

Social Media Declaration

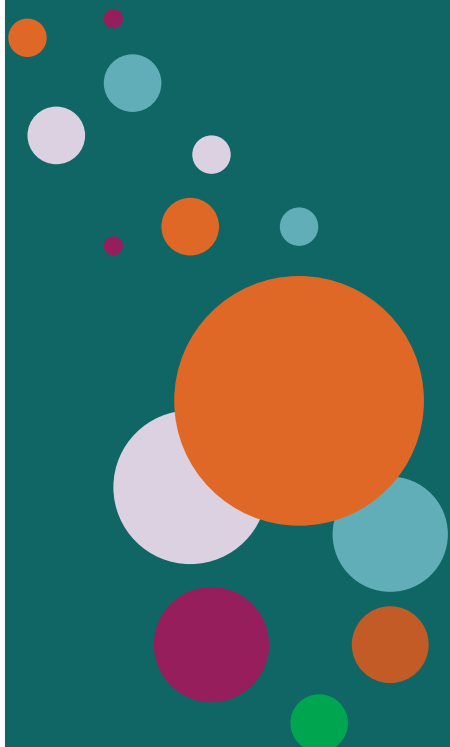
Colombo | 2019

Code of Conduct for Responsible Social Media Use

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**social media
declaration**

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Background

Social media are various Internet-based apps, websites and platforms which allow users to interact with each other, produce, present and promote content and affords, among other things, the ability to engage with audiences that are local, national, regional and global. Unrestrained by geographic boundaries, users of social media often enjoy or carve out freedom of expression beyond what their country or political context may provide. This openness by default and design is both positive and negative. Some users express themselves in a civil, progressive, respectful manner that engages with ideas and substance. Others do not.

Social media gives each user the opportunity to actively participate in conversations and social interactions using a range of media. Knowledge-sharing, creating critical dialogues, questioning authoritative mindsets and building alternative discourses are all possible over social media. Social media also allows for collective activism and organising as well as the presentation of individual opinion on crucial incidents and occurrences. Often, geographic, political and other physical boundaries are seamlessly traversed in these interactions, with interlocutors and producers across various regions, time zones and countries continually complementing or contesting ideas in shared spaces.

At the same time, content published or promoted over social media often creates or exacerbates socio-political disparities inimical to the public interest, contributing over the longer term to a more regressive, repressive and renegade society. We note with concern, even in Sri Lanka, the sharp rise of content inciting hate and violence based on the grounds of gender, nationality, religion, caste or sexual orientation. A few voices and actors who are highly proficient at abusing social media for their parochial gain marginalise other vital voices and dissent. Worldwide, reports indicate that the harmful impact and misuse of social media include sophisticated political and marketing propaganda campaigns, data theft, the spreading of false information and identity theft.

Governments and other entities, including social media companies themselves are trying hard to rein in the abuse of social media. This too has its dangers, since authoritarian regimes can and will use the threat of misinformation to generate their own digital propaganda or seek to introduce new legislation ultimately aimed at silencing dissent.

This declaration is an attempt to recognise the inviolable importance of the freedom of expression on or over social media, yet at the same time, encourage and strengthen the ethical, progressive, democratic and prosocial use of social media.

Objective

To foster a community that encourages the responsible use of social media and the strengthening of digital literacy to allow for the right to access and an information-based society. While acknowledging the potential for social media to be misused, this Declaration recognises digital rights as intrinsic to a society founded on principles of social justice, human dignity and prominent human and social ideals, based on a 'human rights' framework.

Who?

The undersigned will promote as often and as best they can this mutually agreed-upon framework to others, across all social media platforms and digital spaces as well as in non-digital domains, including mainstream print, broadcast and electronic media.

Why?

- As an alternative to efforts, by legal or any other means, aimed at restricting human rights including the freedom of expression online.
- As a platform to help interested stakeholders promote and protect a healthy conversational domain across social media platforms, encouraging a robust debate around ideas whilst maintaining a degree of respect for those whose opinions differ from one's own.
- As a tool to raise awareness around the ethical and responsible use of social media.

Code of Conduct

To the best of our ability, and at all times across all social media platforms and domains we are a part of or interact in, we will act to minimise/eventually eradicate the generation and spread of the following:

- Discrimination based on race, religion or caste.
- Gender-based violence (including sexism, sexual violence, misogyny and the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and videos) and other forms of discrimination against women.
- Sexual abuse.
- Harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Violation of child rights and child exploitation, including child abuse and trafficking.
- Content inciting hate or violence, threats, intimidation, cyber-bullying and dangerous speech.
- Harassing marginalised communities.
- Illegal acts.
- Data theft and unethical abuse of sources of information and media (such as using photographs without permission).
- False information, misinformation and disinformation.
- Irresponsible sharing of explicit sexual content.

We, the undersigned, will promote the following in order to improve the responsible, ethical and democratic use of social media, using a human rights-based framework:

- Protect and preserve the right to information and the freedom of expression.
- The recognition of digital rights as human rights.
- Preserve and protect the spaces on social media that give voice to marginalised citizens.
- Promote and heighten the spread of accurate, factual information.
- Promote media and information literacy.
- Make social media a secure, protected and welcoming space for marginalised and at-risk communities, especially considering trends of misogyny, sexism and violent threats directed at women.
- Respect the right to privacy.

Responsibilities of Social Media Platforms

- Increase language capacity for content moderation in local languages (both Sinhala and Tamil).
- Be transparent about the number of moderators assigned to deal with user generated reports around Sri Lankan content, their gender, language capacity and in which time zone they are located.
- Make clear commitments to look into and resolve user-generated reports around Sri Lankan content within a specific time period, which during heightened violence, must be further reduced.
- Make public the tests to be applied by social media platforms to remove content inciting hate and violence and misinformation.
- Ensure any solutions implemented are sustainable, scalable, responsive, and can be replicated in other regions.
- Make commitments to protect the privacy and security of users, through easily understandable and publicly available policies, in all local languages.
- A professional, broadly applicable Code of Ethics should be developed by technology companies, in collaboration with governments, academics and interested parties, to set down in writing what is and what is not acceptable by users on social media.
- New products should be tested to ensure that products are fit-for-purpose and do not constitute dangers to the users, or to society.

Responsibilities of Government

- Create an environment which upholds and protects human rights, including the freedom of expression in particular.
- Honour commitment made by the government on net neutrality at the Global Conference on Cyber Space in New Delhi on November 23, 2017 to 'preserve the Internet as a fair and level playing field', and refrain from Internet slowdowns or shutdowns.
- Implement existing local legal frameworks and international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Sri Lanka is a signatory, when combating content inciting hate and violence or misinformation, gender-based violence and discrimination online.
- Enact specific, comprehensive legislation on individual user privacy and data.
- Ensure any legal reform adheres to international standards with regards to the freedom of expression.
- Support research into the methods by which misinformation and disinformation are spread online, and work to add digital literacy into the national education curriculum.
- Ensure that all political campaigning online, including through social media platforms, is clearly indicated as sponsored, bringing online advertisements and messages in line with physically published leaflets, circulars and advertisements.
- Consider recognising, as the UK Parliament has, the increased liability of social media platforms for the spread of content inciting hate and violence and misinformation.
- Work towards implementing Universal Access to the Internet, recognising that many areas in the country do not have Internet access, by facilitating projects such as Google Loon.
- Support counter-messaging campaigns in order to combat hate speech.

Responsibilities of Media Organisations and Civil Society

- Encourage governments to create a healthy, favourable environment to protect and uphold the rights of at-risk and marginalised communities, including across digital domains.
- Support and act as advocates for long-term public awareness campaigns on media and information literacy and digital security, supported by relevant line Ministries, which will educate users on their digital rights, within the context of current legislation.
- Lobby the Government to include digital literacy in the national curriculum
- Expose and correct false information, misinformation and disinformation published on social media.
- Introduce comment moderation and content curation policies for official mainstream media websites and social media accounts that actively resist and combat hate speech, bringing them in line with editorial policy that would remove defamatory or hateful content from articles, columns or broadcasts.
- Create counter-messaging campaigns, supported by the Government, to combat hate speech and advocate for respectful and ethical speech online, using a human-rights based framework, such as the “Flower Speech” movement in Myanmar.

Signatories:



Centre for Policy Alternatives | Eastern Province Journalist Forum | Groundviews.org | Hashtag Generation | Internet Media Action | Jaffna Press Club | Lanka News Web | Law and Society Trust | Maatram.org | Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform | Nelum Yaya Foundation | Outbound Today | PEaCE ECPAT Sri Lanka | Rights Now Collective for Democracy | Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement | Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum | Srilanka Working Journalists' Association | Transparency International Sri Lanka | Vikalpa.org



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HUMAN RIGHTS
ONLINE AND OFFLINE”



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