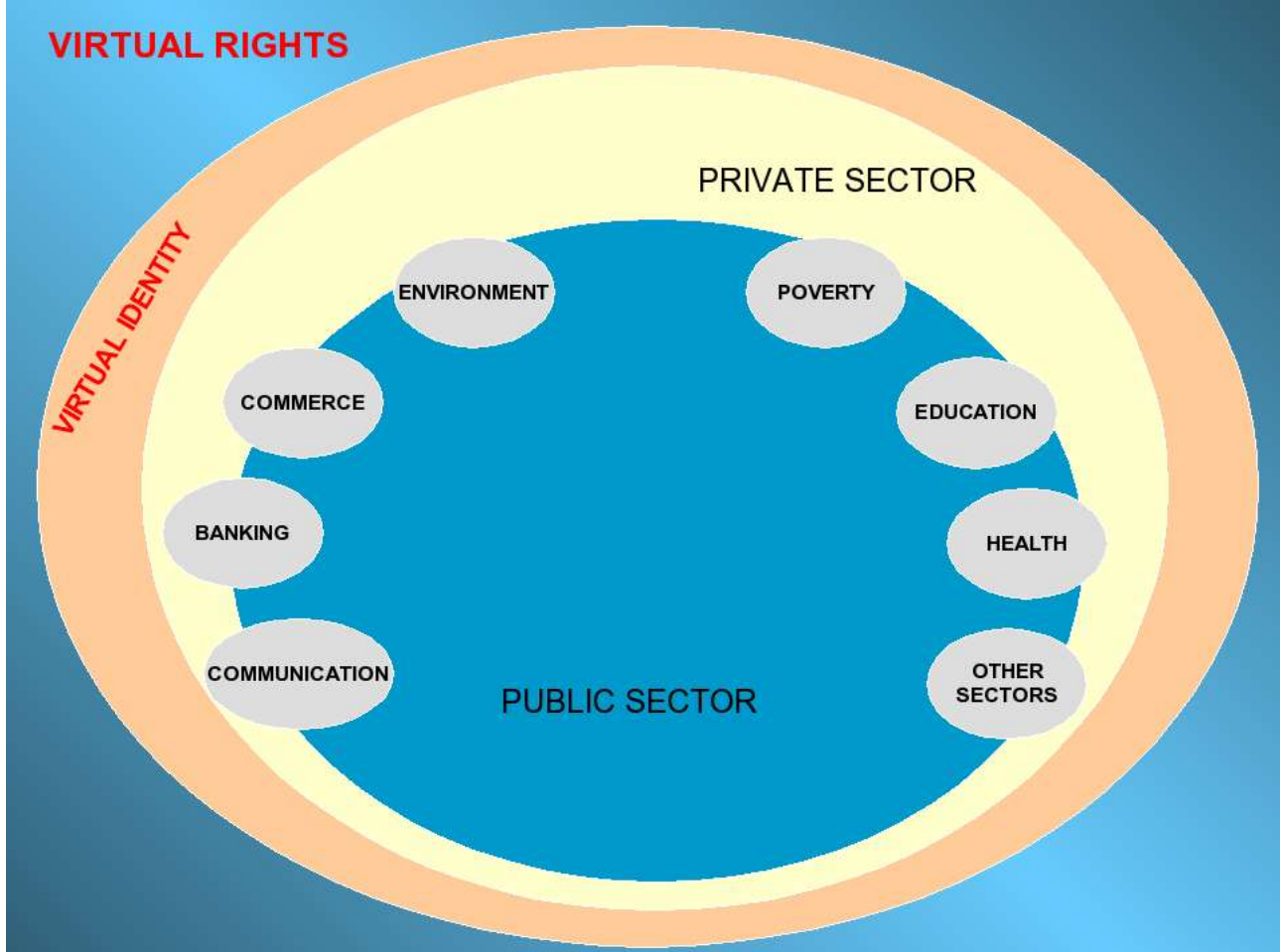
The aim is to eliminate dystopian potentials through regulation and to promote the development of ICT based initiatives that intent to enhance human freedom for all human beings: (i) for people who do have access to the Internet rights for provision of Internet based tools should be articulated, (ii) for people who do not have Internet access it should be provided, and (iii) in the realisation that Universal Access will not be achieved within a satisfactory time frame, but that ICT benefits can reach people indirectly Virtual Rights include a range of initiatives that can help people who are unlikely to gain the privileges of direct use of ICT in their lifetime. Virtual Rights is in that sense a right and an initiative contributing to help reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

Virtual Rights is a constructive engagement with the struggle for human rights in a comprehensive and active manner. In this way the Virtual Rights initiative is not just a visionary statement in theory, but also instigates implementations in practice.

It is the aim of Virtual Rights to facilitate the emergence of a network and provide a supportive gateway for similar projects that represent road-maps towards a realisation of universal access to education and tools for communication and expression. Virtual Rights is not envisioned as a centralising body, but as a structurally underpinning framework that can propagate a functional, non-central network for current and future ICT for development projects.

The inclusion and combination of existing local, regional, international and global projects are thus essential to Virtual Rights; and the initial task is to define a working group that can elaborate, criticise, modify, customise, and reach the targets outlined below.

VIRTUAL RIGHTS



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Therefore this is an invitation to join that group.

Targets.

The targets for the Virtual Rights project are as follows:

- a United Nations International Convention on the Universalisation of Virtual Rights.
- inclusion into the constitutions of Costa Rica, the European Union, and other regions or countries.

The First Step.

The Virtual Rights initiative is currently constituting itself as a community of researchers, policy makers, and politicians that will be hosting an Internet forum on www.virtualrights.org. Through the construction of a dynamic forum using current ICT for discussion and exchange the Virtual Rights initiative attempts to include as many actors from around the world as possible. The purpose of the forum is to increase knowledge of specific and general practices and theories surrounding Virtual Rights and thereby establish foundations for implementations.

Research groups are forming at Lancaster University, England, and at the Distance Learning National University, in San Jose, Costa Rica, with the view to prepare a background research agenda and design pilot projects for relevant implementations.

In the long term the ideas, the structure, articulations and implementations generated at www.virtualrights.org can act as and create generate the model for a forum that can accumulate and facilitate exchange of ideas, information and knowledge about the experiences of the Governments who adopt the Virtual Rights framework and the local, regional, national and global communities who implement it.

It should be noted, of course, that access to the Internet is still a condition of privilege. The forum on VirtualRights.org is only the beginning of a great challenge to disseminate information and acquiring feedback.

Will your organisation be the next partner? Write to [info \[at\] virtualrights \[dot\] HYPERLINK "mailto:info@virtualrights.org"org to join.](mailto:info@virtualrights.org)
 SSSSSS

Concepts and Ideas.

The Virtual Rights initiative attacks the Digital Divide from multiple angles: people who do have access to information and communication technologies (ICT) are offered appropriate tools with which to enhance their communicative capacity. Those who do not have access to ICT and those who have hitherto been deprived of the wider benefits for human development offered by ICT, in terms of health, education, and wealth, are also addressed in the sense that Virtual Rights bring ICT-facilitated improvements to coordination of aid, help and relief programs.

While Virtual Rights should be a right to which all are entitled, Virtual Rights should also include a right to decline such rights for religious, cultural, political and individual reasons.

A framework could be as follows:

The passing of appropriate laws to secure that all citizens have as a birth given Virtual Right the provision of, free access to, and informed understanding of means such as, but not limited to the following: email address, a space for a website, a mailing list and an Internet Protocol address and other tools such as software robots for human development purposes. These virtual rights are to be instantiated, maintained and managed by a multisectorial entity (to include suggested/recommended percentages: 40% Civil Society, 20% Public Sector, 20% Private Investors, 20% International Organisations, and an Ombudsman to monitor and facilitate decision making processes, manage conflict resolution and act as a communication channel for the public).

These visions of Virtual Rights are translated from article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to **seek, receive and impart** information and ideas **through any media and regardless of frontiers**. Article 19 is interpreted as a vision which states that to be able to freely express oneself and to engage fully in the social, economic and democratic processes that constitute human freedom and development, a citizen has to be enabled to communicate. The time has come to make this possible through information and communication technologies that has become common in many, but too few people's everyday life in the global village.

However, due to the time scale of such an ambitious project, a subset of Virtual Rights should be implemented in accordance with the Costa Rican Poverty Information System:

The Sistema de Información de la Población Objetivo (SIPO), supervised by Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (IMAS) is a database that helps identify, register and thereby provide for people in extreme

poverty an identity. This identity lifts people in poverty out of statistics and establishes a foundation for sustained and direct efforts towards the alleviation of their poverty. The identity provision comprises two levels: (i) people who are born outside the system of registration of citizenship are included in order to secure their rights as citizen. Through this inclusion each “new” citizen is informed of and becomes aware of her rights as a citizen in a given state and is thus entitled to receive the benefits that the state offers; (ii) people who are already included in civil registers, but who are poor, and may choose so, are included in a database (which may be build using a felt-tip pen) that form the basis of an optimisation of poverty relief efforts. This is in practice educational and empowering, and requires the informed consent of each individual. SIPO is built by social-workers going from house to house and entering for each individual a range of variables in some main categories that elucidate social relations, level of formal education, age, health and other such data. In order to do so, the citizen is informed of the consequences, options and potentials of appearing in the database; of her rights; of the obligations of her state; and the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The processes should be complemented with the provision of bank accounts for all citizens who desire to open such a channel of communication with aid organisations that can functions as destination for individualised aid.

In a human rights context this instance of Virtual Rights is related to article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of herself and her family, including food.

The vision of Virtual Rights is implementation on a global/universal scale of Virtual Rights to be co-ordinated in a multi-sectorial organisational architecture thereby complementing the visionary, yet theoretical tradition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with an action plan. The intention is to secure articles 19 and 25 directly and to support any other activities that seek to realise fully all of the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Additionally, the Virtual Rights project is a contemplation of new human rights needed to ensure human development, human freedom and individual liberty in the 21st Century with a view to establishing a Global Information Society.

Therefore the concepts of Virtual Rights refer to processes of relief from all kinds of poverty, protection of the environment, self-realisation, communication, exchange of ideas and community building within a globalising world community in which it is recognised that all human life is inter-connected and inter-dependent.

Creating a Network.

Virtual Rights invites the Agenda 21 network as a primary partner. Agenda 21 provides a framework, from local/municipal to global/multilateral levels, for the implementation of Virtual Rights. Complementarily Virtual Rights can bring organisational infrastructure and exchange fora to Agenda 21 and other poverty relief and ICT for human development projects to strengthen current and future efforts. Virtual Rights is also communicating with the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UNICTTF) in order to establish a formal relationship. A range of other organisations and institutions have been approached and agreed to collaborate, including:

- ◆ Agenda 21
Jorge Polimeni/Lidiethe Madden
MINAE
Costa Rican Ministry of Environment
polimeni@ns.minae.go.cr

- ◆ Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics,
Institute for Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy,
Lancaster University, England.
J. Martin Pedersen, Principal Researcher, m.pedersen@lancaster.ac.uk
Ruth Chadwick, Professor & Director, r.chadwick@lancaster.ac.uk
<http://cesagen.lancs.ac.uk>
- ◆ Costarricense.com (Asociacion Andar, Power Access, Fundacion Laberinto, Fundacion Socio Empresarial, which was the initial phase on the implementation of the embryonic model of the Virtual Rights initiative in Costa Rica.)
Lidiethe Madden, lidiethe@hotmail.com
www.costarricense.com
- ◆ Free Software Consortium
Hugo Vega, Coordinator of Technical Governing Body, hvega@fsc.cc
www.fsc.cc
- ◆ IDB - Inter-American Development Bank
Sustainable Development Department;
Information Technology for Development Division.
Guillermo Castillo, Information Technology Specialist, guillermos@iadb.org
Andres Garret, ICT Programs Financing, andresg@iadb.org
Danilo Piaggese, Division Chief, daniop@iadb.org
www.iadb.org
- ◆ IMAS/Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social
Pablo Soto, psoto@imas.go.cr, IMAS, SIPO Database.
- ◆ Laura Chinchilla
Costa Rica Congresswomen
<http://asamblea.racsa.co.cr/web-laura/index.htm>

An unconfirmed potential partner from the Brazilian Government, Mr. Adroaldo Quintela, who is Strategic Planning Director of FOME ZERO / Zero Hungry Program estimates that Brazil can reduce poverty by 30% by implementing a version of Virtual Rights, by way of helping them to coordinate effectively among the wide scope of organisations -Federal, State, Municipal, NGOs, and others- working to reduce extreme poverty in Brazil.

The Appendices are merely suggestive and functions as to-do-lists....

Appendix (A): Ethical Implications.

In connection with the registration of people, particularly in digital systems and databases, questions concerning the risk of abuse, exploitation and other malicious use of the collected information are obvious. Similarly the social problems of stigmatisation and labelling of people as poor are complex and needs to be addressed as a prerequisite for the success of Virtual Rights. It is the purpose of this appendix to present a list of the immediate questions and on that basis develop a research agenda that can lead to the articulation of a set of guidelines that can aid and support implementations. It should be noted that some of these problems and questions are not new, but just as relevant for existing registers.

- privacy
- anonymity

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Appendix (B): Internet Governance.

This is an early suggestive draft and an invitation to contribute alternative models of Internet technical Governance. Through open debate the best model will emerge.

Inherent in the ideas, principles, concepts and intentions of UNIVRI is an architecture for the technical, social, legal and economic organisation of the Internet. The idea of freedom of information and the idea of the end of hunger and poverty; the principles of communication as foundational to democracy; the concepts of Virtual Rights and Identity; and the intentions to allow for human development through the use of Information and Communication Technology cannot be realised without a transparent, democratic and multisectorial model for organisation of the structural underpinning of these efforts: the Internet.

The technical organisation of the Internet has so far been maintained by Internet Corporation For Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). The processes within ICANN, notwithstanding their so far satisfactory results, do not adequately reflect the global manifold uses of the Internet. Thus time has come for a rethinking of the approach to Internet technical governance.

The vision for Internet technical Governance inherent in the UNIVRI proposal is based on the multisectorial model introduced above: 40% Civil Society, 20% Public Sector, 20% Private Investors, 20% International Organizations, and an Ombudsman, to monitor decision making processes and facilitate conflict resolution. This distribution of power ensures that no one interest group, government or industry controls the Internet.

The entity that shall realise Internet technical Governance is not a government. It is constituted by a reformed ICANN that continue to function as a technical work group.

Appendix (C): practical examples.

The purpose of this appendix is to illuminate some practical possibilities and options for the configuration and actualisation of Virtual Rights and Identity. The following examples are in no particular order and serve to stimulate the imagination and instigate discussion. It should be noted that Virtual Rights and Identity can be extended ad infinitum, and that each aspect, level or dimension of the provisions and services mentioned in these examples are offers that each citizen will choose for herself to subscribe to.

- Parents whose children reach the age of schooling can be informed of the relevant educational institutions within a given radius, the facilities they offer, the cost of attending, the transport time and possibilities, and a review/summary of the latest quality assessment of the institution.
- In connection with established routine medical checks (prostate cancer tests for men, and similar tests for women with regards to breast cancer). The notification should include the closest public clinics, waiting time and other conditions deemed relevant.
- Aid, help and relief programs: when every person in poverty has a Virtual Identity (VI) local, national, or international aid organisations can use the VI as a reference with a comprehensive set of parameters from which adequate allocation of resources can be deduced. Consequently, this forms the basis for a continuity of a multi-level (local/national/international) coordination, because the unique point of reference that a VI represents functions as feedback. Thereby the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts can be monitored.
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Appendix (D): commercial development.

The purpose of this appendix is to outline possible ways in which Virtual Rights can be provided in collaboration with existing commercial Internet service providers.

Frequently Asked Questions

1:

Q: Is ICT, such as a website and an email address, really necessary, relevant and helpful for human development?

-A: No, these tools are not necessary; but human communication is. And when considering that we live in a globalising world it is arguable that, say, web based communication tools and techniques offer a technological/infrastructural underpinning of inter-human communication, which can potentially inform and consolidate the lives of a lot of people.

Jaco Aizenman Leiner (c) 2003, 2004

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