

Meeting of the Council of the Socialist International
Santo Domingo, 28-29 January 2019

DECLARATION ON PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACIES FROM NEW THREATS

The Council of the Socialist International, meeting in Santo Domingo on 28-29 January 2019, discussed as a main theme the new threats to democracy that have recently emerged, among them the deliberate discrediting of democratic institutions and the press, fake news, cyber attacks and invasive technology. In light of these rapidly emerging and developing threats, the global social democratic movement must develop a coordinated response to safeguard and protect democracy.

Attacks on democratic institutions and the press have become more and more prevalent, and are no longer limited to those on the fringes of the political debate. When elected officials denigrate and undermine the institutions that uphold democracy, this has the effect of eroding trust, weakening the democratic process and threatening progress made over the recent years and decades in this regard. Likewise, a free press is one of the fundamental pillars of a democracy, in which citizens can have confidence that those who represent them are held to account.

The rise of alternative sources of news and the emergence of social media have contributed to a more open flow of information and facilitated the spreading of diverse viewpoints. These new media have played a role in ensuring opposition voices are heard free from censorship and suppression by undemocratic regimes, but have also shown themselves to be susceptible to exploitation by those seeking to spread misinformation.

The spread of fake news requires vigilance from citizens and politicians alike, in an environment where those responsible for this false information are exploiting the functional logic of social networks with the express intent of influencing the choice of the electorate. As citizens increasingly get their news and information through social media, it is incumbent on the owners of these platforms to take responsibility for ensuring that the information disseminated through their services is verifiable and conforms with the national laws that are in place to prevent the manipulation of public opinion and interference in electoral processes.

New technology, big data and the rise of social media have also changed the way electoral campaigns are conducted and represent a fundamental challenge to the notion of free and fair elections if safeguards are not put in place. With unprecedented access to detailed demographic and personal information on large sections of the electorate, the largest social media providers can directly impact information flow and the effectiveness of political campaigns, creating the potential for manipulation of public opinion and interference in domestic electoral processes by external actors.

The protection of personal data is a significant concern in light of the risks posed by powerful algorithms for personality profiling and the dangers of identity fraud. Ownership of one's own personal data should be regarded as a human right that is respected by all public and private organisations that have access to this data.
