

# G8

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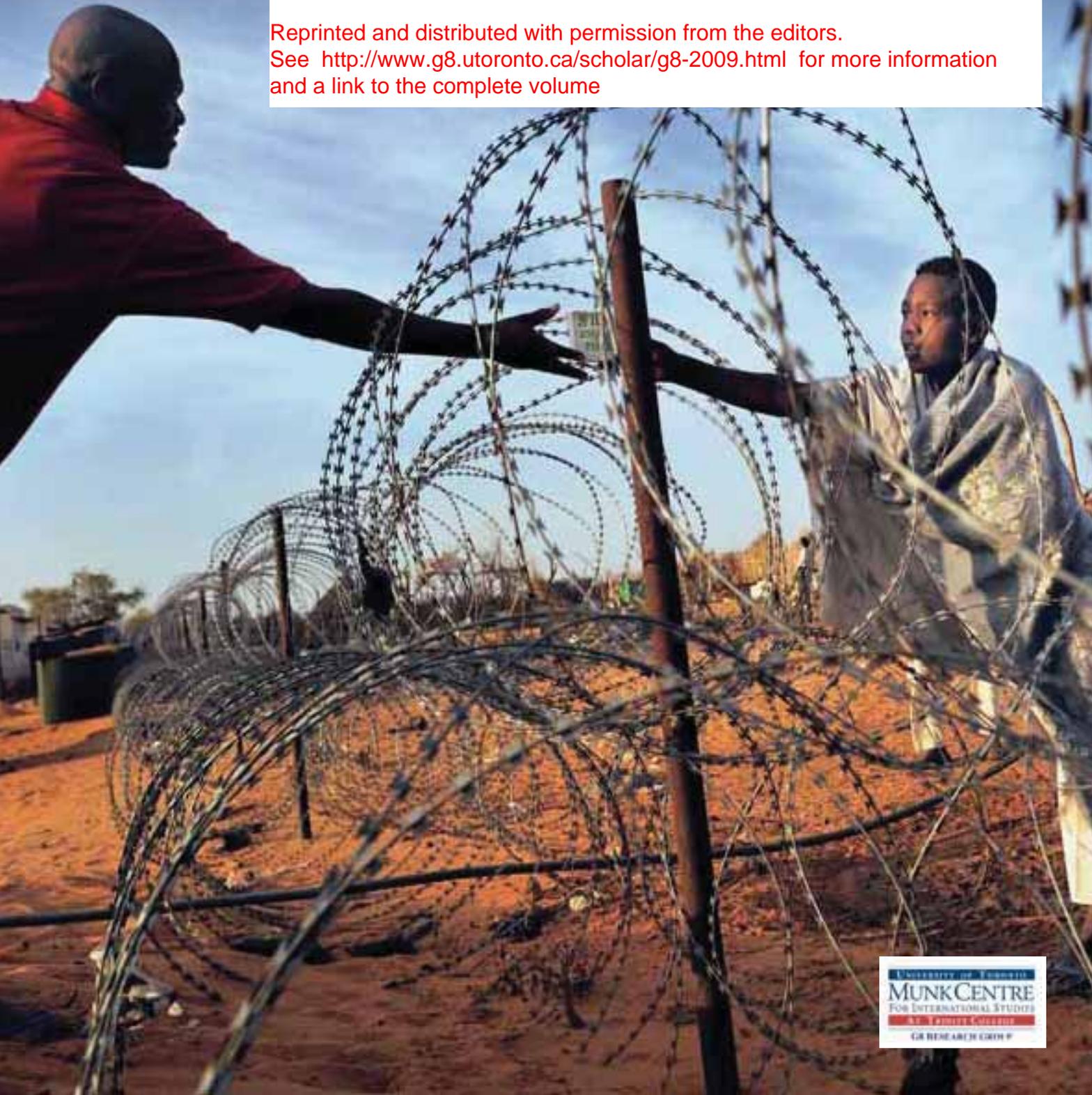
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## FROM LA MADDALENA TO L'AQUILA

**Article: A Better Web for a Better Society  
by Tim Berners-Lee, Steve Bratt and Daniel Dardailier  
World Wide Web Consortium and World Wide Web Foundation**

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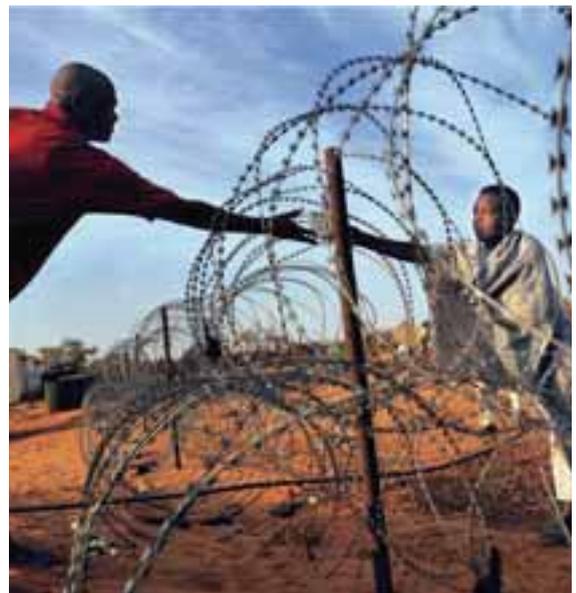
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# A better Web for a better society

*The internet opens up opportunities and helps bring the most disadvantaged out of the isolation of poverty. Governments must invest greater amounts in the development of the Web to make access truly global*

**By** Tim Berners-Lee, Steve Bratt and Daniel Dardailler, World Wide Web Foundation and World Wide Web Consortium

**T**he new World Wide Web Foundation will be launched this year as the next step toward fulfilling the original vision for the Web: humanity connected by technology, not technology in isolation. The foundation's mission is to advance the Web, connect humanity and empower people. Through focused funding and efforts from governments, organisations and individuals, the foundation will accelerate deployment of the Web as a bridge across the digital divide. In turn, the Web will empower people and accelerate tangible benefits, such as access to education, economic growth, sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Stories of the deployment of mobile voice- and text-messaging applications in emerging economies foreshadow the even greater potential of the Web as the next logical step to an open, easier-to-implement, richer and more cost-effective medium for global connectivity. (Many of those stories are available at [www.w3.org/2008/MW4D/wiki/Stories](http://www.w3.org/2008/MW4D/wiki/Stories).) However, there are serious challenges on the road to realising the Web's full potential. Currently, almost 75 per cent of the world's population cannot contribute to or benefit from the Web. Illiteracy, inexperience, language, disability and cost are significant impediments. As a result, usable, useful services are in limited supply, especially for those who need them most.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is developing the standards that will make the Web accessible for people with disabilities (through its Web Accessibility Initiative) and for people from the world's diverse cultural and language groups (through its internationalisation activity). With the number of mobile phones approaching 4 billion, and with the most rapid growth in emerging economies, W3C's standards will make the Web work easily on mobile phones, including the low-cost mobile devices prevalent in developing regions.

The Web Foundation will fund and co-ordinate new efforts to deploy W3C's work in the field and to address the other challenges that have not yet been addressed by others. The greatest promise in the developing world



is the mobile platform, using graphical, text- and voice-browsing technologies as interfaces to the global Web. The foundation will provide tools and training, and build communities of Web authors and users. The creative energies of the next billion Web citizens will be unleashed to advance technology and human connectivity in ways not yet imagined, offering people the knowledge and tools to build applications of value.

Examples include enabling a mother to register the birth of her child by mobile phone, without travelling by foot for two days; helping a healthcare worker, with minimal training, in a remote region, obtain a professional diagnosis and treatment for a child's swollen lymph nodes; providing market data to help a farmer to decide where to drive an ox cart full of bananas to get the best price; providing a student with the education, tools and capital to launch a service directory website in his or her local language or, perhaps, launch the next Google.

Students in Myanmar access the Web at an internet café

“ The Web Foundation aims to address challenges that threaten the advancement, freedom and openness of the Web on a global scale ”

In addition to empowering people at the grass-roots level, the Web Foundation aims to bring together leading experts to address challenges that threaten the advancement, freedom and openness of the Web on a global scale.





Internet access in China: censorship threatens the vision of the Web as a single, universal medium for sharing information

The risk of fragmentation of the internet and of the Web platform itself is real, with the proliferation of non-standard, proprietary technologies and Domain Name System disagreements (with language-support issues not completely resolved, such as .com in Chinese). Other challenges – such as censorship – threaten the vision of the Web as a single, universal medium for sharing information.

For 15 years, the W3C community has developed the free and open Web standards that make the Web work, including HTML, XML and dozens of others. W3C has advanced work on societal issues, such as privacy and security, and has developed an industry-leading, royalty-free patent policy that enhances the growth and value of the Web. W3C's eGovernment work aims to improve citizens' access to their governments through more effective use of the Web, supporting the concept of 'E-governance for Development' referred to in the Genoa Action Plan for the Digital Divide, launched at the 2001 G8 summit and being given a fresh boost at the 2009 L'Aquila Summit.

The Web Foundation is working with the Web Science Research Initiative (WSRI) to expand Web science as a field of academic study and research. This will improve understanding of how the Web works and educate a new generation of experts who will lead the Web into the future. WSRI is building a network of higher education institutions and engaging researchers and funders who are working toward this goal. The Semantic Web – the Web of linked data – has moved from research to application, and could revolutionise the Web and its value to society.

The Web Foundation, along with partners W3C and WSRI, shares the vision of a society in which everyone can create, share, access and be informed by a free

“ The Web has the potential to empower people through deployment of health, education, commercial and governmental services ”

and open Web. A second part of this vision is that more people are directly contributing their ideas and energies to developing the Web as a positive force in the world. The Web has the potential to empower all people through deployment of the health, education, commercial and governmental services needed by the 5 billion people not currently on the Web, most of whom are living below the poverty line. The Web can play an increasingly crucial role in solving other grand challenges, such as preventing and resolving conflict; sustaining fair economic growth; satisfying energy needs; saving the environment; mitigating and recovering from crises; discovering, and deploying, preventions and cures for deadly diseases; and spreading good governance.

Government agencies, especially those from the G8, should increase their support and funding of open Web standards, Web science and the application of the Web to empower and enable positive change. These ideas are elaborated in *The Web and the Promise of a Global Sustainable Future* (available at [www.w3.org/2009/01/paradiso.html](http://www.w3.org/2009/01/paradiso.html)). ♦