

PRESS RELEASE

UN combats spread of fake news at local and national levels

Beirut, Lebanon

Friday, 22 May 2020 (United Nations) – Reaffirming its commitment to combat fake news, the UN is engaged with different partners in Lebanon to counter the surge in the production and dissemination of disinformation, propaganda and other misleading content. Part of the solution to the massive amounts of disinformation is to improve the supply of truthful information, and ensure that demand for it is met, through reinforcing journalistic ethics and professionalism, and improving media literacy among consumers of information. This strategy involves a two-pronged combination of awareness raising on the national level and capacity-building for local actors.

Tackling fake news is particularly critical in the current Covid-19 pandemic as it is putting lives at risk, including the lives of people stigmatized for carrying the virus or accused of spreading it. This should serve as a wakeup call for all responsible societies to learn how to deal with the spread and effects of fake news in future challenges.

“Misinformation during times of a health crisis can spread fear and stigmatization. It can also leave children, families and communities unprotected and more vulnerable to the virus”, said UNICEF Lebanon Representative Yukie Mokuo. “We ask everyone to seek accurate information from verified sources and to you refrain from sharing information from untrustworthy or unverified sources”.

The latest effort by the UN in Lebanon is a national campaign in partnership with the Ministry of Information to respond to the flow of fake news, specifically about the Covid-19 virus, by flooding media and social media with accurate scientific information and facts. The campaign involves a series of infomercials under the title “صححوا المعلومة” (check your facts) as well as technical and in-kind support to the National News Agency in creating a fact-checking online page to debunk fake news related to the virus.

The plan includes the development of a rumour log to record locally monitored rumours, verify them and provide neutral, accurate and trusted information to each shared rumour. A reporting website will be also available to allow people to report and fact check any news they’ve heard of. A campaign will be disseminating on media and social media widely shared fake news along with their accurate answers.

With the sudden lax of the lockdown people found themselves wondering if being in a swimming pool is safe or not with rumors ranging from coronavirus swims in water to no its safe to swim in



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chlorinated water. A new animated video is on the way to clarify this information and set the record straight to the safety of being in a swimming pool.

“We are fighting a two-fold pandemic, both of which affect our health and well-being in different ways. A dangerous epidemic of misinformation has been circulating through different communication channels and in communities since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. We strive to provide accurate information which we disseminate with our partners at the right time,” said WHO representative in Lebanon Dr. Iman Shankiti.

In March 2020, UN has also launched a national campaign in partnership with LBCI TV station to raise awareness about safe ways for people to consume news amidst the growing spread of disinformation. Under the slogan “Count till 10 before sharing unverified news,” the campaign initially focused on Covid-19 related news as part of UN emergency response to the pandemic. The campaign involved infographic videos disseminated widely on social media, including contributions by local influencers. As a next step, a series of infomercials will be broadcast on national TV stations, in parallel with an outdoor campaign.

“As with the courageous front-line healthcare workers engaged against the spread of the virus, we can all join the fight against covid-19 by promoting facts and science and embracing hope over despair and divisions. As part of our efforts to counter fake news, we launched the ‘Count till 10’ campaign earlier last month and today’s partnership with the Ministry of Information marks another milestone in strengthening our collective efforts to combat misinformation, and rumors,” said UNDP Resident Representative Celine Moyroud.

In addition, the UN in Lebanon has been training 40 youth actors from 10 villages across Lebanese governorates on combatting fake news and engaging with their local communities to consolidate social cohesion and stability. In April 2020, the trainees launched the first youth-led social media initiative against fake news in Lebanon under the headline "صحتك من صحة الخير" (real/“healthy” news contribute to your health/wellbeing) on Facebook and Instagram to monitor, detect and combat the spread of fake news that contribute to increasing fear and stigmatization among communities. Through these pages, the youth actors will raise awareness on the issue and promote the use of the right tools and techniques in disseminating only accurate information.

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