

# Strengthening Democracy and Protecting Civic Space

DRAFT COMMITMENT FOR CANADA'S 5<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON OPEN GOVERNMENT (2022-2024)

## Problem to be addressed

**Problem statement:** There is a need to take action to ensure a healthy and inclusive democracy in Canada.

**Background:** Democratic governments must take appropriate measures to ensure that everyone – including the most marginalized – can participate in decisions that affect them. For democracy to prosper, it must be inclusive, safe, and participatory.

Holding free and fair elections is a first essential step. It is critical to maintain all the rights, processes and institutions that make up a healthy democracy – from a free press to an independent judiciary, to the holding of free and fair elections, while being mindful of the opportunities and challenges presented by rapidly evolving digital technologies. For instance, the online behaviours observed during election periods and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated how the spread of disinformation can have harmful consequences on the health of our democracy and the lives of individuals.

In order to ensure that democracy works for all, the Government of Canada should foster social cohesion by actively combatting disinformation, safeguarding fair elections, protecting civic space online and offline in an inclusive way.

For additional information on what we heard from Canadians and Civil Society, as well as on international best practices, please read this thematic background.

## Commitment Title

Strengthening Democracy and Protecting Civic Space

## Lead Department(s)

1. Canadian Heritage
2. Privy Council Office
3. Global Affairs Canada
4. Public Safety
5. International Development Research Centre

## Milestones and Indicators

1. **Milestone: Take action to address the rising spread of disinformation in Canada and its consequences on the health of our democracy<sup>1</sup>**

### Indicators

- 1.1 **Summit for Democracy** - Projects are supported by the [Digital Citizen Contribution Program](#) with a focus of combatting online disinformation and other harms in a Canadian context to better understand the origins, impacts and potential response to online disinformation (by March 2023)
- 1.2 **Summit for Democracy** - Projects are supported by Canadian Heritage's [Joint Initiative](#) with Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council with a focus on combatting online disinformation and other harms in a Canadian context (by March 2023)
- 1.3 **Summit for Democracy** - Annual Digital Citizen Initiative conferences are held, bringing together stakeholders for capacity building and knowledge dissemination (by February 2022 and February 2023)
- 1.4 **Summit for Democracy** - New models are explored that enable private giving and philanthropic support for trusted, professional, non-profit journalism and local news (by March 2024)
- 1.5 **Summit for Democracy** - The Local Journalism Initiative supports the hiring of journalists to provide coverage for underserved communities across Canada to support a healthy, diverse, and reliable news ecosystem (by March 2024)
- 1.6 Lead a multi-stakeholder working group to develop and advance international priorities related to Diversity of Content Online (by March 2023)
- 1.7 Finalize voluntary actions in line with the guiding principles on diversity of content online (by December 2022)
- 1.8 Countries, private sector, and civil society organizations sign on to the Guiding Principles and commit to advance voluntary actions (by March 2023)
- 1.9 Publish an educational document for Canadians that would raise awareness on what the national security community does, why they do it and how, with specific reference to national security efforts to combat mis- and disinformation meant to undermine our democratic system and social cohesion (by March 2022)
- 1.10 Launch an online engagement tool to foster dialogue with Canadians on national security transparency issues, with specific reference to national security efforts to combat mis- and disinformation meant to undermine our democratic system and social cohesion (by February 2023)

## 2. Milestone: Continue protecting democracy at home and abroad and safeguarding Canada's electoral and democracy processes by combatting foreign threats to democracy

### Indicators

- 2.1 **Summit for Democracy** - Release an annual G7 Rapid Response Mechanism public report aimed at raising awareness of and strengthening societal resilience to foreign interference, including state sponsored disinformation, by keeping publics in the G7 member states informed about the latest threats and countermeasures (by March 2022)
- 2.2 **Summit for Democracy** - Share Canada's experience implementing its Plan to Protect Democracy, such as the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol and the Declaration, with domestic and international partners (by fall 2022)
- 2.3 **Summit for Democracy** - Engage provincial and territorial officials on threat awareness including countering cyber threats and disinformation in electoral processes (by fall 2022)

- 2.4 Summit for Democracy** - Implement the Declaration for Electoral Integrity Online commitment to enhance the circulation of authoritative and verifiable government information in the Internet ecosystem, including ensuring that electoral management bodies are identified as the leading source of information online for where, when, and how to vote (by fall 2022)
- 2.5 Summit for Democracy** - Work with social media companies on the next iteration of the Declaration (by fall 2022)
- 2.6 Summit for Democracy** - Canada will establish a new centre to expand the availability of Canadian expertise and assistance to those seeking to build peace, advance justice, promote human rights, inclusion and democracy, and deliver good governance (by fiscal year 2023-2024)
- 2.7 Summit for Democracy** - Canada will chair the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in 2022, and by doing so will support the organization's work on the advancement of democracy worldwide (by December 2022)
- 2.8 Summit for Democracy** - As co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition in 2022, Canada will take positive steps towards strengthening capacity to defend journalists around the world and protect the right to freedom of expression, public interest media, and the safety of journalists (by December 2022)

### **3. Milestone: Take steps towards strengthening trust, inclusion, and social cohesion in Canada<sup>ii</sup>**

#### **Indicators**

- 3.1 Summit for Democracy** - Monitor trends on trust in government and identify lessons learned from other countries through the OECD's work and<sup>iii</sup> survey on the<sup>iv</sup> drivers of trust and how it can foster greater social cohesion (by fall 2022)
- 3.2 Summit for Democracy** - Support research to better understand the state of civic discourse (both online and offline) and social cohesion in Canada (by fall 2022)
- 3.3 Summit for Democracy** - Canada will launch its first-ever federal LGBTQ2 Action Plan with a view to advance the health, social and economic outcomes of LGBTQ2 people in Canada and the human rights of LGBTQ2 individuals internationally (by December 2022)

### **4. Milestone: Advance digital inclusion at home and abroad with a focus on shaping global norms, empowering multistakeholder engagement and boosting communication and outreach**

#### **Indicators**

- 4.1 Summit for Democracy** - Launch a program of action for 2022 Canada's chairship of the Freedom Online Coalition to advance digital inclusion that will foster meaningful<sup>v</sup> participation in society online and offline, at home and abroad, with a focus on shaping global norms and expanding diplomatic networks, promoting multi-stakeholder engagement, and ramping up advocacy, communication and outreach (by December 2022)
- 4.2** Conduct a landscape study and a mapping on misinformation in the four global South regions - Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia; examine policies and actors; and build an agenda to work together to reduce misinformation (by Spring 2022)

- 4.3** Support research in 18 countries on the extent of technology facilitated Gender-based violence (GBV) (by Spring 2022)
- 4.4** Conduct research on fostering a feminist Internet - infrastructure, data, discourse from artificial intelligence to LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex, plus) to labour to Gender-based violence (GBV) (by June 2022)
- 4.5** Support 2 countries in the global south to advance legal and gender transformative approaches to countering sexist hate speech online [India and Brazil] (by December 2022)

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<sup>i</sup> Posted by jury.konga on 02/18/2022 at 9:24am

I note that most of the indicators reference annual or one off events. My suggestion would be to seek to take the messaging and introduce as part of civic events happening throughout the year - ongoing communications to multiple sectors & communities.

<sup>ii</sup> Posted by Nicole Priddle on 02/18/2022 at 3:58pm

This can only be accomplished with participation and engagement. It doesn't appear we've done this well in the past. I've heard of the concept of "social license" in the context of open government / open data policy recently. This is one way to consider being more participative in strengthening democracy. We have more opportunity now than ever to connect, and yet in many ways, it seems we are more disconnected as Canadians.

<sup>iii</sup> Posted by jury.konga on 02/18/2022 at 9:28am

Relative to Open Gov, trust is directly related to government transparency. Although governments point to examples of transparency, it is very inconsistent which is the reason for the lack of trust in government. Government needs to walk the talk!

<sup>iv</sup> Posted by Nicole Priddle on 02/18/2022 at 3:56pm

It is disappointing to see that more than 20 years after completing an MPA, the distrust and strong anti-government sentiment that exists in our communities, online, etc. I feel this is not the reality of the work of our government and more needs to be done to combat the disinformation. Unfortunately, the media doesn't often help. There is a lot of good work being done in government. I think we need to revisit how the benefits provided is defined as a value to Canadians, in terms of current and future programs needed with a strong public service. I am not sure past roles and expectations are still relevant in some cases, and there's a lot of distrust based on a lack of clarity of roles, and understanding of facts.

<sup>v</sup> Posted by jury.konga on 02/18/2022 at 9:33am

Importance of "meaningful participation" cannot be overstated. Consultations and dialogues with Canadians needs to show it's more than checking the box and that input is seen as being recognized and acted on. Show the process, show where comments have been reviewed and decisions made related to feedback.