



PUBLIC STATEMENT

Transparency and access to information policies:

Pillars for electoral integrity, informed decision-making, and the consolidation of democratic values of pluralism, participation, deliberation, and justice in the digital age.





The Assembly of the Transparency and Access to Information Network (RTA), meeting on November 15, 2023, within the framework of its XXV Meeting, issues the following statement:

Recalling that, in accordance with the Statute of the Transparency and Access to Information Network, the RTA is an international forum made up of the Ibero-American authorities responsible for guaranteeing the right of access to information that aims to maintain a permanent and formal space for dialogue, cooperation, as well as the exchange of knowledge and experiences among its members.

Considering that access to information is a human right recognized in various normative and cooperation instruments in the field of human rights, at the regional and international levels, such as: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Convention against Corruption; the American Convention on Human Rights; the European Convention on Human Rights; the Convention on Access to Official Documents of the Council of Europe; the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement); the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons, among others.





Emphasizing that, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights recognize that citizens must enjoy the right to vote and be elected in authentic periodic elections, held by universal and equal suffrage, and by secret ballot that guarantees the free expression of the will of the voters.

Noting that the Inter-American Democratic Charter recognizes as essential elements of representative democracy, among others, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law; as well as the holding of periodic, free and fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the peoples.

Taking into account that, within the framework of the International Day of Democracy, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) recalled that democracy is indispensable for the exercise of human rights and called on States to protect and strengthen institutions and the rule of law.

Stressing that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in its Handbook on International Human Rights Standards in Elections, stresses that for the right to vote and to be elected to be exercised genuinely, it is necessary for a climate to prevail in which human rights are respected and enjoyed by all people, in particular: the rights to equality and non-discrimination, to freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, to security and to an effective remedy.

Emphasizing that, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also guarantees the right of such persons to political participation, on an equal basis with others, and the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as voters.





Considering that, between 2023 and 2024, elections were or will be held in some Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, El Salvador, Panama, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay, to name a few.

Recalling that, the Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Fake News, highlighted that disinformation and propaganda are often designed and implemented with the purpose of confusing the population and to interfere with the public's right to know and the right of people to seek and receive, and also transmit, information and ideas of all kinds.

Emphasizing that the fight against disinformation requires the creation of a responsible policy, where all actors (social platforms, media, authorities, and citizens) are guided by the principles of diversity, credibility, inclusion, and transparency in the way in which information is produced and shared in the digital environment.

Underlining that, in the framework of World Media and Information Literacy Week (MIL), UNESCO emphasized that the spread of rumours and the distortion of facts, undermine the very foundations of our democracies and put lives at risk through the spread of fake news, conspiracy theories or the spread of racism and hate speech. Therefore, it was emphasized that information literacy is a key skill for the education of citizens in the 21st century.

Emphasizing that disinformation should not be combated by criminalizing fake news, but with objective and quality information, as well as guaranteeing the full exercise of freedom of expression and access to information.

Recognizing that all members of the RTA have a crucial role to play in promoting integrity and accountability in electoral matters, through the construction of strategies aimed at generating digital and critical thinking skills among all sectors of the population.





HEREBY STATE:

1. That transparency and access to information laws and policies play a fundamental role in guaranteeing free, reliable, and peaceful democratic processes. Therefore, we will promote the use of the digital era and the advancement of technology to bolster compliance and observance of legal and statutory provisions that promote maximum disclosure and the widening of spaces for deliberation and public debate within the framework of electoral processes.
2. In the electoral context that several countries in the region are going through, we urge governments, electoral authorities, and candidates to generate mechanisms of proactive transparency and access to information that improve citizens' decision-making before, during and after the elections.
3. We highlight the importance of promoting policies, guidelines, and strategies, in terms of inclusion, which prevent the risks associated with technological disruption in democratic processes such as: the proliferation of disinformation, false news, hate speech, undue propaganda for electoral purposes, invasions of privacy or violations of human rights.
4. That access to accurate and reliable information empowers citizens to make informed decisions in elections and public affairs, so it is also necessary to join coordinated efforts to deploy actions that promote civic education and media and information literacy among all sectors of the population.





HEREBY STATE:

5. That vulnerable groups are more exposed to the harmful effects of hate speech and disinformation due to the information gap, so it is crucial to develop public policies that promote their digital and media literacy, which are accessible and that consider the needs and particularities of each of these groups.
6. That transparency and access to information are fundamental to consolidate peaceful, free, plural, participatory, egalitarian, and just democracies. In this sense, it is very important to promote and disseminate policies that facilitate a culture of open government, as well as the participation of all sectors of the population in democratic processes.
7. We will privilege the principle of maximum disclosure as a fundamental right inherent to every person, where all the obliged subjects involved in the holding of the elections guarantee citizens access to information.

NOVEMBER, 2023

