

# KEY MESSAGES

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2019

MEDIA FOR DEMOCRACY:

JOURNALISM AND ELECTIONS IN TIMES OF DISINFORMATION



## FACTS, NOT FALSEHOODS SHOULD INFORM CITIZENS' DECISIONS DURING ELECTIONS

The spread of disinformation during times of elections complicates the democratic potential of journalism. False information disseminated through social media and social messaging platforms is used to influence people's votes. This detracts from quality journalism, which is accountable for providing verifiable information, and which holds the powerful to account for the integrity, peace and fairness of an election. Citizens should make decisions based on verified, reliable sources of information inside and outside of the voting booth.

## TECHNOLOGY INNOVATIONS SHOULD BE USED TO HELP ACHIEVE PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

The use of AI during electoral campaigns should be considered, especially at times of elections, when citizens are increasingly using the Internet and social media platforms for political discussion and debates. AI should be harnessed to support media institutions that can play a role in peaceful elections. This includes tackling "viral" emotive content that is prioritized at the expense of facts-based information, and automated chat bots that spread propaganda material, even if journalists and fact-checkers debunk it.

## TRANSPARENCY AND THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF ELECTIONS

Internet and digital technologies allow candidates a direct means by which to communicate with the voting public. However, some digital technologies used to influence people's choices escape scrutiny – such as whether, for example, advertising complies with the rules of electoral authorities. Without effective access to information and transparency, the integrity and legitimacy of elections can be compromised. We need technology companies and governments that are more transparent, and that respect the rules and regulations of elections, in order to guarantee free and fair elections.

## JOURNALISTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO WORK WITHOUT FEAR OF ATTACKS

Hostile political discourse that seeks to discredit professional journalism and truthful news reports, can undermine public trust in the media. When political figures employ anti-media rhetoric, the risk of violence against journalists as well as online harassment increases. We need rapid political and judicial responses to address impunity for crimes against journalists.

## INTERNET SHUTDOWNS COMPROMISES DEMOCRACY

During times of elections, it is especially crucial for citizens to participate in debates, be aware of electoral irregularities, and obtain verified information. When the internet is disrupted with the intention to restrict such information and exert control on what to read and listen, citizens' right to access to information and freedom of expression are curtailed. Gossip and rumour can thrive. Internet shutdowns, unjustifiable filtering of content and blocking of websites all violate citizens' right to seek, receive and impart information.

### **AN OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE INTERNET FOR ALL**

An inclusive approach to internet governance is fundamental for freedom of expression online. Governments and all interested stakeholders should support Internet Universality based on the ROAM principles: human Rights, that is Open, Accessible to all, and which ensures Multi-stakeholder participation. UNESCO has indicators that stakeholders can use to assess their national internet landscapes and propose evidence-based policy improvements.

### **FAIR AND INDEPENDENT REPORTING CAN COUNTER INCITEMENT AND HATE**

Conflict-sensitive reporting that takes into account different opinions from different sources and avoids being instrumentalised by different sides can contribute to reducing polarization. Divided societies can have a negative impact on peaceful elections. Journalism can also be a force for reconciliation before, during and after elections especially in post-conflict situations.

### **INFORMED CITIZENS THAT THINK CRITICALLY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEFUL ELECTIONS**

Voter education programmes should also include media and information literacy approaches. The more citizens are able to analyze information in a critical manner, the less prone they will be to share falsified information and identify reliable sources. Citizens need capacities to engage with information in order to make well-informed choices and cast their vote freely.

### **MEDIA CONTRIBUTES TO PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES**

SDG 16 target 10 calls for “public access to information and fundamental freedoms”. This encapsulates the media’s potential to promote peaceful, fair and inclusive societies. The two indicators under Target 16.10 cover the safety of journalists and the legal and political guarantees to access information.

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