RSF **REPORTERS**
WITHOUT BORDERS

UN Global Digital Compact (GDC)

Reporters without borders (RSF)

Written inputs to the Zero Draft GDC

I. Introduction

Reporters sans frontières (RSF) welcomes the opportunity to provide inputs as part of the development of a Global Digital Compact (GDC).

The lack of democratic regulation of the global information and communication space has led to an 'information chaos', where propaganda and disinformation are thriving at the expense of quality journalism. Yet, access to reliable information is a prerequisite for the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and for democratic processes in general, including elections, decision-making and accountability. For several years, RSF have been striving to develop innovative solutions in response to this challenge - see below.

The proposed GDC therefore provides a timely opportunity to secure a strong commitment from governments to support and protect people's right to information on a global scale. In order to ensure consistency and avoid duplications, we strongly encourage the GDC to refer and build on existing initiatives and cooperation structures, such as:

The Partnership for Information and Democracy

Initiated by RSF and launched in 2019, the Partnership for Information and Democracy is an intergovernmental (non-binding) agreement endorsed by 52 countries representing all five continents. It builds on the principles set out in the Declaration on Information and Democracy published on November 11, 2018 to advance the development of systemic responses to mass disinformation and promote democratic principles in the digital environment.

The Forum on Information and Democracy, a civil society-led initiative supports the implementation of the Partnership principles by providing ready-for-use policy recommendations to States signatories. It was founded by 11 civil society organisations, including RSF, and has published over 400 recommendations to date[1]. Finally, the Observatory on Information and Democracy provides for an research-based assessment of the challenges affecting the global information and communication environment.

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[1] The recommendations can be found in the 5 following reports: _How to End Infodemics_ (2020), _A New Deal for Journalism_ (2021), _Accountability Regimes for Social Networks and their Users_ (2022), _Pluralism of information in Curation and Indexation of Algorithms_ (2023) and _AI as a Public Good: Ensuring Democratic Control of AI in the Information Space_ (2024).

<u>The Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI)</u>

The JTI is a normative instrument to turn accountability and transparency of news media into a competitive advantage and thus, incentivize compliance with ethical norms in journalism. It is based on a global ISO-type standard which was developed under the aegis of the European Committee for Standardization. As of March 2024, over 1200 media in 100 countries have signed up to engage into the JTI certification process.

The JTI contributes to reinforce information integrity because it rewards trustworthy media content in the online information environment. RSF actively promotes the JTI as an instrument for governments to use e.g. in the allocation of public subsidies, or for platforms in their algorithmic curation.

II.   Key Recommendations in relation to the GDC main objectives

To close the digital divide and build digital public infrastructure:

- Reforming higher education of IT developers to embed human rights, ethics and sustainable development in their education program with the objective to build digital goods that serve humanity
- Promote the creation of a "Fair Trade" certification system for artificial intelligence systems to encourage the development and deployment of AI systems that work in the public interest.

To foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space

- Impose legal obligations on digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms to protect fundamental rights, including the right to information; to provide access to effective remedies and be held accountable for violations.
- Impose a legal obligation on social media platforms to enhance the transparency and accountability of their systems; to provide researcher access to data and to implement state-of-the art detection and content authentication and origin standards

To strengthen access to reliable information

- Promote and support the fundamental contribution that independent and professional journalism plays online by establishing protection from cyber harassment; establishing measures to ensure they derive sufficient and sustainable resources from their digital publications
- Support independent public service media and all media certified as compliant to self-regulatory standards of independence and journalism ethics such as those certified through the Journalism Trust Initiative
- Require platforms to implement algorithms-based mechanisms to give due prominence to reliable news sources.

To recognise and build upon existing initiatives and avoid duplication

- Acknowledge the role of the International Partnership for Information and Democracy and other multi stakeholder platforms for discussion on public policy issues related to the Internet

To ensure the sustained and meaningful participation of civil society and academia

- Make resources available for civil society and academics to conduct research and actively participate in international and national internet and digital governance mechanisms, including agenda-setting moments and policy discussions.

III.   Annex - Proposed amendments to the Zero Draft GDC

Objective 1. Closing the digital divides and accelerating progress across the Sustainable

> 15a new. Reform higher education and continuous training of IT developers to include mandatory embedded learning on human rights, ethics and sustainable development across coursework to foster the development and deployment of digital public goods.
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> 15b new. Promote the creation of a « Fair Trade » certification system for artificial intelligence systems to encourage the development and deployment of AI systems that work in the public interest.

Objective 3. Fostering an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space

> 21.(b) Establish appropriate safeguards to prevent and address any adverse human rights impacts arising from the development, deployment and use of digital and emerging technologies (All SDGs). This includes legal obligations for digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms to implement appropriate measures that ensure all their users' fundamental rights, including the right to information, are protected. Digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms should also be required to provide access to effective remedies and be held accountable for violations.
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> 21. new Provide access to effective remedy for violations arising from the development, deployment and use of digital and emerging technologies by establishing appeal mechanisms for decisions taken by digital technology companies,

developers and social media platforms through referral to independent national or international courts and/or an ombudsman institution.

25. We recognize and commit to uphold the role of multi-stakeholder cooperation in maintaining a universal, free, and secure Internet at the governance, content and technical layers. We acknowledge the value of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and of the international Partnership for Information and Democracy in that regard.

26. (b) Support existing multi stakeholder platforms for discussion on public policy issues related to the Internet, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the international Partnership for Information and Democracy;

26. (c) Continue efforts to increase diverse participation in the Internet Governance Forum, especially by governments and the private sector and through the equitable, sustained and substantive participation of civil society and academia (SDG 10);

26a. - new: Make resources available for civil society and academics to conduct research and actively participate in international and national internet and digital governance mechanisms, including agenda-setting moments and policy discussions.

28a. - new: Impose a legal obligation on digital technology companies and developers, to co-develop industry accountability frameworks, in consultation with other stakeholders that, inter alia, define responsibilities and commit to standards as well as auditable public reports (SDGs 9 & 17);

30. Access to relevant, reliable and accurate information and knowledge is essential for an inclusive, open, free, resilient, safe and secure digital space. We will work together to promote information integrity, tolerance and respect online, as well as to protect the integrity of democratic processes. We recognize that digital and emerging technologies can facilitate the manipulation and interference of information in ways that are harmful to societies and people and create risks for international peace and security. We will counter disinformation and mitigate the risks of information manipulation in a manner consistent with human rights and freedom of expression as well as the principles from the International Partnership for Information and Democracy.

30a new: We underline the fundamental contribution that independent and professional journalism plays to provide people with access to reliable, relevant and accurate information. We commit to working together to provide the appropriate conditions for journalists to safely report online about matters of public interest and be protected from cyber-harassment; for media outlets to derive sufficient and sustainable resources from their digital publications; and for independent public interest media to be given due prominence by social media platforms.

31.(b) Promote and support diverse and resilient information ecosystems, including by strengthening independent public service media and all media certified as compliant to self-regulatory standards of independence and journalism ethics such as the Journalism Trust Initiative (SDGs 9 & 16);

31. (c) Promote access to reliable, independent and pluralistic information in conflict and crisis situations, to protect and empower communities in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation (SDG 10)

31 - new: Impose a legal obligation on social media platforms to enhance the transparency and accountability of their systems, to provide researcher access to data and to implement state-of-the art detection and content authentication and origin standards.

31 - new: Impose a legal obligation on social media platforms to give due prominence to independent public interest media such as those certified by self-regulatory standards as the Journalism Trust Initiative and implement safeguards for public interest media in content moderation policies and decisions.

Objective 4. Advancing equitable international data governance

34. We commit to develop international and national data governance frameworks that maximise the benefits of data use while protecting privacy, preserving freedom of expression and the right to reliable information, and securing data in ways that are lawful, transparent and accountable and conform to international human rights law, norms and standards.

35.(b) Empower individuals and groups to participate in the processing, control and use of their personal data, including through legally mandated protections for data privacy, drawing on regional frameworks such as the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection and the EU General Data Protection Regulation and provide access to effective remedy (SDGs 10 & 16);

Follow up and Review

53. Government-led efforts can only succeed with the active engagement of the private sector, technical and academic communities and civil society, whose innovations and contributions to digitalization are fundamental and irreplaceable. We must strengthen and direct our collaboration, and accelerate implementation of existing cooperative efforts such as the Partnership for Information and Democracy, to achieve the objectives set out in this Compact.

57. We reaffirm the role of multi-stakeholder frameworks of cooperation, such as the Internet Governance Forum and the international Partnership for Information and Democracy, for the promotion of an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space. We encourage governments, the private sector and all stakeholders to engage actively in their work with a view to advancing Compact commitments on Internet governance. We invite the Internet Government Forum to build on its youth networks to amplify the voices and views of young people in policy deliberations on the Internet.

57a new. We welcome the creation of the Observatory on Information and Democracy, an independent evaluation body mandated to run periodic meta-analyses of the digital space and its impact on human rights.