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## **The future of internet in Pakistan is at risk**

Quetta- Facebook Chief Mark Zuckerberg led internet.org partnership with Telenor in Pakistan is a very small step towards bridging the digital divide in Pakistan but sadly in the wrong direction. Telenor in collaboration with internet.org has launched access to free websites including the famous social media site Facebook among others to be accessed using internet.org the aim, as advertised on their website is connecting "two thirds of the world without access to the network".

Internet.org goals are based on a real problem faced by millions of people without internet access in Pakistan disconnected either due to lack of infrastructure or social and economic constraints also defined as digital divide. Internet Policy Observatory Pakistan director and leading internet policy expert Mr. Arzak Khan sees this development as a threat to the future of internet in Pakistan, according to Mr. Khan this step has more drawbacks than benefits. Firstly, Telenor is misleadingly marketing to the people this initiative as the internet whereas, this is basically just a bundle of limited insecure websites that will violate user's privacy and security. Secondly, despite the good intentions of Facebook and Telenor to bridge the digital divide in Pakistan it provides access to the internet that is not the real internet through internet.org. The very success of the internet itself is due to its openness, equality of opportunity and innovation. Platforms like Facebook itself would not have been created if Mr. Mark Zuckerberg was accessing the internet via this initiative Mr. Khan said.

Internet Policy Observatory Pakistan believes this is the responsibility of the government and most importantly Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to devise strategy for bridging the digital divide especially in rural and under developed areas like Baluchistan and Kyberpakhtunkhawa. The silence of the regulatory body on accepting internet.org as a public policy strategy for universal access to internet in Pakistan is alarming for the development of internet in Pakistan. People who will connect to the internet for the first time using this initiative are at risk of missing out on the real internet also restricting innovation and further growth of the internet Mr. Khan said.

A recent study by Internet Policy Observatory Pakistan identified that internet is already an important medium to help Pakistan evolve into a successful economy but is hampered by poor broadband infrastructure and low internet speeds. Internet.org initiative does not help in resolving the connectivity issues and doubles the gravity of the issue by offering a platform for a restricted internet access where people with fewer economic resources have very limited opportunity for joining the global internet economy.

We at Internet Policy Observatory Pakistan urge the government and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority to create new laws that address the issues of net neutrality as existing telecom law do not have the necessary basic protection for internet users in Pakistan. Furthermore, relying on this initiative to fulfill the needs of universal access will greatly risk the development of internet in Pakistan.

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