DECLARATION

5th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network

Countering Disinformation to Promote Responsible Public Discourse

March 2021

We, parliamentarians representing 26 countries in the Americas and the Caribbean, met virtually on March 15, 19, and 26, 2021, with the support of the Parliament of Canada, for the **5th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network** entitled *Countering Disinformation to Promote Responsible Public Discourse*.

The dissemination of digital disinformation and computational propaganda through new communication technologies has had harmful effects with multiple manifestations and consequences, including the proliferation of hate speech, undue interference in electoral processes, limits to political participation, delegitimization of government actions and campaigns, and the deterioration of democratic dialogue, which threatens peace and security.

Throughout the gathering, we participated in dialogues about the serious effects of disinformation on national security, democratic institutions, and human rights; exchanged good legislative practices to mitigate its consequences; and considered key issues to guide our parliamentary work.

Considering the above and,

Recognizing:

1. That the consolidation of phenomena related to digital disinformation, computational propaganda, and the ubiquity of new technologies and platforms has had harmful effects, the multiple manifestations of which challenge national sovereignty, governability, security, and democratic stability as they have the potential to affect the integrity of electoral processes, undermining public trust in democratic institutions and exacerbating political and social polarization.

2. That the magnitude, power, and global nature of large technology companies requires coordinated legislative initiatives between countries designed to safeguard the interests and protection of users and consumers, always in adherence to the highest standards of transparency and integrity.

3. That given the state of the digital economy and digital markets, it is necessary to consider novel legislative approaches that build ethical business practices and prevent the deepening of existing monopoly models and anti-competitive practices.

4. That the protection of personal data and privacy is an important public policy area that implies, among other actions, guaranteeing the right of all persons to know, update, and rectify any information collected about them in public or private databases or files, as well as applications and social media platforms with which they interact.

5. That the deployment of digital disinformation campaigns orchestrated with the objective of interfering in the development of transparent and democratic electoral processes is one of the most serious threats to the sovereignty and national security of several countries in the region and the world.

6. That online gender-based violence and gendered disinformation, which can particularly affect the credibility of and public trust in those who are active in politics and in the public sphere, and can silence or minimize women's contributions and ultimately exclude them from decision-making spaces

7. That there are disinformation campaigns designed to infringe the human rights of persons and communities in vulnerable situations such as migrants, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI persons, ethnic and racialized groups, and other historically marginalized groups, further limiting spaces for their political participation.

8. That it is the duty of States to guarantee the right to free expression and to promote a favourable environment for unrestricted, independent, and diverse communication, advocating for a culture of peace and encouraging consensus and cooperation among actors of the political system.

9. That it is necessary to address the proliferation of hate speech online, especially on social media, which generates various consequences, including by exacerbating political polarization and human rights violations toward historically marginalized groups.

10. That the era of digital communication has created serious challenges for independent journalism—an objective and reliable source of information that is of singular importance in democratic systems.

11. That international and multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Open Government Partnership, among others, as well as spaces for global cooperation, such as the International Grand Committee on Disinformation, have been working on initiatives and recommendations to address the phenomenon of disinformation by offering tools to different stakeholders to mitigate its effects.

12. That new information and communication technologies (ICTs) also offer tools and resources to counteract the effects of disinformation and strengthen fundamental principles for democracy, such as openness, transparency, and social accountability.

13. That parliaments around the world are developing innovative legislation to confront the phenomenon of digital disinformation and computational propaganda, including aspects related

to ethical processing and use of information, as well as unrestricted respect for the rights of political participation and freedom of expression.

14. That in the design of artificial intelligence and computational algorithms there are biases and patterns of discrimination that affect and exclude historically marginalized groups from full participation in the digital world.

15. That state openness and, particularly, legislative openness is essential to guaranteeing transparency, access to public information, and integrity, as well as the involvement of all key actors to combat this phenomenon, especially through commitments and action plans created jointly between parliaments and society.

We commit to:

1. Convene our governments, the media, civil society organizations, social movements, and technology companies to agree on actions to safeguard the integrity and transparency of the electoral processes in our countries, bearing in mind the increasingly sophisticated strategies of digital disinformation and computational propaganda and in adherence to international standards for freedom of expression—a fundamental right in democratic societies.

2. Propose measures that encourage large technology and communication companies to strengthen their contribution to societal well-being by implementing social responsibility practices and better managing unwanted impacts, whether social, environmental, or economic.

3. Oversee the implementation of existing legislation or develop new legislation to address the consolidation of monopoly models in the information and communication technologies sector to respond to anti-competitive practices that have facilitated dominant positions in digital markets.

4. Promote international collaboration among the Governments of our region and, particularly among the legislative branch, to enable coordinated responses that include recent advances in cybersecurity and data protection, in light of the globalized and systemic nature of disinformation and the actors and platforms involved.

5. Insist on the need to promote debates and establish or designate legislative committees dedicated to addressing the phenomenon of disinformation, raising public awareness of its consequences, and developing policies and legislative measures to counteract these consequences.

6. Develop legislative initiatives that consider hate speech against women and girls, migrants and historically marginalized groups and promote fundamental democratic values for social coexistence, such as equality, non-discrimination, political plurality, and intercultural understanding in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

7. Urge our governments to promote a free and plural communications environment that recognizes the importance of independent journalism, the diversity of the media, and civic spaces as opportunities and allies in countering disinformation and propaganda, thereby promoting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 16.

8. Promote collaboration between the ministries of education or their equivalent, civil society, student organizations and educational institutions to foster initiatives designed to strengthen critical thinking, digital literacy, and cybersecurity practices.

9. Strengthen and update data protection laws in accordance with the highest international standards on the matter that acknowledge the importance of the principles of quality, legality, purpose, and proportionality in the collection, transfer, and use of personal data and communicate to the public their rights and guarantees in a transparent manner.

10. Seek the adoption of legislation to guarantee the right of access to public information and promote the proactive disclosure of governmental and parliamentary information as an element to encourage evidence-based public debates, using as references the ParlAmericas Roadmap towards Legislative Openness and the Legislative Transparency Toolkit, jointly developed by the Transparency and Access to Information Network, EUROsociAL, and ParlAmericas.

11. Advance the discussion on the importance of adopting ethical principles in the development of computational algorithms under democratic, transparent, and inclusive paradigms.

12. Reaffirm our duty to promote responsible public discourse in our parliaments and in our in-person and virtual public interactions, employing respectful, inclusive, and tolerant communication practices that foster constructive dialogue and recognize the value of political plurality in our societies.

13. Develop or modify legislation and call on governments and the private sector to promote the design of artificial intelligence and computational algorithms under democratic, transparent, inclusive and ethical paradigms, to avoid discrimination or disparate impact.

14. Continue to strengthen spaces for exchange and best parliamentary practices at the level of parliamentarians as well as parliamentary staff who are key in ensuring the effective implementation and sustainability of efforts in favour of legislative modernization and use of the ICTs that allow for increased and improved interaction with the public.

Adopted March 26, 2021