LATIN AMERICA DECLARATION

on Internet Platform Transparency

The expansion of digital platforms that moderate third party content such as social media platforms and search engines has changed the production and circulation of information. It also contributes (though there is still an important discussion taking place regarding the scope of this intervention) in opinion shaping, access to information on public affairs, the broad exercise of political criticism and public debate and, as such, democracy in general.

In this context, some of these companies have become Internet gatekeepers. This may impact at-risk groups such as women, people of African descent, indigenous peoples and members of the LGBTQ community, as well as the work of the independent media, community communicators and human rights defenders. Even worse, platforms have been subject to increasing pressure by governments and sectors of society to remove unwanted content, responding to increased intervention in and removal of user content.

This situation is aggravated by the concentration of power in the hands of a few dominant companies that have positioned themselves as the new spaces that mold online civic engagement. While this is a global phenomenon, in Latin American countries it is aggravated by unequal access to ICTs and a context in which public discussion is already impacted by the lack of plurality and diversity of the media.

While all digital platforms must have terms of conditions and community standards that are compatible with human rights standards, the impact of dominant platforms makes this even more necessary and urgent because of their massive impact on users' fundamental rights and particularly their freedom of expression and right to information.

November 24, 2021

Lack of transparency in content moderation

There is no doubt that many of the actions taken by these companies and the standards and policies that they implement regarding content moderation lack transparency. We recognize that companies have made an effort to increase the transparency of their activities due to the pressure placed on them by international human rights organizations, academia and organized civil society. Even so, it is broadly recognized that this progress is insufficient and that users' basic rights continue to be violated.

A proactive towards promoting platform transparency

The lack of transparency fuels reactive, disproportionate and unnecessary public policies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, most of the legal initiatives on social media regulation that are being discussed are abusive and would violate fundamental rights if they were implemented. Our organizations will continue to reject these proposals in order to protect those rights and a free and open internet. However, we also believe that a proactive attitude towards regulation can be a smart path to limiting those attempts. Transparency and accountability requirements may be a first step to be taken following broad and open multisectorial dialogue and with the support of international agencies such as UNESCO and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (RELE-CIDH) in order to guarantee digital platform user rights and anticipate attempts to implement anti-democratic regulations.

Platform transparency: Necessary, urgent and mandatory

It is thus urgent to reach a consensus in order to guarantee transparency and accountability on the part of content platforms through democratic and asymmetrical obligations that complement the adoption of best practices by the companies. Demanding transparency in their moderation and content filtering processes, including algorithmic transparency, is a human rights and democratic expansion issue. It is also necessary in order to empower users in the face of the power of private regulation. Furthermore, increased visibility and understanding of digital content platforms' standards and practices is key to structuring serious, responsible discussions of the need to address additional obligations.

Commitment to an agenda on transparency in Latin America and the Caribbean

In this sense, we believe that it is necessary to seek out spaces of dialogue, coordination and exchanges of experiences so that proposals on platform transparency like those promoted by UNESCO can be advanced and implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on this shared vision, the undersigned civil society organizations express their commitment to move forward with the construction of a shared agenda and plan for dialogue with other civil society stakeholders, companies, the academy and the technical community. The goal is to promote and guarantee transparency and accountability on the part of our region's major content platforms.

Signatures of organizations supporting this declaration

● Access Now ● Asociación para el Progreso de las Comunicaciones –APC ● Aqualtune Lab (Brazil) ● Art.19 México y Centroamérica ● CAInfo (Uruguay) ● Coalizão Direitos na Rede (Brazil) ● DatySoc (Uruguay) ● Desarrollo Digital (Argentina) ● Datos Protegidos (Chile) ● Educadigital (Brazil) ● FLIP (Colombia) ● Fundación Vía Libre (Argentina) ● Hiperderecho (Perú) ● IDEC (Brazil) ● Intervozes (Brazil) ● IPANDETEC (Panamá/CentroAmérica) ● OBSERVACOM (Regional) ● objETHOS (Brazil) ● PROLEDI (Costa Rica) ● R3D (México) ● TEDIC (Paraguay) ● Usuarios Digitales (Ecuador)