



National statement delivered by Ambassador Tahir Hussain Andrabi, Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, during Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion at the 47th session of Human Rights Council

02 July 2021

Madam President,

We thank the Rapporteur for her well-researched report, which analyses in detail contemporary drivers, vectors and impacts of disinformation.

We agree that disinformation is a threat to human rights, democratic institutions and development process. Its detrimental effects on minorities, migrants and other marginalized communities are deeply concerning. Hence, the imperative to act against this growing problem is both essential and urgent.

We also share the Rapporteur's concerns that unregulated social media platforms have exponentially expanded the scale, speed and spread of disinformation. This has, in turn, constrained effectiveness of existing societal, legal and administrative checks and balances.

The business models of these companies, along with their opaque, algorithm-driven content moderation rules, are part of the problem. We, therefore, endorse Rapporteur's call for review of such business models through a transparent multi-stakeholder process so as to anchor them in international human rights law, principles and norms.

Pakistan is particularly alarmed by the growing use of State-sponsored disinformation campaigns to deliberately incite hatred, discrimination and in some cases, violence against Muslim minorities. Regrettably, the COVID pandemic has accentuated this trend. Derogatory tropes such as #Corona Jihad, #BioJihad and #Corona786 are illustrative of this disturbing trend.

Pakistan draws the Rapporteur's attention towards the global disinformation campaign, being run by India against Pakistan for over 15 years in 116 countries, as exposed by the independent EU Disinfo Lab in its two investigative reports of 2019 and 2020.

The NGO has revealed presence of over 750 fake media outlets, more than 550 fake websites, identity theft, and impersonation of EU institutions as part of this massive campaign. This very Council has been exploited by the world's so-called largest democracy to spread falsehoods against Pakistan by renting GONGOs. Such irresponsible actions are a serious affront to freedom of expression and civil society participation.

We, therefore, urge the Rapporteur to call such State-sponsored disinformation campaigns and take forward the Report's findings/recommendations within the scope of her mandate. Thank you.