

# International Partnership on Information & Democracy

This international Partnership was signed on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

It has been signed by the following States:

Andorra; Australia; Benin; Bulgaria; Canada; Chile; Costa Rica; Croatia; Czech republic; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; India; Italy; Latvia; Lebanon; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Malta; Montenegro; Netherlands; Norway; Senegal; South Africa; South Korea; Sweden; Switzerland; Tunisia; United Kingdom

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1. **We, the States taking part in the International Partnership for Information and Democracy;**
2. **Recalling** the right to freedom of opinion and expression that includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers;
3. **Recognizing** the rapid evolution of the global information and communication space, including the development of internet;
4. **Acknowledging** that the global information and communication space is a shared public good of significant democratic values that requires special protection to ensure it remain global, open and accessible to all, and that the actions of public authorities or private actors should not unduly restrict this space directly or indirectly;
5. **Underlining** that this new global information and communication space has enhanced the possibilities of exercising the right to freedom of opinion and expression and improved access to information in many ways;
6. **Recognizing** that, however, it is not immune from new ways to censor, manipulate and control information;
7. **Reiterating** our commitment to protect all human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, guaranteed by Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
8. **Welcoming** multi-stakeholder efforts to establish, at international level, "a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge", as pledged at the World Summit on the Information Society adopted on 12 December 2003;
9. **Taking** note of all relevant UN resolutions and conventions related to safety of journalists and the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet and recalling in particular the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions' guiding principle that cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression are guaranteed;
10. **Welcoming** the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitments therein to, inter alia, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, including by ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and

international agreements, and therefore recognizing the important contribution of the promotion and protection of the safety of journalists in this regard;

11. **Recalling** the International Declaration on Information and Democracy adopted on 5 November 2018 by the independent international Information and Democracy Commission, initiated by the non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF);
12. **Considering** the Joint Statement made by 12 Heads of State and Government on 11 November 2018 at the Paris Peace Forum announcing their desire to launch an initiative inspired by the work of this Commission;
13. **Underlining** that information can be regarded as reliable insofar as its collection, processing and dissemination are free, independent, diverse and based on cross-checking of various sources, in a pluralistic media landscape where the facts can give rise to a diversity of interpretation and viewpoints;
14. **Considering** that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is essential for the enjoyment of other human rights and fundamental freedoms and that access to reliable information is crucial to the exercise of freedom of opinion;
15. **Commending** as such the crucial role of journalism for freedom of opinion and expression and to contribute to and foster debate over issues of public interest both online and offline;
16. **Reaffirming** that independent media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government and are of particular importance in safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms;
17. **Expressing** concern at the damage which can be done by the spreading of false or manipulated information intended to deliberately deceive, and recognising the role that the collection, processing and dissemination of information, when free, independent, diverse and based on cross-checking of variable sources, can play in mitigating that damage,
18. **Highlighting** the importance of transparency surrounding media ownership, financing and editorial independence;
19. **Observing** that access to the global information and communication space is of crucial importance for full democratic participation;
20. **Underlining** in this regard the importance of education to media and information for people to be free, critical, independent, and capable of defending oneself against misinformation, disinformation and manipulation of public opinion;
21. **Recognizing** also the importance of public trust in and the credibility of journalism, and the challenges it faces in maintaining journalistic professionalism in an environment where targeted disinformation and smear campaigns to discredit the work of journalists are increasing;
22. **Noting** with concern that all forms of human rights violations and abuses committed against journalists which affect directly their safety and prevent them from providing information to the public negatively affect the exercise of the right to freedom of expression;
23. **Welcoming** a multi-stakeholder approach to internet governance;
24. **Confirming** that all stakeholders, especially the Online Service Providers, as they help structure the information and communication space by creating technical means, architectures and standards for information and communication, have responsibilities relating to their role;

**25. Affirm the following principles:**

- a. The global information and communication space, which is a shared public good of significant democratic value, must support the exercise of human rights, most notably the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, through any media of one's choice regardless of frontiers, in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19);
- b. Access to reliable information must be protected and promoted to enable democratic participation and the exercise of freedom of opinion and expression;
- c. Information can be regarded as reliable insofar as its collection, processing and dissemination are free and independent, based on cross-checking of various sources, in a pluralistic media landscape where the facts can give rise to a diversity of interpretation and viewpoints;
- d. In accordance with the international law and standards on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, journalists and media workers, in the course of their function, must be protected against all forms of violence, threats, and discrimination; against all forms of arbitrary detention, abusive legal proceedings; against any unduly restrictive efforts to prevent them from carrying out their works and have access to appropriate legal remedies, including as relevant with respect to the confidentiality of their sources;
- e. Sustainable business models must be developed to serve high-quality independent journalism;

**26. Call on the online service providers that structure global information and communication space to:**

- a. **Comply** with the principles of transparency, accountability, and political, ideological and religious neutrality, including with regard to their own services, while bearing in mind their responsibilities in this matter, and implement mechanisms to foster access to reliable information and to counter the dissemination of false or manipulative information intended to deceive audiences;
- b. **Uphold** the responsibilities incumbent on them according among others to the UN principles on business and human rights ahead of the design of new programmes, software and connected devices;
- c. **Demonstrate** transparency and accountability in algorithmic curation, including moderating human and technical decision-making processes, financial promotion of online content, collection of personal data and relevant agreements concluded with any government or private entity which have an impact on compliance with the above principles;
- d. **Ensure** the consistency of their policies, procedures, algorithmic design, and tools for the moderation and curation of content with human rights and in particular international standards on the right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- e. **Enable** access to a variety of media outlets, information and ideas through diverse indexing solutions that limit the risk of echo-chambers and filter bubbles that are algorithmically populated;
- f. **Promote** tools to foster visibility and dissemination of reliable information;

**27. We will strive to:**

- a. **Implement** international obligations related to the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as media freedom, including by respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom to seek, receive and impart information regardless of frontiers;
- b. **Ensure** that our legislations, policies and procedures promote a global space that fosters access to reliable information that complies with the above principles;
- c. **Promote** national and international legal frameworks that are compliant and conducive to the aforementioned right to freedom of opinion and expression, and that are able to allocate clear obligations and responsibilities;
- d. **Encourage** public awareness and exercise of this right;

- e. **Work** to prevent acts of violence, threats and attacks aimed at journalists and media workers, and fight against impunity for crimes committed against journalists through the conduct of impartial, prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations;
  - f. **Condemn** unequivocally and address the specific attacks on women journalists and media workers in the exercise of their work, including sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation and harassment, online and offline;
  - g. **Establish** and preserve a safe environment enabling journalists and media workers to work freely and independently and without undue external interference and intimidation and without any form of discrimination;
  - h. **Combat** any unduly restrictive measure against the right to freedom of opinion and expression and take measures to prevent manipulation of information by state or non-state actors, and condemn, prevent and fight such actions;
  - i. **Sustain** and support conditions to ensure the financial viability of journalism, while ensuring that this support empowers and does not undermine editorial independence and journalistic freedom;
  - j. **Promote** this Partnership as a means to reinforce existing international and regional mechanisms contributing to the implementation of established human rights instruments and Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 ; to facilitate multi-stakeholder discussions on the means, standards and exchange experience ; and to encourage development of self-regulation practices among information and communication space actors,
  - k. **Welcome** the work carried out by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) to foster the implementation of this Partnership through the creation of a Forum in cooperation with other independent organisations, particularly to provide non-binding recommendations for States and Online service providers;
  - l. **Convene** in consultation with states signatories an annual meeting in an agreed upon format;
  - g. **Promote** the International Partnership for Information and Democracy among all States with a view to encouraging them to join it;
28. **Membership** of this Partnership is open to all States, after approval by the signatory States.