



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIR OF THE FREEDOM ONLINE COALITION: A CALL TO ACTION ON STATE-SPONSORED DISINFORMATION IN UKRAINE

March 2, 2022

As 2022 Chair of the Freedom Online Coalition, Canada leads a coalition of 34 governments united by our belief that the same human rights people enjoy offline must be protected online.

The unprovoked and unjustifiable attack by the Russian Federation against the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of the democratic state of Ukraine was preceded by a steady outpouring of fabricated claims and unfounded allegations online by the Russian Federation.

We have since witnessed a continued onslaught of disinformation orchestrated by the Russian Federation.

At an unprecedented moment in history, when people around the world are turning to the Internet to connect, learn and consume their news, the Russian Federation's coordinated disinformation campaign has conjured false and misleading narratives intended to corrupt the information environment. This campaign aims to sow confusion, seed division, and erode trust in democracy. It ultimately puts lives at risk.

State-sponsored disinformation campaigns undermine peace, prosperity and individual freedoms, threatening to destabilize the fabric of our rules-based international system.

A strong democracy relies on access to diverse and reliable sources of news and information so that members of society can form opinions, hold governments and individuals to account, and participate in public debate.

The Freedom Online Coalition stands for the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms online and offline.

We stand with the people of Ukraine, reaffirming that they should be able to participate meaningfully in society online and offline, free from oppressive practices such as state-sponsored disinformation.

We call for the cessation of the conducting and sponsoring of disinformation campaigns, and urge all stakeholders to take active steps to address the issue in a manner that respects human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We call for the end of Internet shutdowns and the blocking or filtering of services. We also call for the Russian Federation to refrain from content restrictions on the Internet that violate international human rights laws. States must not unduly restrict, moderate or manipulate online content or disrupt networks to deny users access to information, contrary to their international obligations.

More than ever, social media platforms are powerful tools of information. They play a key role in the health of democracies and global stability. Social media platforms play an important role in the fight against disinformation—in the last few days, we have seen them make unprecedented and powerful decisions to restrain the Russian Federation’s attempts to misinform national and international audiences.

While respecting freedom of expression, Canada calls on platforms to work with the Freedom Online Coalition and to keep taking every step possible to counter state-sponsored disinformation, including that propagated by Russia Today and Sputnik channels online. We offer our continued collaboration to get this done in a manner guided by respect for human rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Together, let’s send a clear message—the world order we have fought hard to maintain is under attack. Disinformation cannot be enabled, whether through state media, private media or social media platforms.

We support Ukrainians’ human rights and Internet freedoms, and will work together to counter state-sponsored disinformation, which puts democracies and lives at risk.

Endorsed by: Australia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States