

309. Do Not Encourage Governments to Impose “Responsible Communication” on People

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Orbicom’s question: *Should an objective supporting Responsible Communication be added to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals?*

We communicate responsibly when we are candid and sincere, concerned to give our interlocutors true and complete information. In contrast, we communicate irresponsibly when we seek by what we say or how we say it to manipulate others into serving our ends. (Irony, allusion and playfulness do not make communication irresponsible, I hasten to add. Only deceit and mean-spiritedness do.) Because we value responsible communication, we oppose lies, bullshit and abuse.

So should we want to add a new Objective to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations, one expressing our commitment to Responsible Communication?

No, we shouldn’t.

No good can come of governments, corporations or other authorities trying to combat irresponsible or disrespectful expression and communication. The tools at the disposal of governments and other powerful agencies are censorship, oversight and control of expression; but people are not free when they are subject to censorship.

Respectful and responsible communication cannot be respectfully commanded or enforced. A government that insists through the fear of sanctions that people speak to each other respectfully is not itself treating people respectfully. Government manipulation by punishment and reward corrupts the venues through which people communicate with each other. Oversight by authorities makes candour and sincerity impossible.

To add to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations an objective on Responsible Communication would lead to even more government and corporate control and censorship than we presently suffer under. We need no more rules abridging freedom of expression or freedom of communication. Fewer would be better.