

UN Human Rights Council 50: UK statement on disinformation and human rights

Thank you, Mr President.

State-backed disinformation and the systematic manipulation of information in the digital age presents a fundamental challenge to the enjoyment and realisation of human rights.

States that engage in disinformation campaigns deploy overly broad laws, extensive censorship and internet shutdowns. They suppress legitimate expression and prevent the free flow of information, the countering of false narratives and fact-checking efforts.

Disinformation and hate speech has paved the way for war crimes, atrocities and genocide, from the Holocaust to Rwanda to Bosnia. The current Russian disinformation directed towards Ukraine and Ukrainians is profoundly disturbing.

The Kremlin has fed Russian citizens a steady stream of propaganda seeking to dehumanise Ukrainians since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. This has intensified following the failing full scale invasion. The Kremlin's propaganda machine has: pushed outlandish claims that Ukraine is controlled by neo-Nazis; run a disinformation campaign to deflect responsibility for the war crimes its forces committed in Bucha, calling it an 'attack of fakes' despite clear evidence to the contrary; and, while preventing exports of grain by blockading Ukrainian ports, sought to obfuscate Russia's culpability for holding the world's food supply to ransom in an attempt to get sanctions eased.

And in Russia, the Kremlin has legislated against references to 'war' or 'invasion', closed Russia's independent press, prevented protests from taking place, stopped access to social media and arrested individuals for telling the truth.

A free, independent, plural and diverse media is the best antidote to disinformation.

Panellists, how can States work with the private sector to ensure a rights based approach to tackling disinformation?

Thank you.