



Statement of Ireland

44th session of the Human Rights Council

Item 3: ID on the annual report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

10 July 2020

Madam President, *[Mr/Madam Vice-President,]*

Ireland aligns with the statement of the EU and thanks the Special Rapporteur for the focus of his report, which is timely and significant.

Faced with an unprecedented global health crisis, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as access to reliable information, has never been more important. As the Special Rapporteur rightly emphasises in his report, there is a *‘dependent relationship between freedom of expression and access to information, on the one hand, and public health on the other’*.

As part of the response to COVID-19, states also have a duty to ensure that there is no flow of disinformation, the rapid spread of which is enabled by new technologies, leading to what the SR aptly calls a type of *‘public health harm’*.

Ireland is concerned, however, that the need to eliminate false information may be used as an excuse for censorship. The criminalisation of the *‘spreading of false information’* can result in restrictions on media freedom, endangering the safety of human rights defenders and journalists, silencing critical voices at this perilous time.

Special Rapporteur, what concrete steps do you recommend states take in order to counter flows of false information related to the current COVID-19 pandemic, while respecting citizens’ right to freedom of expression?

Thank you.

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