

Launching of the MIL Week

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Keynote by Guy Berger

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here in Morocco talking about Media and Information Literacy (MIL), six years after Morocco hosted in Fez what was the first international conference on MIL which contributed to originate a global movement in this field of work. And it is a pleasure to see how the issue of MIL has advanced in the national agenda, as demonstrated by your presence here, as well as by impressive slate of actions and events planned during this week. Inspiring here is the world's first RadioMIL, an innovation that uses a temporary licence for a model of associative radio to involve young people to produce programming on MIL – and spread awareness of this to the public in Rabat.

This meeting today marks the 101st event worldwide to commemorate MIL Week. this year.

Accordingly, I would like to thank all of you and your organizations for joining hands on this MIL Week, and a special thanks to the ISIC (*Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication*) for hosting us here and for its long-standing cooperation with UNESCO on a number of issues related to Communication and Information. In fact, I would like to recall that UNESCO was part of the idea of putting in place such an important and much needed institution here in Morocco in the 1970/80s. Since then, collaboration has always been fruitful and ISIC has played a crucial role (also region-wide) in journalism education.

I'd like also to extend a special thanks to those donors who generously supported MIL and other efforts in the area of Communication and Information in Morocco and in the MENA region: namely the European Union (through the NET-MED Youth Project) and Sweden with regards to this event, as well as Finland, Norway, Spain and Switzerland.

In today's world, the paradigm of a government *protecting* the public and itself from what it sees as dangerous information is changing. The proliferation of information in society calls out for *emphasis* to be on *preparing* the public to deal with the information they encounter. *Preparation* is more effective than *protection*.

Today, we cannot keep people in permanent shelter. It is not realistic, nor is it healthy. We need to prepare the public, especially young people, for exposure to a huge range of content – much being questionable – because they are going to encounter it. This is a bit like, in our homes, from early on we have to teach children to be able to cross the road on their own, to get to the other side safely and successfully reach their destination.

It is for these reasons, that the impractical idea of controlling our new and amazingly multiplying information environment is increasingly being recognised as an archaic approach. The new paradigm has to put emphasis on *empowerment* of the public itself to engage with the diverse mass of communications they receive, share and produce. This is what Media and Information Literacy means – the skills to distinguish what's nourishing and what's toxic, what's true and what's fake. What it means to put even the same facts into different narratives that generate different meanings. None of this is easy to do.

MIL is not a luxury. It is a lifeskill in the digital age. It is vital to understanding the new information environment. Increasingly, knowing where you are – i.e. on the Internet, is central to knowing who you are, and how to proceed. MIL means knowing how the information you receive and the parts of it that you share, as well as that information that you produce and put into circulation, affect your identity – especially if you are young.

For instance, communications affects what your favourite brands are and what fashion you wear; what you see as beauty; how you perceive your rights, and how you exercise your citizenship. MIL, however, can put communications in perspective, understanding the difference between reality and representation – to illustrate, that buying a certain product does not equate to happiness; that a politician performing on TV is actually only a human being, that real women are not like those in pornography, that a person who touches your emotions in order to enlist you for violent extremism is only exploiting you for their own ends.

More and more, it is evident today that social media while excellent for social cohesion and much else is not just an innocent neutral tool to use; it is a business

platform designed deliberately to exploit scientific insights into human psychology; it embodies what people are now calling architectures of addiction and persuasion. It prioritises information that will resonate with your prior beliefs, and it plays to our pleasures, our entertainment values, and our sense of spectacle and drama – just like reality television. And all this is tailored to each the character of individual user. The more you use social media, the more it knows about you and can micro-target you to keep you there with just the right information and advertising needed to hold your attention.

MIL can help each of us to understand these systems, such as to understand that free services and apps are a business model where you, the user, are the product, with your data being harvested and valorised. It's a price we pay for these wonderful facilities, and we need to be aware of it and avoid being over-exploited.

When you understand the *where* of contemporary communications, and when you are in charge of the *who*, then you are also in a position to act. Then you can consciously undertake the *how*. Knowing where, supports knowing who you are, and together these empower you to know how to be an active subject, rather than an unwitting and manipulated object.

In short, MIL is key to the way you can practically be empowered to use communications as an autonomous individual and contributing member of society. It is key for you to appreciate and exercise your inalienable individual rights in relation to communications. It shapes how you respect and defend those of others, and not least how you – and other members of society – value and defend the rights of the people whose hard work produces brave and honest journalism in the public interest.

MIL is all this - instead of being overwhelmed, or manipulated by our unavoidable engagement with an ever-expanding information environment. An environment which includes elements that violate our human rights, or which incite the violations of the rights of others; elements that disarm, disinform and detract from what's important and what has social value.

However, MIL is not just about building resilience to the bad, it is not just about inoculation. It is also about proactive engagement. It means, for example, learning the competencies to be able to use facebook, for intercultural dialogue, democratic participation, gender equality, cultural creativity, educational and skills development, defending privacy, and actively rejecting and countering all forms of discrimination, inequalities, hate, misogyny, intolerance and violent extremism. It

means combatting the circulation of anti-scientific information about vaccinations and climate change.

During the Global MIL week event held in Kingston, Jamaica recently, young participants crafted, in dialogue with UNESCO, a “MIL CLICKS Pact,” which is a self-commitment to engage in critical thinking and influencing their peers in this regard online and offline. Participants voluntarily declared the statement, “I am a MIL CLICKER, I pledge to REVIEW before I click, post, and share.” With R.E.V.I.E.W. here standing for:

Rights: committing to the respect of everyone's rights, as online posts can have both visible and unknown consequences for me or towards the rights of others. It is important to think critically before posting and sharing:

Education: referring to the understanding that my full literacy includes being information and media literate:

Voice: committing to sharing my voice and acting as a peer-educator of MIL:

Intercultural dialogue: respecting differences and mutual cultural understanding of people:

Ethics: not sharing information that I know not to be true/factual, as well as information that may impact on others’ privacy, their rights online. In general, using ethical judgments when sharing and posting content;

Wise clicking for women and men: recognizing that the information, media, technological and communication landscape concerns women and men of all ages equally, and aware that MIL is a tool to promote gender equality, committing to using my MIL competencies, to advance the equal rights of women and men of all ages.

This pact is also available on the sites of UNESCO and the Moroccan Communications Regulatory Authority (HACA) - HACA having kindly translated it into Arabic and French.

MIL is this kind of voluntary commitment, but it also has to be much else. It is a systematic set of knowledge and skill, as set out in many published resources by UNESCO and others. MIL competencies take time to learn, and new ones are continuously coming to light. MIL used to cover only an understanding of the print and broadcast media that you consumed, or how to use the library that you visited. Now, however, MIL also needs to cover digital literacy, privacy literacy, and

cybersecurity literacy amongst others. And it needs to systematically be part of teacher training, school curriculums, university courses, NGO programmes, Internet companies activities, and news media content and role. No single actor can meet all the need for MIL, all are needed – and indeed, individuals have a great contribution to make in their own capacity.

UNESCO is very well aware of this, and has supported the creation of a strategic platform with the aim to federate the maximum number of actors and stakeholders involved in MIL, which is open and handled following a participatory approach. So the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL) is an effort to stimulate and encourage international reflection and cooperation to ensure that citizens all around the world can have access to media and information competencies. Launched in 2013, this initiative also aims to give greater impetus to the process of mainstreaming MIL in the governance and development agenda. GAPMIL also has regional chapters, including the Arab one, which here I'd like to congratulate for its activism.

To return to the MIL CLICKS pledge cited earlier, this example illustrates how young people can take centre stage, not just as a target audience, but as key partners of UNESCO.

And this is important because it reflects an approach that UNESCO takes, more broadly, to meaningfully engage youth throughout its fields of competence. It is precisely this same vision that drives the EU-funded NET-MED Youth project, which brings us here today, whereby it is youth themselves who design and lead workplans implemented in Southern Mediterranean countries, which include MIL activities. No one can empower the youth by treating them as objects, as empty vessels just waiting to be filled with the health tonic of MIL. Only dialogue, interaction, participation, creativity and opportunity can take everyone forward.

It is also in this same spirit that an essential branch of the Global Alliance for Partnerships on MIL is its Youth Committee, through which young women and men contribute to shaping the MIL Agenda, and that this Global Alliance has also named Youth Ambassadors that coordinate initiatives at national, regional and international level.

Allow me to conclude my intervention by recalling that MIL competencies are indeed more necessary than ever. We cannot credibly imagine achieving sustainable development without them.

For this reason, I'd like to congratulate all actors and stakeholders that are here today, as well as to strongly encourage you to contribute to mainstreaming MIL in national policies, strategies and budgets.

Thank you for your attention.
