



Cognitive Freedom Coalition

COGNITIVE FREEDOM / AUDIENCE DOSSIER

Human Rights Dossier

Protecting Cognitive Liberty, Dignity and Mental Privacy

Prepared for Human Rights

A Human Rights Agenda for Cognitive Freedom

This paper examines the possibility that future technologies could analyze or influence aspects of human thought and behavior, and the protections needed to prevent misuse.

For human rights organizations, national institutions, monitoring bodies and civil society defenders, the central task is to protect people while establishing a trustworthy record. Cognitive Freedom Coalition calls for respectful complaint handling, independent scrutiny and safeguards that apply before emerging capabilities become commonplace.

Why We Are Bringing This Forward

Emerging technologies could change how institutions learn about people and influence their choices. The Coalition asks human rights organizations to examine that possibility early: identify vulnerable settings, define protections, prepare complaint routes and make institutional decisions reviewable.

The right to be heard should not depend on a complainant already proving a technical mechanism. At the same time, an institution must distinguish an allegation, a corroborated event, an expert assessment and a legal finding. That distinction strengthens advocacy by making its claims usable.

The Protection We Seek

- Mental privacy and freedom of thought remain central when technology can infer intimate information or influence choices.
- People retain meaningful control over research participation, neural data and decisions about their bodies and minds.
- Complaints receive fair consideration, with proportionate safeguards against exposure, retaliation and institutional neglect.

Neurotechnology can expand communication, health and human capability. A rights framework should make those benefits accessible without treating refusal as suspicious or allowing dependency on services to undermine consent. UNESCO's ethics work situates these concerns within an international conversation. [2]

Consider a future workplace system that infers attention or stress and uses those estimates in employment decisions. A rights organization could examine whether refusal is realistic, whether the inference is reliable and whether a worker can challenge its use. This is anticipatory protection with a concrete institutional purpose.

What Cognitive Freedom Protects

Cognitive Freedom is the principle that a person's thoughts, mental processes and inner life deserve protection. Cognitive Liberty expresses the freedom to make meaningful choices about that mental life. These ideas connect privacy, self-direction and consent with the conditions people need to think freely.

Six Interests That Belong Together

Freedom of thought. People need room to form beliefs, reflect, imagine, disagree and change their minds without coercive interference. The value extends beyond what a person chooses to say publicly.

Mental privacy. Intimate information about mental life deserves protection, including inferences generated by a system rather than information deliberately supplied by a person.

Cognitive Autonomy. People should retain meaningful agency over decisions affecting their own mental life. A convenient service should not make manipulation or dependence an unavoidable condition of participation.

Neural data protection. Recording, processing, retention and sharing each create responsibilities. Safeguards should follow sensitive information through its lifecycle, including derived profiles and models.

Human dignity. A person is more than a score, prediction or research record. Institutions should treat uncertainty and difference fairly rather than reduce a person's worth to an automated classification.

Informed consent. A meaningful choice requires understandable information, an ability to refuse and a clear account of what participation or withdrawal will mean.

A Wider Conversation

UNESCO and the OECD address ethical governance of neurotechnology. Existing human rights instruments also provide relevant protections. The Coalition contributes to this conversation by asking what institutions should prepare before future capabilities become commonplace. [1, 2, 7]

Our position is pro-progress and human-centered. Scientific advances should expand health, communication and human capability. Protections make those benefits more trustworthy by giving people a meaningful voice in how technologies affect them.

From Research to Future Safeguards

Communication and Human Capability

Willett and colleagues demonstrated attempted-speech decoding using an implanted brain-computer interface in a participant with paralysis. The work illustrates the value of restoring communication and the importance of user control over generated output. [6]

A future assistive system could become central to how a person speaks, works or participates in public life. Safeguards should address correction of errors, continuity of service, ownership of records and the ability to choose who receives the output. A person should not lose agency because they depend on a useful device.

Inference and Mental Privacy

Tang and colleagues reconstructed aspects of language meaning from fMRI recordings after extensive participant-specific training. Cooperation and controlled conditions mattered. This raises a concrete privacy question about how sensitive inferences might be handled as methods develop. [5]

If future systems infer intimate information from neural or related signals, a prediction could affect a person even when it is inaccurate. The Coalition proposes limits on consequential use, a right to contest an inference and a clear distinction between a measured signal and a conclusion about someone's mind.

Interfaces and Institutional Power

DARPA's N3 program funded research toward nonsurgical, bidirectional brain-machine interfaces. Published research objectives identify a direction of development, rather than establishing every proposed capability. [4]

If future interfaces become more accessible, the same capability could serve different purposes in a clinic, workplace or security setting. Consent, access controls and independent oversight must account for who holds power over the person using the system.

A Future-System Model

A future system might combine sensing, inference, a decision process and feedback or intervention. Each step creates a governance question: what is collected, what is inferred, what action follows, who authorizes it and how a person can stop or challenge it. A failure at any step could turn a helpful tool into a source of coercion or unfair treatment.

The Coalition proposes preparing safeguards around these decisions now. Define acceptable purposes, prohibited outcomes, responsibility for errors and routes to remedy. Technical validation should assess particular claims under stated conditions; policy should also address risks that remain uncertain without pretending the eventual mechanism is already known.

Rights, Responsibilities and Institutional Choices

Use Existing Rights Carefully

The ICCPR addresses privacy, freedom of thought, expression, effective remedy and protection from non-consensual medical or scientific experimentation. Relevant provisions include Articles 2, 7, 17, 18 and 19. Their application depends on the facts and the applicable jurisdiction. [1]

The Convention Against Torture requires attention to severity, purpose and official involvement in its definition of torture. Its investigation and redress provisions have specific legal conditions. Qualified legal review should assess a case rather than treating every reported symptom as a completed legal finding. [9]

Build an Intake Process People Can Use

Assign a case identifier and a named contact. Ask what happened, when it happened, who witnessed it, what records exist and what help the person wants. Keep the original account alongside a separate analytical chronology. Record uncertainty without rewriting the person's experience into either an institutional diagnosis or a preferred technical theory.

Explain what can be kept confidential, who can see each record, the retention period and any limits on withdrawal. Separate permission to receive information from permission to publish it, refer it to another body or use it in research. Collect only the identity and location information needed for the stated purpose.

Keep Care and Inquiry Available

People raising concerns may need practical support as well as a formal response. A rights-based process should consider evidence on its merits and make appropriate assistance available. Neither access to care nor a complaint review should require a person to surrender the other. Identify barriers such as cost, disability, language or dependence on the institution concerned.

Design Protections for Future Systems

If future systems could infer sensitive mental information or alter aspects of perception, institutions should address coercion, discriminatory use, unauthorized disclosure and loss of personal agency. Require a clear purpose, informed participation, independent oversight and routes to contest harmful decisions. These are Coalition proposals for governing risk, including where an eventual mechanism remains unknown.

An institution can improve intake and privacy practice now while reserving technical and legal conclusions for evidence-based review. This creates a pathway from testimony to accountable action without requiring premature certainty.

An Action Agenda for Human Rights Organizations

Receive and Preserve

- Create an accessible complaint route and publish what the institution can investigate, refer or support. Set an acknowledgment target and explain the next step.
- Preserve original documents and media, timestamps and available metadata. Keep a transfer log, protect working copies and record any redactions separately.
- Offer consent-based referral to independent legal, clinical or technical expertise where the facts justify it. Document why a referral was made and what question it should answer.

Investigate Within the Mandate

Identify the alleged conduct and the responsible institution before choosing a mechanism. Depending on mandate, jurisdiction and admissibility, options may include a national human rights institution, ombudsman, regulator, court, UN Special Procedure or treaty-body process. Match the submission to that mechanism's rules; do not promise an investigation or a particular outcome.

Where evidence supports broader concern, prepare a thematic submission on complaint handling, consent, neural-data governance or access to remedy. Separate documented failures from policy gaps and unresolved allegations. Seek a response from the institution concerned and include its substantive reply.

Advance Standards and Oversight

- Propose safeguards for neural data and sensitive mental inferences, including purpose limits, access controls and independent review.
- Review human-subject protections, institutional conflicts and the ability to refuse participation without penalty. The Belmont principles offer a useful ethical foundation. [3]
- Support anti-retaliation measures and lawful reporting channels for complainants, staff and whistleblowers.

Measure What Changes

Track acknowledgment, referral and resolution times; record the reasons for closure; and offer a route to challenge a decision. Publish aggregate findings that protect identities. A growing collection of complaints should improve institutional learning rather than become a substitute for case review.

The Coalition seeks partners willing to turn these steps into practical intake standards, model policies and focused oversight proposals. The immediate contribution is a reliable pathway from a person's account to a fair response. The longer-term contribution is protection of Cognitive Freedom as technology develops.

The Coalition and the Work Ahead

Cognitive Freedom Coalition prepares rights, evidence standards and safeguards for the future of Cognitive Liberty. It brings research, public education and policy discussion into a shared conversation about freedom of thought, mental privacy and human dignity.

Public Education and Professional Dialogue

Different audiences contribute different strengths. Human rights organizations can develop protections and routes to remedy. Journalists can examine claims, institutions and incentives. Members of the public can shape priorities and ask how technology affects everyday choices. Governments can establish responsibility, oversight and enforceable safeguards.

The Coalition seeks useful contributions: clear explanations, focused research questions, model policies, ethical principles and practical institutional standards. The purpose is to prepare people and institutions for emerging risks while supporting technologies that improve lives.

The Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative

NFII is the Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative, a Coalition initiative being finalized for a Q4 2026 launch. Its public information and research pathways are available now. Planned outreach will seek connections with universities worldwide and thousands of researchers. Participation will depend on agreement; an outreach plan is not a claim of institutional endorsement. [8]

Independent research should use informed consent, clearly stated questions and methods capable of distinguishing competing explanations. Findings should be reported with their scope and limitations. Null results and corrections are valuable because the quality of the record matters more than a preferred answer.

Principles for Collaboration

- Connect each project to a concrete contribution to Cognitive Freedom, such as a safeguard, an ethical standard, a public explanation or a governance proposal.
- Make responsibilities, conflicts of interest and the basis for conclusions visible. Distinguish a proposal from an adopted policy or verified finding.
- Respect privacy and meaningful participation. Arrange an appropriate process before sharing sensitive records or individual accounts.

Start a Conversation

We welcome inquiries about research, reporting, public education and policy collaboration. Begin with the question you want to address, the perspective you bring and the practical outcome you hope to develop.

Contact: contact@CognitiveFreedomCoalition.org

Website: cognitivefreedomcoalition.org

Research Initiative: cognitivefreedomcoalition.org/nfii

A Framework for Evaluating a Proposal

A useful Cognitive Freedom proposal connects a specific activity with the people it affects, the benefit it seeks and the protection it needs. The following questions can guide a meeting, a policy review, a reporting plan or a public discussion.

Purpose and Benefit

- What human need does the activity serve? Who receives the benefit, and who bears its risks or costs?
- Is the proposed use necessary for that purpose, or could a less intrusive approach achieve the same result?

Information and Choice

- What signals or personal information are collected? What further inferences might be created? Who can obtain either?
- Can people understand the proposal, refuse it, leave it or choose a realistic alternative without unfair penalty?

Evidence and Accountability

- Which claims have been demonstrated, under what conditions and for whom? Which are goals, assumptions or future scenarios?
- Who is responsible for mistakes, misuse or harm? What independent review, complaint route and remedy are available?

A Simple Way to Record the Answer

Write a short statement of the purpose, affected people, intended benefit, relevant evidence, unresolved questions and proposed safeguards. Name the responsible institution and the next decision. Revisit that record when the purpose, technology or evidence changes.

Essential Terms

Neurotechnology: technologies that interact with or help study the nervous system.

Neural data: information recorded from nervous-system activity.

Mental inference: a conclusion about a mental state or process derived from data.

Neurorights: rights and safeguards addressing the effects of neurotechnology on people.

Brain-computer interface: a system linking recorded brain activity with a computational or assistive function.

The Coalition uses these questions to keep the purpose clear: technology should expand human possibility while protecting the freedom to remain the author of one's own mental life.

Sources and Further Reading

1. OHCHR, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

Privacy, freedom of thought, remedy and research consent.

2. UNESCO, [Ethics of Neurotechnology](#)

Human rights and the international ethics conversation.

3. HHS, [The Belmont Report](#)

Respect for persons, beneficence and justice.

4. DARPA, [Six Paths to the Nonsurgical Future of Brain-Machine Interfaces](#), 2019

N3 research objectives and interface development.

5. Tang and Colleagues, [Semantic Reconstruction of Continuous Language](#), 2023

Nature Neuroscience, non-invasive brain recordings and language reconstruction.

6. Willett and Colleagues, [A High-Performance Speech Neuroprosthesis](#), 2023

Nature, implanted interface supporting attempted-speech decoding.

7. OECD, [Responsible Innovation in Neurotechnology](#)

Recommendation adopted in 2019, governance across development and use.

8. [Neuro Frequency Investigation Initiative \(NFII\)](#)

Coalition initiative, research pathways and participant information.

9. OHCHR, [Convention Against Torture](#)

Definitions and provisions concerning investigation and redress.

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