PRESS RELEASE
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ParlAmericas and the Parliament of Canada hosted the 5th Gathering of the Open Parliament Network: Countering Disinformation to Promote Responsible Public Discourse

ParlAmericas celebrated the 5th Gathering of its Open Parliament Network entitled "Countering Disinformation to Promote Responsible Public Discourse", which was hosted by the Parliament of Canada. The gathering brought together parliamentarians from 26 countries, alongside parliamentary staff, subject-matter experts, and representatives of civil society organisations and youth organisations from across the hemisphere for a working session in English-French on March 15, and in Spanish-Portuguese on March 19, as well as a closing plenary session on March 26.

The Honourable Anthony Rota (Canada), Speaker of the House of Commons, in his opening remarks noted that "the topic of the 5th Gathering of ParlAmericas' Open Parliament Network could not be more timely or relevant. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the public has relied on online resources to remain informed about the virus and the pandemic (…) Disinformation during a global pandemic can endanger public health and safety, especially if people believe false prevention measures or treatments, or if their trust in health services and public institutions is undermined."

In addition, the Honourable Pierrette Ringuette (Canada), Speaker Pro Tempore of the Senate, stressed that "disinformation campaigns during an election can have a range of harmful impacts. For example, the disinformation spread through such concerted campaigns can obscure legitimate information for voters, polarize social discourse, and weaken confidence in the electoral process."

From her perspective, Senator Blanca Ovelar (Paraguay), President of ParlAmericas, contributed that "we decided to dedicate this 5th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network to analyse the phenomenon of disinformation and its different effects, recognising that the globalised and multifaceted nature of this problem requires a coordinated and collaborative approach."

Through these sessions, participants engaged in dialogues around the harmful effects of disinformation and computational propaganda, 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. These dialogues were supported by experts including Professor Taylor Owen, Beaverbrook Chair in Media Ethics and Communications of the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University; Professor Marco Aurelio Ruediger, Director of Public Policy Analysis at Fundación Getúlio Vargas; Nazima Raghubir, First Vice-President of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers; Laura Zommer, Executive Director at Chequeado; Pedro Vaca Villarreal, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; Sandra Pepera, Daniel Arnaudo and Victoria Welborn, of the National Democratic Institute; Micaela Mantegna, Professor at Universidad de San Andres and Research Fellow at

the Berkman Klein Center in Harvard University; Amalia Toledo, Consultant on Gender and Technology; and Professor Elena Gil González, Professor at Instituto de Empresa Law School.

It also included a high-level panel moderated by Senator, the Honourable Ranard Henfield (The Bahamas) and featuring Catalina Botero Marino, Member of the Facebook Oversight Board; Lucina Di Meco, Gender Equality Expert and Co-founder of #ShePersisted Global; and Member of Parliament Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Canada), Member of the International Grand Committee on Disinformation, which fostered a proactive discussion around the most pernicious effects of disinformation, including gender-based violence, and presented innovative initiatives to address this issue, such as Facebook's Oversight Board and the International Grand Committee on Disinformation.

The Gathering concluded with reports from parliamentary delegations on the progress achieved to implement the commitments presented at the previous Gathering which have been published on ParlAmericas' Open Parliament Commitment Tool, as well as present new commitments that they intend to implement over the next year. A final declaration stressing parliamentary commitments to address disinformation in the hemisphere was adopted and the results for the election of the OPN Executive committee were announced.

In conclusion, Member of the Chamber of Deputies Javier Macaya (Chile), President-elect of the ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network, commented that "I am certain that we are leaving this meeting with a better understanding of a complex contemporary phenomena, with a renewed commitment to democratic principles of transparency, freedom and inclusion, and with better tools to support our ongoing efforts to strengthen governance and tackle this issue."

All meeting materials, including panellist presentations can be accessed on the ParlAmericas website. A final report outlining the discussions held within the various working sessions will be published in the coming weeks.

For more information on the work carried out by ParlAmericas, visit www.parlamericas.org and follow @ParlAmericas on social media.