## 53rd session of the Human Rights Council

**Panel discussion on the role of digital, media and information literacy in the promotion and enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression**

*Concept note (as of 21 June 2023)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **Monday, 3 July 2023, 4 to 6 p.m. Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva, and online platform (Zoom)** *(will be broadcast live and archived on* [*https://media.un.org/en/webtv*](https://media.un.org/en/webtv)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The panel discussion aims to exchange on the role of digital, media and information literacy (DMIL) in the promotion and enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. **In particular, the panel discussion aims:**   * **To foster** a deeper understanding of the role that DMIL can play in the promotion and enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as enshrined in articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and other instruments including regional human rights instruments; * **To consider** the challenges that nowadays affect the right to freedom of opinion and expression and how these challenges should be taken into account when designing the content of DMIL programmes and activities; * **To explore** the specific roles that States, as well as the media sector, civil society and business entreprises can play to develop DMIL programmes and activities with a view to promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Václav Bálek**,President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statements:** | **Ms. Nada Al-Nashif**, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights  **Mr. Tawfik Jelassi**,Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  *(video message)* |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Irene Kahn**,Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression  *(video message)* * **Ms. Sarah Kaddu**, President of the Uganda Library and Information Association and Chair of the International Steering Committee of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance *(video message)* * **Mr. Aymen Zaghdoudi**, Senior Policy Counsel for the Middle East and North Africa region, Access Now * **Mr. Daniel Dessein**,President of the Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas (ADEPA) |
| **Outcomes:** | The expected outcomes of this thematic discussion are:   * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will be better informed about of the role that DMIL can play in the promotion and enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will learn from shared experiences, new initiatives and successful practices that should guide DMIL programmes and activities for them to be effective; * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will be better informed about the role that States, the media sector, civil society and business enterprises can respectively play to develop DMIL programmes and activities with a view to promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression; * OHCHR will prepare a report on the panel discussion in the form of a summary that will be presented to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-fourth session (in September 2023). |
| **Mandate:** | On 8 July 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution [50/15](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/407/29/PDF/G2240729.pdf?OpenElement) on freedom of opinion and expression. In operative paragraph 13 of the resolution, the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, including in consultation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other relevant United Nations bodies, to convene at its fifty-third session a panel discussion, fully accessible to persons with disabilities, on the role of digital, media and information literacy in the promotion and enjoyment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and by conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, which will cover the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States and observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel discussion will be made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcast during the panel discussion. Participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>) during the event itself. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in *The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>). |
| **Background:** | Generally, “digital, media, and information literacy” (DMIL) refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and use media and information critically, and to effectively engage with information, including in the digital communication landscape.[[1]](#footnote-1) In an increasingly interconnected and information-driven world, DMIL plays a crucial role in promoting equal participation, tackling the digital divide, and ensuring political and economic inclusion for all individuals, as highlighted in Council resolution 50/15.[[2]](#footnote-2) On the eleventh anniversary of Global Media and Information Literacy Week, participants in the conference organized by UNESCO on that occasion reaffirmed this, while calling Governments and intergovernmental organizations to allocate specific budgets to the development of Media and Information Literacy programmes.[[3]](#footnote-3)  However, to be efficient, DMIL programmes and activities cannot be envisaged without considering the context in which they take place. In this regard, Human Rights Council resolution condemns, in addition of the spread of disinformation and the persistence of digital divide, the use of Internet shutdowns.[[4]](#footnote-4) It expresses concern about the continuing violations and abuses of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, “often with impunity”, and “facilitated and aggravated by the abuse of states of emergency, as well as unlawful or arbitrary surveillance and/or interception of communications, including through digital surveillance technologies”.[[5]](#footnote-5) The resolution calls on States to refrain from “imposing new restrictions, and to lift existing ones, on the free flow of information and ideas”, including through practices such as “online censorship to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or the dissemination of information online, the banning or closing of publications or other media and the abuse of administrative measures, criminalization and censorship, and the restriction on access to or use of information and communications technology, inter alia radio, television and the Internet”.[[6]](#footnote-6)  Taking into account that context, the panel discussion will consider what DMIL programmes and activities should consist of in order to effectively contribute to the promotion of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In that respect, Human Rights Council resolution 50/15 refers to General Assembly resolution [75/267](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/076/41/PDF/N2107641.pdf?OpenElement) proclaiming the Global Media and Information Literacy Week, which stresses the importance of DMIL, “including through education, training, the empowerment of all people, the facilitation of digital inclusion, including connectivity, and awareness-raising on the opportunities and risks associated with digital products and services, including for the protection of the right to privacy”.[[7]](#footnote-7) Council resolution 50/15 highlights as well that DMIL should include “risk awareness, digital security and self-protection training and guidance, and to acknowledge the particular risks of the digital age”.[[8]](#footnote-8) It further mentions that DMIL should “empower all women and girls by enhancing their equal access to information and communication technology”,[[9]](#footnote-9) as well as foster “the knowledge and skills of individuals to discover, access, critically evaluate and disseminate information and communicate their views in various media and contexts to bridge digital divides and ensure equitable knowledge societies”, including through “lifelong learning”.[[10]](#footnote-10)  The panel discussion will envisage the role that States should play in this regard, but also the media sector and civil society. Council resolution 50/15 refers as well to the responsibility of “business enterprises, including technological intermediaries and social media platform”, in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. According to the resolution, they promote “DMIL and digital user safety as a way to empower all people and facilitate digital inclusion and global connectivity”.[[11]](#footnote-11) With this in mind, the panel discussion will consider the resources needed by each of these actors, as well as the specific challenges they face, to develop DMIL programmes and activities. |
| **Background documents:** | * Resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council relevant to the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in particular resolutions [7/36](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_7_36.pdf) of 28 March 2008, [12/16](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/12/16) of 2 October 2009, [16/4](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/16/4) of 24 March 2011, [23/2](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/23/2) of 13 June 2013, [25/2](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/25/2) of 27 March 2014, [34/18](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/34/18) of 24 March 2017, [38/7](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/38/7) of 5 July 2018 , [38/5](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/214/82/PDF/G1821482.pdf?OpenElement) of 5 July 2018, [39/6](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/39/6) of 27 September 2018, [43/4](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/43/4) of 19 June 2020, [44/12](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/44/12) of 16 July 2020, [47/16](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/47/16) of 13 July 2021, [48/4](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/285/95/PDF/G2128595.pdf?OpenElement) of 7 October 2021, and [49/21](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/304/10/PDF/G2230410.pdf?OpenElement) of 1 April 2022 * General Assembly resolutions [75/267](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/076/41/PDF/N2107641.pdf?OpenElement) of 25 March 2021 on the Global Media and Information Literacy Week; [75/101](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/361/00/PDF/N2036100.pdf?OpenElement) of 10 December 2020 on questions relating to information (75/101 A on information in the service of humanity and [75/101 B](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/361/00/PDF/N2036100.pdf?OpenElement) on United Nations global communications policies and activities), [75/202](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/379/41/PDF/N2037941.pdf?OpenElement) of 21 December 2020 on information and communications technologies for sustainable development, [53/199](https://undocs.org/A/RES/53/199) of 15 December 1998 and [61/185](https://undocs.org/A/RES/61/185) of 20 December 2006 on the proclamation of international years * Economic and Social Council resolution [1980/67](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/34253) of 25 July 1980 on international years and anniversaries * Report of the the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms ([A/77/287](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/459/24/PDF/N2245924.pdf?OpenElement)) * Reports of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, especially her report [A/HRC/50/29](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/29) on reinforcing media freedom and safety of journalists in the digital age * UNESCO General Conference resolution [56](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372579/PDF/372579eng.pdf.multi) of 25 November 2019 proclaiming 24 to 31 October of each year as Global Media and Information Literacy Week * The Abuja Declaration on Global Financing for Media and Information Literacy: an imperative to fight against disinformation and build trust ([CI/MIL/2023/5](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384461)) |

1. See for example: <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy/about>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Human Rights Council resolution 50/15, preambular paragraphs 11, 13, and 15 and operative paragraphs 7, 8 (i), (k), and 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384461>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Resolution 50/15, preambular paragraph 17 and operative paragraph 8 (o). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraph 8 (o). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraph 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraph 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraph 8 (j). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Resolution 50/15, preambular paragraph 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraph 8 (k). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Resolution 50/15, operative paragraphs 10 and 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)