Global Forum for Media Development

https://gfmd.info/

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Chapeau

- The ability to access accurate and unbiased information is fundamental for making healthy political and economic decisions, fostering fair and just communities, and pursuing meaningful and sustainable development and peace. As a vital conduit for building trust and cohesion, freedom of expression and media independence are thus key to renewing a social contract anchored in human rights.

- International norms have long acknowledged this importance, including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially Article 19; the General Comment on Article 19: freedoms of opinion and expression; the 1991 Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press and subsequent declarations; and various other instruments at the global and regional levels, including target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

- The Summit of the Future, in recognizing that shared challenges can only be addressed through stronger international cooperation, must prioritize freedom of expression, media independence, and access to information as an integral component of inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism as it seeks to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals.

- This requires strengthening alignment of freedom of expression and media independence with key proposals from the Our Common Agenda report and its 12 commitments, including ensuring digital inclusivity, applying human rights online, facilitating universal access to the Internet, elevating the voices of younger women, promoting integrity in public information, pursuing accountability for misleading content, and regulating artificial intelligence.

- Any resulting goals – e.g., the Global Digital Compact, Digital Cooperation Forum, and UN Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms – must be grounded in standards that preserve the centrality of citizens (in the widest sense), the quality and accessibility of information, the safety and protection of journalists, the freedom and independence of media outlets, and the vibrancy and viability of the ecosystems that sustain them.

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

- Financing of quality information and independent media remains a serious challenge, including the collapse of traditional business models, rapid technological changes, shrinking advertising markets, migrating consumption patterns, unstable economic and political environments, and limited access to investment capital, private philanthropy, and government support.

- Despite decades of research on the vital role of public interest media and healthy information ecosystems for development, international support to the sector has stagnated at a tiny fraction of Official Development Assistance: a mere 0.3 percent.

- To ensure that journalists and media outlets continue to provide fair and accurate information on issues across the Sustainable Development Goals – including on health, education, economic growth, and climate action – as well as play constructive roles in reducing equalities, pursuing peace and justice, and fostering strong institutions, public and private donors must increase both the quantity and the effectiveness of their support to the media and information environment.

- Such support should take a whole-of-system approach, viewing the media and information environment as a development sector in itself; as a critical part of efforts to promote democracy, human rights, gender equality, and development; and as an actor that can support implementation of other development goals.

- This includes incorporating assistance to media and the information environment as a vital element of the response to rising authoritarianism and mis- and disinformation – e.g., by fostering the availability and sustainability of healthy alternatives – as well as integrating support within wider development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding.

- Financing should prioritize local leadership and ownership; empower domestic media partners and other actors in the information environment to meaningfully participate in the policies and programs that affect them; and ensure that responses remain grounded in local realities: bottom-up, evidence-based, demand-driven, and long-term.

Chapter II. International peace and security

- Unprecedented challenges underscore more than ever the importance of free and independent media in ensuring international peace and security, including de-escalating inflammatory rhetoric, providing life-saving information for those who most need it, bearing witness to events on the ground, and telling the stories of all those affected, with sensitivity and responsibility.

- Prioritizing respect for international standards of freedom of expression, on- and offline, this includes the importance of ethical and unbiased reporting and objective and accurate fact-checking, along with accessible platforms for under-represented voices, equitable guidelines for combating hate speech in all forms, and effective efforts to counter mis- and disinformation.

- Journalist safety must remain paramount – physically, psychologically, financially, and digitally. This includes the particular circumstances of women journalists, who often face discrimination, harassment, threats, attacks, and other forms of gender-based violence.

- Within SDG 16, access to information and media independence – including investigative journalism – must continue to play a key role in uncovering corruption, ensuring election integrity, harnessing public participation, and holding institutions and officials to account.

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

- Technology, innovation, and digital cooperation lie at the heart of the future of the information ecosystem, including the ability of legal and policy regimes to keep pace with accompanying challenges, e.g., algorithms, bots, surveillance, and artificial intelligence and their potential threats to media sustainability, journalism safety, and information integrity.

- Any effort to regulate the use of technology must ensure equitable inclusion from the Global South; involve the meaningful participation of civil society, the media community, and users; and

keep international human rights standards for freedom of expression and access to information, as well as data protection and privacy, at its forefront.

- Strengthening the availability and sustainability of ethical and independent public-interest journalism remains the most effective antidote to hate speech and mis/disinformation. This includes the importance of research, data, innovation, and experimentation in producing content, exploring platforms, engaging audiences, and pursuing financing models.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

- As digital natives, young people often drive changes in the information ecosystem, including migration away from traditional media platforms and towards new ways of producing and consuming content.

- Fostering a healthy information environment requires engaging with young audiences to ensure that they remain active and responsible consumers, producers, and critical thinkers.

- Engaging youth, and all generations, must take an intersectional approach, prioritizing respect for difference and diversity across all identities and communities.

- Youth empowerment should also equip young people with the tools to mitigate on- and offline harms, including hate speech, mis/disinformation, and the risks of information echo chambers.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

- No crisis – whether health, climate, economic, political, or humanitarian – can be addressed without reliable and quality information at its core.

- Quality information cannot be produced without journalists, of all genders, who can safely report and media outlets that can operate with sufficient resources and without undue interference.

- Representatives from the media, journalism, and information communities – particularly those from the Global South – must thus remain a central part of global governance.

- This includes building on and cooperating with existing international efforts to support information integrity, media independence, and public-interest journalism.