

Human Rights Council – 44th session

Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right
to freedom of opinion and expression

10 July 2020

Australian Statement

Australia thanks the Special Rapporteur for his report.

We agree that protecting freedom of expression, including media freedom, and ensuring transparency, are essential for reliable, life-saving information and successful pandemic responses and recovery.

Australia condemns the abuse of COVID-19 emergency measures to spread disinformation and target opponents, including through silencing journalists, health workers, human rights defenders, and others reporting on the pandemic or criticising official responses.

Journalists play a fundamental role in sharing critical information, and empowering the public to take appropriate steps to protect themselves and their communities. We reiterate our support for a free, independent and pluralistic media as a conveyer of reliable news and public health information.

During the current COVID-19 crisis governments must facilitate accurate health information. Freedom of expression and opinion must be protected equally online and offline. Emergency measures and restrictions must be necessary, proportionate, non-discriminatory and reasonable and in accordance with international human rights law.

We ask the Special Rapporteur, what are some best practices for combatting disinformation, while still promoting freedom of expression, in support of a successful pandemic response?