Call for input to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression - Report on Disinformation

Feedback from: The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), https://www.cipe.org/

Questions for Input:

- **What do you believe are the key challenges raised by disinformation? What measures would you recommend to address them?**

One key challenge raised by disinformation is the erosion of trust between different societal stakeholders. Disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic greatly contributed to undermining global trust in governments and other institutions. An important stakeholder often overlooked when it comes to re-building trust and combatting disinformation is business. According to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer, more people declare trust in business than government in 18 out of the 27 surveyed countries. Employers in particular are the mainstay of trust, ranked even higher than "business" in general. Moreover, among the key societal stakeholders – business, government, NGOs, and media – survey results show only business being seen as both competent and ethical. That may be attributable to the COVID-19 vaccine being developed rapidly thanks in large part to pharmaceutical companies, and more broadly businesses of all sizes around the word making efforts to get people safely back to work. There are potentially unexplored opportunities here for multi-stakeholder partnerships between businesses and other actors such as independent media. Jointly they can leverage the power of local businesses as reliable sources of information not just regarding COVID-19, but also issues such as the economy and post-COVID-19 recovery – topics that remain vulnerable to government- and foreign-sponsored disinformation.

- **Please share any suggestions or recommendation you may have for the Special Rapporteur on how to protect and promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression while addressing disinformation.**

The right to freedom of opinion and expression online is often curtailed by disinformation, especially in countries across the Global South. To address this challenge, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) developed the Democratic Principles for an Open Internet. The Principles are primarily designed for citizens in fragile and emerging democracies who are new to the digital rights space, are beginning to engage more regularly online, and who may be more likely to encounter deliberate digital rights violations, including disinformation campaigns. Among the digital rights topics addressed through the Principles, the need to protect freedom of expression while also pushing back against disinformation is underscored as essential to ensuring that democratic dialogue can foster in the vibrant and safe online space.