

Software Freedom Day Message (2014)

The concept of Software Freedom is increasingly gathering momentum, both as a stand-alone ethical concept, as well as a component in the larger matrix of on-line and Internet freedoms that have become mainstreamed as a result of recent revelations on privacy, data security, and surveillance.

Lest the debate on Internet freedoms should overshadow Software Freedom on its own right, this is a good time to assert the reasons why technical communities as well as global civil society should treat it as an ethical imperative.

Technology has become an essential and sometimes intrusive (some would say invasive) component of human life. Much of the adoption of technology by individuals and institutions (including Governments) has been “blind”, looking at technology only as an enabler of efficiency, and without sufficient thought as to the compromises made in such adoption. While technology, deployed with sufficient forethought, certainly has the potential to be a most potent enabler of efficiency, convenience, cost reduction and transparency enhancement, it is critically important that all entities examine the true, non-financial costs of technology as well.

Technology usually consists of the Hardware that provides a computing platform, and Software, the “intelligence” that drives it. In order to ensure that the present and future rights of end users are protected, both hardware and software must be, at the very least, transparent and visible to the users and be governed by a licensing mechanism that preserves such transparency in an inalienable manner. Further, as users start using technology, it has to be ensured that the data generated by users is also governed by similarly transparent mechanisms. This forms the crux of Software Freedom.

In the context of widespread and growing use of mobile phones, tablets, Cloud repositories, and Internet-of-Things (including wearables, implants, “ingestibles”, “nearables”, and arrays of sensors), the Freedom aspect of hardware, software and data must be ensured so as to ensure that the rights of the several billion end-users, many of whom are not sufficiently techno-literate, are protected.

The Software Freedom Day is an annual occasion for the FOSS community to come together, reflect, and act on the means of propagating Software Freedom. It is also an occasion to reach out to the public.

ICFOSS offers its greetings to all members of the FOSS community and supporters!

Satish Babu
Director, ICFOSS
20 September 2014