

INTERNATIONAL  
DECLARATION  
ON INFORMATION  
AND DEMOCRACY

**INFORMATION & DEMOCRACY**  
COMMISSION

Global communication  
and information space:  
a common good of humankind

# Preamble

The global communication and information space is a common good of humankind and should be protected as such. Its management is the responsibility of humankind in its entirety, through democratic institutions, with the aim of facilitating real communication between individuals, culture, peoples and nations, in the service of human rights, civil concord, peace, life and the environment.

The global communication and information space should serve the exercise of freedom of expression and opinion and shall respect the principles of pluralism, freedom, dignity, tolerance and the ideal of reason and understanding. Knowledge is necessary for human beings to develop their biological, psychological, social, political and economic capacities. Access to knowledge, particularly knowledge of reality, is a fundamental right.

Political control of the media, subjugation of news and information to private interests, the growing influence of corporate actors who escape democratic control, online mass disinformation, violence against reporters and editors, and the undermining of quality journalism, threaten the exercise of the right to knowledge. Any attempt to abusively limit it, whether by force, technology or legal means, is a violation of the right to freedom of opinion.

The communication and information space must be organized in such a way as to allow rights and democracy to be exercised. It should preserve and strengthen our ability to address challenges of the present time, to anticipate our common destiny and to help us shape global sustainable development which takes into account the rights and interests of future generations.

The communication and information space should guarantee the freedom, independence, and pluralism of news and information. As a common good, this space has social, cultural and democratic value and should not be reduced to its commercial dimension alone. Dominant positions in the production, distribution or curation of information, must be prevented where possible and controlled when unavoidable, in order to preserve the variety of facts and viewpoints.

# Principles

## Right to information

Freedom of opinion is guaranteed by the free exchange of ideas and information based on factual truths. The truth, which may take many forms, is grounded on the correspondence between reality and perceptions or on the best available evidence from established methods of scientific, academic, journalistic or other professional practices designed to produce trustworthy information and knowledge.

Reliable information underpins the exercise of freedom of opinion, respect for other human rights and all democratic practices, including deliberation, election, decision-making and accountability. The integrity of the democratic process is violated when information that could influence this process is manipulated.

The right to information consists of the freedom to seek, receive and access reliable information. Information can only be regarded as reliable when freely gathered, processed and disseminated, according to the principles of commitment to truth, plurality of viewpoints and rational methods of establishment and verification of facts.

The commitment to free pursuit of truth, factual accuracy and “do no-harm” principles is necessary for the integrity of news and information. Disseminating information that is misleading or incorrect or withholding information that should be known can undermine the individuals ability to understand their environment and to develop their capacities.

Undisclosed conflicts of interest in the field of information pose a threat to freedom of opinion. Content that is designed to advertise or promote must be clearly identified as such.

## **Freedom of expression**

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right of individuals to express themselves. In accordance with international standards on free speech and with due regard to the rights and reputation of others, it includes the right to criticize any system of thoughts and cannot be constrained or limited by the beliefs or sensitivities of others.

Intellectual property, which is only applicable to creations and inventions, should not create closed systems in the information and communication space and should not be used to restrict public deliberation. The product resulting from the creative work of gathering, processing and disseminating information confers the right to fair remuneration.

## **Privacy**

Participants in the public debate must be able to protect the confidentiality of their private information or communications. The right to privacy may only be restricted, and only in a proportionate manner, where it is necessary in a democratic society for public order, the safety of persons, the prevention of crimes, the protection of health or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

## **Responsibility**

Responsibility of all participants in the public debate is a key principle, which implies transparency over their identity. Exceptions to the principle of transparency are legitimate if they facilitate the quest for truth or contribute to their own security.

All participants in the public debate are liable for their expression, including content they disseminate or help to disseminate. Liability

may be established only on the basis of the restrictions on freedom of expression regarded as admissible under international standards.

## **Transparency of powers**

Every public or private sector entity imbued with a form of power or influence has – within the limits of the public interest – transparency obligations in proportion to the power or influence it is able to exercise over people or ideas.

This transparency must be assured in a swift, sincere and systematic manner.

# **Entities that create means, architectures of choice and norms for information and communication**

## **Accountability**

When creating technical means, architectures that shape choices and norms for communication, entities that contribute to the structure of the information and communication space shall respect the principles and guarantees that nourish and underpin the democratic nature of this space. They have to be held accountable in accordance with and in proportion to the impact of their contribution or participation.

## **Political, ideological and religious neutrality**

These entities, such as platforms, shall comply fully with standards of freedom of expression and opinion and, to this end, shall respect political, ideological and religious neutrality when structuring the information and communication space. Systems distributing or curating information and ideas must be neutral as regards the interests of those who control them, with the exception of advertising, which must be explicitly identified.

## **Pluralism**

Such entities, including platforms, shall promote diversity of ideas and information, media pluralism and favor serendipity. Tools used for curating and indexing information - meaning aggregating, sorting and prioritizing information - must provide alternative solutions, allowing for a pluralism of indexation, and allowing for freedom of choice for users.

## **Reliable information**

Such entities shall implement mechanisms that favor visibility of reliable information. Such mechanisms shall be based on criteria of transparency, editorial independence, use of verification methods and compliance with journalism ethics. The integrity, authenticity, traceability of ideas and information shall be promoted, so that their origin and mode of production and dissemination are known. It shall not be a violation of political, ideological and religious neutrality to favor reliable information.

## **Transparency to inspection**

Such entities must be predictable for those over whom they have influence, resistant to any manipulation and open to inspection. Platforms shall be transparent over curation algorithms, moderation (whether human or algorithmic), content sponsoring, collection of personal data, and agreements they may have entered into with governments.

## **Integration by design**

Compliance with the obligations of these entities, such as platforms, shall, as far as possible, be integrated from the outset into software, algorithms and connected objects. These corporate entities and services are required to observe due diligence.



# Media and journalism

## **Social function of journalism**

Journalism's social function is that of a "trusted third party" for societies and individuals. It allows for the establishment of checks and balances and empowers people to fully participate in society. It aims at giving account of reality, of revealing it in the broadest, deepest and most relevant manner possible, allowing for the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion.

Journalism's task is not just to portray events but also to explain complex situations and changes, being comprehensive and inclusive, allowing the public to distinguish the important from the trivial. It should reflect both positive and negative aspects of human activities and expose potential constructive solutions to important challenges.

## **Journalism's deontology**

Journalists fulfil their social function when their rights are protected, when they can work freely and when they respect their professional obligations, as defined in the established ethical documents of the profession. Journalism can be practiced by a plurality of actors, without regard to their status, being professional or not.

Journalists must be committed to handling information in such a way as to serve the public interest and the public's fundamental rights. They should not treat information as a commodity. Motivated by the demands of truth, they must present the facts fairly, disregarding as much as possible their own interests and prejudices and rejecting all forms of connivance and conflicts of interest.

## **Freedom and safety of journalists**

Journalism can only fulfill its social function if journalists' freedom and safety are guaranteed, online and offline. They must be protected against all forms of violence, pressure and discrimination, against all forms of abusive legal proceedings, and against any efforts to erode their ability to fulfill their social function.

They have the right to the protection of the confidentiality of their sources. An effective protection of whistleblowers is necessary in order to guarantee the transparency of powers.

## **Editorial independence**

Journalists act in complete independence from all forms of power and undue influence, whether political, economic, religious or other. Any violation of the principles of independence, pluralism and honesty of information by public officials, owners, shareholders, advertisers or the media's commercial partners violates the freedom of information.

State or private sector funding for journalism should not be accompanied by conditions that would dictate the substance of content or seek to interfere with a journalist's professional judgement.

## **Journalism sustainability**

The social function of journalism justifies an effort by societies to ensure journalism financial sustainability.

# **Toward an international framework for information and democracy**

Accountability for practices that cross diverse national boundaries raises complex challenges, particularly in a fast-changing field. Democratic accountability will require continuous expert participation that adequately balances global representation with rigorous evidence-based assessment of practices and conditions of knowledge production in the global communications and information space. To this end, an international group of experts should be created. Its funding and mandate shall provide sufficient independence from both companies and governments and it shall have the power to investigate practices and outcomes of the primary means, architectures, and norms of communications, on an ongoing basis, and issue periodic reports and recommendations on best practices.

An initiative by

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