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20th Anniversary Joint Declaration by Special Rapporteurs

Today, in London, at the Global Conference for Media Freedom, the four special mandates tasked with promoting and protecting freedom of expression at the UN, OAS, OSCE and African Commission launched their Twentieth Anniversary Joint Declaration: Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade. Drafted with the assistance of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), the Declaration highlights the challenges that freedom of expression is expected to face over the next decade.

“The fact that Joint Declarations have been issued continuously for 20 years is itself a tremendous achievement”, said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“This Declaration is special inasmuch as it provides a framework to guide monitoring of future threats to freedom of expression.”*

The first section, on an enabling environment, focuses on both traditional threats – such as safety, excessive content restrictions, maintaining media diversity and the need for independent, accountable regulators – as well as some more modern ones – such as the dominance of online companies in terms of advertising, the need for States to respect human rights when seeking to influence major online intermediaries, restrictions on encryption and anonymity tools, and the growth in surveillance. The next section, on a free, open and inclusive Internet, looks at issues such as ensuring universal, affordable, quality Internet access, disruptions and shutdowns, network neutrality and State actions that fragment the Internet.

The last section examines the threat of private control over digital communications systems. It calls for independent multi-stakeholder oversight of the application of private content rules, regulatory measures to address business models which foster disinformation and hate speech, company responsibilities to respect human rights, transparency in algorithmic and artificial intelligence moderation of content, and effective measures to address concentration of ownership and abuses of dominant market positions.

The Joint Declaration is available in English and other languages at: <https://www.law-democracy.org/live/?p=4761>.

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