

# Program

## Fact as Fiction:

### Identifying Mis/Disinformation in North Africa to Advance Citizen, Civil Society and Institutional Resilience

October 12-13, 2021. Sheraton Tunis

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The “Fact as Fiction” conference will offer an opportunity for participants and the public to discuss the latest developments in detecting and fighting information disorders and learn more about the presence of this phenomenon in North Africa. The Conference will offer insights on disinformation activities and their consequences. With recent global challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased exposure towards online information which has created a fertile ground for information disorders activity. With the goal to provide information regarding challenges in the information environment in North Africa, focusing on the presence of disinformation phenomena, real-life experiences, and discussions on maintaining the integrity of information, this conference will be an interactive hybrid event.

The conference will be organized by the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) Middle East and North Africa (MENA) team and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and in partnership with International IDEA, AccessNow, Porticus, OECD, and Salam@. The event will consist of two days, with a combination of panel discussions, closed-door roundtables and rapid fire presentations that will provide information and solutions on topics related to information integrity disorders. The conference will feature stories from North Africa and the world focusing on the personal experience of people, civil society, organizations and other actors being affected by disinformation activity.

The event will bring together key local, regional and international actors and stakeholders, including journalists, CSO activists, social media and technology experts. Recent studies of the disinformation landscape in Tunisia and across North Africa indicates there is little to no coordination across donors or non-governmental organizations, both domestic and international, engaged in combatting disinformation -- unless the government is actively engaged in mis/disinformation. Many international organizations expressed a desire to understand current and planned initiatives both to reduce redundancy and to establish alliances and partnerships in pursuit of common objectives.

**Working language:** English and Arabic (with simultaneous translation)

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In partnership with:



## Tuesday, 12 October 2021

08:30 - 09:00

### Registration

09:00 - 10:30

### Welcome and Opening Panel

#### Overview of Information Space Globally and in North Africa

This session will map out the media and information environment in North Africa, first defining what disinformation is and then setting up the biggest challenges to regional actors in the information space. Panelists will outline the complementary roles of stakeholders to understand who is responsible for countering disinformation and will share personal stories of challenges with disinformation they've encountered.

Moderator

**Raed M. Sharif**, Senior Program Manager (Salam@ MENA), SecDev Foundation (Virtual)

Speakers

**Nadia Al-Sakkaf**, Editor in Chief, Radio Lana and Former Minister of Information in Yemen (Virtual)

**Jazem Halioui**, Founder, Web Radar

**Rawan Damen**, Executive Director, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) (Virtual)

10:30 - 10:45

### BREAK

10:45 - 12:00

### Rapid Fire: Tools and Resources to Support Information Integrity

#### Countering Disinformation Guide, Arabic

Learn about the new Countering Disinformation Guide including sections on dealing with platforms, online election observation, legal and regulatory frameworks, and others, alongside a comprehensive database of informational interventions. This rapid fire will focus on the guide and plans to make it a living, dynamic resource for the democracy and technology community, with an example of a powerful intervention from the global database.

Presenter: **Moira Whelan**, Director of Democracy and Technology, National Democratic Institute

#### Gaming Options to Fight Disinformation

DROG is a multidisciplinary team of academics, journalists and media experts that conduct research, offer workshops, educational programmes, and create innovative tools that help you build "resistance" to disinformation, using "gamification," the application of typical elements of

game playing to other areas of activity. DROG has used this methodology to create the social impact game Bad News, where you take on the role of a propagandist. In collaboration with the University of Cambridge they have developed this “innovative vaccine” to show you how various tactics and methods are used to spread deceitful messages.

Presenter: **Lisa Poot**, Project Manager, Bad News Game

#### **Salam@ Digital Safety Portal**

Salam@, the Digital Safety for Women and Youth Programme in the MENA Region, implemented by the SecDev Foundation, aims to change perceptions and behaviors towards digital safety, increase public awareness and build the lasting capacity of women, youth and civil society organizations to operate safely online in Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait and Bahrain (soon Libya). Working closely with local partners, Salam@ adopts a “public health” approach to addressing online risk and violence, including online Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Salam@’s portal, the first of its kind in the region, will provide relevant, easy to understand and culturally/gender sensitive content (how-to guides, alerts and tips) in local dialects in the programme’s 7 countries of operation.

Presenter: **Leila Menkebi**, National Coordinator in Tunisia, Salam@

12:00 – 01:00 PM

#### **NETWORKING LUNCH**

01:00 – 02:00 PM

#### **LUNCH DISCUSSION: Internews Media Landscape in Tunisia**

As part of the USAID-funded Political Transitions Project (PTP), Internews has produced a Media Landscape Assessment (MLA) to map out and assess the capacities of the various information producers, develop a clear understanding of media consumption habits amongst information consumers and identify the strengths and weaknesses in the framework which governs the flow of information supply and demand. A key component of the PTP project focuses on better informing and engaging Tunisian citizens, specifically vulnerable and underserved populations, in elections and political processes through strengthening Tunisia’s media landscape and the capacities of its information producers as well as raising the levels of awareness and media and information literacy amongst target groups. This session will present the main findings and recommendations of the MLA with a focus on the root causes for the spread of mis/disinformation in Tunisia.

Presenter: **Mohamed Attafi**, Project Coordinator, Internews

02:00 – 02:30 PM

#### **BREAK**

02:30 – 03:45 PM

#### **Disinformation in Elections**

In recent years, the disruptive influence of disinformation on elections has been increasing remarkably in strong as well as fragile democracies. The most common forms of disinformation in

elections include the dissemination of “false news” in order to discredit opponents or influence the voting process, manipulation of polling data, and the use of fictitious election observation and monitoring. This session focuses on current trends and aspects of disinformation and their effect on elections and presents good practices to tackle the spread of disinformation in electoral periods. The exchanges highlight the essential role of politicians and decision-makers in ensuring trust during the election process.

Moderator:

**Thomas Volk**, Director, the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS PoDiMed)

Speakers:

**Ronja Kemmer**, Member of Parliament, Germany (Virtual)

**Steve Driehaus**, Former U.S. Congressman, Ohio (Virtual)

**Lobna Jeribi**, Former Tunisian MP and Minister

**Roberta Metsola**, Member (Malta), European Parliament (Video Message)

03:45 – 04:00 PM

**BREAK**

04:00 – 05:15 PM

**Session: Building Civil Society Capacity to Mitigate and Counter Disinformation**

Civil society has played multiple and significant roles to mitigate and counter the risks of disinformation in politically and socially changing contexts. Whether during elections or the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society was able to explore and test innovative approaches to deal with disinformation and develop communities’ resilience to its threats. Also, CSOs are increasingly able to influence the information integrity policies through their engagement with the social media platforms and regulatory institutions. This session will focus on how the different contexts determine civil society interventions to counter disinformation. Through experience-sharing, it will harness the best practices and lessons learned and continue with exploring the way forward to build stronger civil society capacities.

Moderator:

**Mohieddine Abdellaoui**, Regional Manager, Open Society Foundations

Speakers:

**Henda Fellah**, Project Officer, HIVOS

**Leyth ben Jeddou**, Business Development Director, ATDCE

**Chérif El Kadhi**, MENA Policy Analyst, Access Now

**Amjad Bader**, Co-founder, Hexa Connection

**Mayssa Zerzri**, Senior Technical Advisor, Salam@ Tunisia.

## Wednesday, 13 October 2021

09:00 – 10:15

### Digital Landscape for Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups

As many social and political activities have fully or partially moved online, the virtual environment is being increasingly used by marginalized segments of population to engage in the civic life of their communities. However, the same environment accommodates various forms of harassment and abusive behavior disproportionately targeting vulnerable groups, whose impact is being potentiated by the features of digital communication instruments. This session aims at mapping the wide spectrum of digital safety threats and their impact on the representatives of the historically marginalized groups, while identifying ways to effectively support these communities to safely benefit from the advantages of the online environment.

Moderator:

**Moira Whelan**, Director of Democracy and Technology, National Democratic Institute

Speakers:

**Ingrid Bicu**, Seconded National Expert, International IDEA

**Khawla Bouaziz**, Secretary General, Mawjoudin (We Exist)

**Feriel Menouar**, Algeria National Coordinator, Salam@ (Virtual)

10:15 – 10:30

### BREAK

10:30 – 11:45

### Exposing Disinformation through Election Monitoring- Lessons Learned from Tunisia and Looking Ahead to Libya

The existence and impact of disinformation must be considered in any comprehensive assessment of an electoral process. Even if an election is well-organized and transparent, a highly compromised information environment leading up to and on election day can subvert its credibility. Traditional electoral safeguards, particularly election observers, are expanding their capacities, activities, relationships, and advocacy efforts to confront disinformation threats to electoral integrity. This session will examine the information environment of the 2019 Tunisian elections, discussing challenges and lessons learned and looking ahead at Libyan national elections scheduled for December 2021.

Moderator:

**Hervé de Baillénx**, Regional Representative for North Africa, Democracy Reporting International (DRI)

Speakers:

**Jazem Halioui**, Founder, WebRadar

**Aly Mhenni**, FALSE

**Mekrem Dhifalli**, Data Analyst

**Ralph Baydoun**, Strategic Communication Expert

11:45 – 12:00 PM

**BREAK**

12:00 – 01:15 PM

**Election Management Body Approaches to Disinformation**

Digital disinformation is a real and immediate threat for election management bodies (EMBs) around the world. Some EMBs have sophisticated social media monitoring capabilities and dedicated teams to track and respond to disinformation; others do not have any social media presence at all. For all of them, disinformation is an unwieldy threat that is being brought to their door, while the immense, primary task of the EMB – administering credible elections – continues to be just as complex an endeavor as ever. In addition to technology-forward responses that some EMBs may be equipped to adopt, there are also a range of responses that EMBs can take that build on existing core functions of public relations, communication and voter education.

Moderator:

**Khameyel Fenniche**, Director, International IDEA- Tunisia

Speakers:

**Nabil Baffoun**, President, Independent High Authority for Elections - ISIE

**Emad Al Sayeh**, Head of Commission, Libya High National Election Commission (HNEC)

01:15 – 02:00 PM

**NETWORKING LUNCH**

02:15 – 03:30 PM

**Towards Rights-Respecting Regulatory Frameworks and Legal Considerations**

Governments around the world, including in North Africa, are responding to the challenges of disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech online by proposing and enacting broadly-worded criminal legislation such as cybercrime laws and 'anti-fake news' bills. The broad criminalization of speech is a disproportionate measure that can be used to restrict freedom of expression, and target journalists and human rights defenders. This session will explore the recent attempts of legislators in the MENA region to regulate online speech, and discuss what a right-respecting and user-centric regulatory framework could look like.

Moderator:

**Chérif El Kadhi**, MENA Policy Analyst, Access Now

Speakers:

**Rania Chebbi**, North Africa Project Manager, Reporters without Borders

**Nouri Lajmi**, President, Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA)

**Ines Osman**, Co-founder and Director, MENA Rights Group

3:45 – 5:00 PM

### **Best Practices for Counteracting Mis- and Disinformation in the Public Sector and Beyond**

This session will serve to share emerging good practices that governments across the OECD membership and beyond are adopting to mitigate and prevent the spread of false content that can harm policies and undermine democracy. The OECD will present draft guidelines for governments and stakeholders in the MENA region to adopt key counter-disinformation interventions to both prevent its spread (such as pre-bunking rumours, filling information voids and communicating proactively through trusted messengers) and react to it (including by working with media and fact checkers and debunking falsehoods). The session will include interventions from experts across OECD countries to discuss their experiences and practices in combating misinformation.

Moderator:

**Carlotta Alfonsi**, Policy Analyst, OECD (Virtual)

Speakers:

**Jamie Ballantyne**, Counter Disinformation Africa Lead, UK Government Communication Service International

**Kat Duffy**, VP Global Technology Platforms, Internews

**Samba Badji**, Chief Editor, AfricaCheck (Virtual)

**Saloua Ghazouani Oueslati**, Regional Director for Tunisia and MENA, Article 19 (Invited)

### **CLOSING: Post-conference Follow-up and CSO Networking**

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Please register for the event and note that all information may be subject to change

**Venue**

Sheraton Tunis Hotel  
[B.P. 345, Av. de la Ligue des Etats Arabes, Tunis 1080](#)  
(or **Zoom** for remote participation)

**Zoom Registration for Remote Participation**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_WD-DDNYe1Rzq-Xx8OPscpag](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_WD-DDNYe1Rzq-Xx8OPscpag)

**Conception & Organization:**

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