Canada Launches UN Declaration Targeting Online 'Disinformation'

Canada has launched a U.N. declaration that calls for action to protect what it calls "information integrity" and to tackle "disinformation."

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***Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly** has launched a United Nations declaration that calls for action to protect what it calls "information integrity" and to tackle "disinformation."*

Ms. Joly launched the Global Declaration on Information Integrity Online jointly with Dutch **Foreign Affairs Minister Hanke Bruins** Slot during the U.N. General Assembly in New York on Sept. 20.

> "Information integrity is essential to help ensure the strength of democratic processes and to protect fundamental rights," says a joint statement by Canada and the Netherlands.
>
> "The erosion of information integrity, including the propagation of disinformation, weakens the strength of democratic engagement."

In a speech on Sept. 20, Ms. Joly said the declaration is a "concrete step toward establishing global norms on disinformation, misinformation, and information integrity," the National Post reported.

Speaking to the U.N. on the same day, Ms. Bruins Slot said the emerging online environment makes it difficult to determine what is and what is not truthful.

> "Every day, the world is flooded with disinformation and misinformation. Rapid advances in technology—particularly generative AI—make it more and more difficult to tell fact from fiction," she said.

Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Japan, and South Korea

are among the 30 countries that have signed the declaration.

The declaration promotes concepts such as respect for "the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information."

It says signatories need to "take active steps to address misinformation and disinformation targeted at women, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples."

It also calls on signatories to "refrain from unduly restricting human rights online, especially the freedom of opinion and expression, under the guise of countering disinformation," and to "promote and respect pluralistic media and journalism, and protect access to media content as one measure to counter disinformation."

Multiple Strategies

In recent years, the federal government has initiated a number of projects to counter "misinformation," "disinformation" and what it considers extremist ideologies.

Some initiatives are the result of international collaborative efforts to shape the flow of information, and others have been conceived closer to home.

Canada's participation in the Rapid Response Mechanism, established by G7 leaders at the 2018 G7 Summit in Charlevoix, Quebec, monitors the digital information environment. Its goal is to encourage cooperation among member countries to provide a coordinated response to "foreign state-sponsored disinformation" and the "evolving foreign threats to democracy."

The Liberal government has enacted legislation to shape the information space, with bills C-18 and C-11 being passed in recent months.

The Online News Act, Bill C-18, which passed in June, has been framed as an attempt to defend democracy by bolstering the coffers of flailing legacy media with money from Big Tech.

In reaction to the new legislation, Meta has restricted Canadians' access to news content in their feeds, to avoid sharing revenue with media outlets. Google has threatened to take action but hasn't yet.

The Liberal government also passed Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act, in order to boost Canadian content and to regulate some aspects of online streaming and social media.

A new bill to address "online harms" is also in the works, but it does not appear to be a legislative priority for the government at this time.

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Featured image: Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly speaks with reporters in the foyer of the House of

Commons in Ottawa on April 27, 2023. (The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld)

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