

FACT-FINDING MISSION:

IMPACT OF ONLINE DISINFORMATION IN ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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APHR is a regional network of current and former parliamentarians who use their unique positions to advance human rights and democracy in Southeast Asia. We seek to help create a region where people can express themselves without fear, live free from all forms of discrimination and violence, and where development takes place with human rights at the forefront.

Our members use their mandate to advocate for human rights inside and outside of parliaments, regionally and globally. They work closely with civil society, conduct fact-finding missions, and publish recommendations and opinions on the most important issues affecting the region.

APHR was born out of the recognition that human rights issues in Southeast Asia are interconnected, and from the desire of progressive legislators to work together across borders to promote and protect human rights.



ABOUT THE REPORT

In August 2022, APHR as one of the implementing partners of the Internet Freedom Initiative (IFI) led by Article-19, undertook a fact-finding mission to the Philippines to gather information on the proliferation of online disinformation during elections and how it has affected electoral integrity and impacted democracy in the country, with a view to finding solutions on how parliamentarians together with civil society, human rights defenders, and other stakeholders can work together to address the problem in the Philippines, in Southeast Asia, and globally.

Three parliamentarians from Southeast Asia formed the Mission's delegation and visited Metro Manila for three days to meet with government officials, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, journalists, academes, and election experts. The delegates of the mission were Hon. Maria Chin Abdullah, Member of Parliament from Malaysia; Hon. Kelvin Yii, Member of Parliament from Malaysia; and Hon. Pannika Wanich, former member of Parliament from Thailand.



APHR Meeting with COMELEC during Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022.
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INTRODUCTION

On 9 May 2022, the Philippines concluded its national and local elections which resulted in a landslide victory of Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, Jr. as President, and Sara Duterte as Vice-President.

President Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos, Jr. is the son of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. known globally for amassing billions of dollars from the state’s coffers and arresting, torturing, and killing, thousands of political opponents. Sara Duterte is the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte known for his violent war on drugs that has killed thousands.

The human rights community in the Philippines and Southeast Asia have raised concerns about these outcomes, especially considering that former President Marcos Sr. was ousted through a people’s revolution just three decades ago.

It is important to understand the processes involved as the results can possibly impact the country’s neighbors in the region.

While the electoral process in itself was generally free and fair, the extent and coordinated campaigns of online disinformation and historical revisionism, in particular on social media, heavily influenced political conversations and voting decisions.

False narratives were found online aimed to whitewash Marcos Sr.’s dictatorship, portray it as a the “golden age” for the Philippines with claims that the country was then the third richest economy in the world while denying all human rights abuses that occurred during that time.

Years of organized, coordinated, and systematic, political online disinformation and historical revisionism spread widely especially among the younger generation with limited knowledge of the brutal legacy of the Marcos’s regime.

The Philippines has been a breeding ground of online disinformation. In 2016, a Facebook executive referred to the country as ‘patient zero’ in a ‘disinformation epidemic.’¹

As of 2023, 73.1 percent of the country’s population have regular access to the Internet while 72.5 percent of the population are social media users which saw a 13% increase between 2022 and 2023.²

Throughout Duterte’s presidency and in the lead-up to the 2022 elections, human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition lawmakers increasingly faced online smear campaigns and attacks.

Entities directly related to the authorities have been linked to those organized disinformation campaigns.³ Ahead of the 2019 midterm elections, Facebook removed at least 200 pages of coordinated “inauthentic behavior” linked to a network organized by the social media manager of President Duterte’s electoral campaign.⁴

In 2020, Facebook removed⁵ a network linked to the Military or Police.⁶ Among those targeted were youth activists and members of the opposition.

In January 2022, Twitter suspended more than 200 accounts reportedly promoting Marcos Jr. for violating their policies against platform manipulation and spamming,⁷ while Meta reported to have removed over 5 million pieces of content across Facebook and Instagram in the period leading up and shortly after the election due to violation of its policies on violence, harassment, and hate speech.⁸

Online disinformation for political purposes is not unique to the Philippines. Organized disinformation campaigns are happening globally. Central to this disinformation age is the business model of social media giants and the lack of transparency about how their algorithms work.

This fact-finding mission investigated how online disinformation impacts electoral integrity. It is important for parliamentarians to understand why such phenomena continue and how social companies play a huge role in spreading falsehoods not only in the Philippines but globally.

The battle against online disinformation will persist for years unless action is taken. It is important to have a clear understanding on how this phenomenon impacts our democracies, find solutions, and immediately act on them.



APHR Meeting with journalists and fact checkers during Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022.
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KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

1



Pervasiveness of **online disinformation** influenced voting decisions and undermined electoral integrity

2



Misogynistic attacks and **red-tagging online** posed real threats offline

3



Disinformation thrived on **attacks against free press, civil society, and election watchdogs**

4



Fact-checking initiatives are insufficient to combat spread of disinformation

5



Imperative for **electoral reforms** in the Philippines

6



Social media platforms play a crucial role, need to be held accountable

1 Pervasiveness of Online Disinformation influenced voting decisions and undermined electoral integrity

The spread of Online disinformation in the Philippines has been found not to be a simple electoral phenomenon but a bigger threat to democracy and human rights that needs serious attention from all concerned stakeholders.

Disinformation, as the act to intentionally mislead through false information, has been weaponized by politicians to win and gain political power. The sheer volume of disinformation online undermines people's participation in democratic processes as they are swayed by erroneous information.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the problem as citizens spent more time on social media and the government-forced shut down of one of the largest TV networks, ABS-CBN, pushed Filipinos towards online sources of information.⁹

Coordinated efforts and historical revisionism

The extent of coordinated disinformation campaigns and historical revisionism online is alarming with evidence that these efforts began well before the 2022 elections. The Philippine Media Monitoring Laboratory (PMM) identified widespread networks of false or misleading content on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube ahead of the 2022 elections.¹⁰

While online content manipulation was observed across the political spectrum during the 2022 Philippine elections, some online campaigns stood out for their blatant use of fabricated information to boost specific individuals and attack opponents.

One notable case involved the whitewashing of the Marcos family's human rights abuses during the martial law period in the country. Revised historical narratives proliferated on social media platforms forming part of a massive online disinformation campaign to influence voting behavior.

Rappler, a news portal founded by Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, reported in 2019 that massive amounts of propaganda and targeted disinformation, most of them proven to be false, are part of a systemic campaign to clear the image of the Marcoses and pave the way for their return to power.¹¹

Fact-checkers also found that former vice president Maria Leonor "Leni" Gerona Robredo, the main opponent of then Presidential candidate Marcos, Jr was the most targeted candidate, while Marcos Jr. seemingly benefitted the most from these disinformation campaigns.¹²

Other forms of disinformation were aimed to confuse voters or suppress voter turnout. Fake news circulated about voting locations and election procedures potentially discouraged voters from participating and casting their votes. One specific example was pertaining to the voting guidelines. As the elections took place during a time when the country was just emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, some falsely claimed that COVID-19 positive individuals would not be allowed to vote.

This necessitated the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to counter such wrong information and strengthen their own information campaign to encourage voters to only rely on official COMELEC web pages, partner news agencies, and other official sources.

Another prevalent narrative shared by the groups interviewed by members of the mission involve the false promise of gold distribution should a specific candidate win, which unfortunately resonated with some voters, evidenced by stories shared by voters themselves expressing their trust on this misleading claim.¹³ Then presidential candidate, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., debunked this claim himself.

The spread of disinformation created an environment that made it difficult for many voters to make informed voting decisions. While the mission found that the overall electoral process was conducted in a generally free and fair manner, serious review of tackling disinformation is crucial, as voting choices based on lies and even harmful narratives impact electoral integrity.



APHR Meeting with COMELEC during Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022. © APHR



Presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos campaign rally in Paranaque city, May 2022. © EFE/FRANCIS R. MALASIG

Online trolls and State-sanctioned disinformation

Discussions with stakeholders during the mission and published reports reveal links between entities directly related to the authorities and organized disinformation campaigns targeting opposition lawmakers and human rights activists with intent to undermine and intimidate them.¹⁴

Online disinformation campaigns used coordinated networks of "online trolls" to spread engineered narratives, and in the case of the Philippines leading to the 2022 elections, to drown out conversations about human rights and silence criticism against the ruling government.¹⁵ These coordinated campaigns created echo chambers where dissenting voices were silenced.

The huge number of social media users in the Philippines facilitated the weaponization of these platforms, allowing targeted disinformation to reach specific demographics to shape and influence public perception.

It was observed that new pro-Marcos pages, many coming from troll farms and fake accounts, began to increase in 2014.¹⁶ That was around the same time, Imelda Marcos, widow of the late dictator and mother of President Marcos, Jr. announced that she wanted her son to run for president.

Online platforms became breeding grounds for misinformation and disinformation before, during, and after the elections. Social media platforms were utilized to spread misleading information about candidates, parties, and even electoral processes. Unfortunately, the spread of fake news has not only influenced political opinions but also caused confusion and disrupted the electoral process.



The delegation with APHR members in the Philippines met with former Vice-President, also 2022 Presidential Candidate, Maria Leonor “Leni Robredo”. © APHR

2 Misogynistic attacks and red tagging online posed real threats offline

Coordinated online disinformation campaigns were identified as a direct threat to democracy in the Philippines. The spread of false narratives fueled intense polarization, oversimplifying social dynamics and creating stark dichotomies between perceived enemies and allies. This eroded pluralism, leading to the breakdown of robust political and democratic conversations. This alarming pattern defined the 2022 Philippine elections, the practice of "red tagging", often state sanctioned, were used as weapons against political adversaries.¹⁷

Throughout the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte and in the lead-up to the 2022 elections, the number of online attacks against human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition lawmakers increased. APHR’s report, *Parliamentarians at Risk 2021*, documented a rise in disinformation campaigns and baseless red-tagging of accusations targeting opposition and left-wing parliamentarians.¹⁸

Disinformation campaigns often generate hatred toward vulnerable groups such as women. Documented trends of red-tagging and other forms of online attacks were misogynistic in nature as they were specifically directed at women opposition parliamentarians, activists, and journalists.



The delegation with APHR Member and Philippine Senator Risa Hontiveros. © APHR

APHR's 2022 *Parliamentarians at Risk Report* highlighted how elected representatives, members, and supporters from the Makabayan Bloc, a coalition of 13 progressive left-wing party lists in the House of Representatives, were red-tagged by former President Duterte's government.¹⁹ Despite the bloc's repeated rejection of these claims, red-tagging statements were posted on social media even by Facebook pages of government agencies and public officials. These posts were widely shared by social media users and resulted in threats, violence, and even deaths of members and supporters of the Bloc.

One of the examples of these attacks is from an APHR member, former member of the House of Representative from the Kabataan (youth) party-list, Sarah Elago. Red-tagging allegations being against her appeared on official police social media pages, continuing in 2022 when she and a fellow student leader received death threats on Facebook.²⁰

Another notable case involved Senator Risa Hontiveros, an opposition Senator and a member of APHR. She was labeled as 'dilawan' (a term used to associate individuals with the liberal party or with former President Benigno Aquino, Jr.) and targeted with fake news and red-tagging. Senator Hontiveros expressed her disappointment on the use of disinformation to inflict political slut-shaming on women.

Some perspectives suggest that female politicians are often targeted by fake news because it taps into a deep-seated and strong undercurrent. This reveals an entrenched misogyny deeply rooted in the country's culture, highlighting the urgent need for reforms in various fronts.



APHR meeting with Free Leila Committee during Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022. © APHR

APHR Member and Former Senator Leila De Lima also faced relentless fake news and misogynistic attacks aimed to tarnish her reputation and undermine her credibility.

The persecution and red-tagging assaults on journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society groups undermined credible voices while a torrent of fake news surged online and unfortunately permeated public consciousness. Journalists were demonized, labeled as sympathizers of the Communist Party of the Philippines New People’s Army (CPP/NPA), and legitimate investigations dismissed as conspiracies. Impunity fueled this trend, and the pandemic was exploited to justify further media control.

The sustained harassment also caused psychosocial harm for many journalists. This harassment often manifested as a barrage of repeated false quotations, comments, and negative portrayals against press members in online platforms. Notably, a significant portion of these attacks specifically targeted women, projecting them as mistresses of rebel commanders or casting aspersions on women leaders/journalists.



Former senator Leila De Lima gestures as she attends a court hearing in Muntinlupa city, the Philippines, 13 November 2023. © EPA-EFE/FRANCIS R. MALASIG

Undermining of fellow journalists

Unfortunately, some attacks came from fellow media practitioners and columnists adding to the disinformation landscape and complicating the work of fact-checkers. Highly partisan media organizations, including church-based outlets like Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI) of controversial preacher, Pastor Apollo Quiboloy, the spiritual adviser of then President Duterte, who direct disinformation and attack fellow media journalists trying to undermine their credibility left the public confused on who to believe.²¹ As of November 2023, the House of Representatives Committee on Legislative Franchises is conducting a probe on SMNI's practice of spreading fake news.²²



A Filipino holds a placard as she joins a demonstration outside the ABS-CBN network headquarters in Quezon City, Metro Manila, the Philippines, 10 July 2020. © EPA-EFE/FRANCIS R. MALASIG

Recognition of media provided a protective effect

Nevertheless, there were silver linings amidst all the challenges. The recognition of courage and credibility of news organizations and personalities has provided a protective effect to the media. The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Maria Ressa, head of Rappler, a leading news organization, was found to have had a protective effect that rallied communities around journalists.

3**Disinformation thrived on attacks against free press, civil society, and election watchdogs**

The overwhelming extent of disinformation undermined trust and confidence in genuine journalists, the work of civil society, and even fact-checking initiatives. Already facing censorship and bias accusations, legitimate sources struggled to compete against widespread manipulation strategies employed by online disinformation campaigns.

The relentless attacks on the press were central to the success of disinformation. Government investigations were routinely dismissed as premeditated campaigns, carrying the implicit message that negative reporting, especially on exposé about government abuses and corruption, was inherently biased.

Biases against the administration were reflected in the disinformation narratives claiming that mainstream media only report these ‘negative’ reports. This led in discrediting the press, forcing them to divert valuable resources toward combating false information, adding more work for them with less focus on critical work.

These attacks targeted both media organizations and individual personalities. Accusations ranged from Rappler being CIA-funded to ABS-CBN’s alleged foreign ownership and non-payment of taxes, eventually leading to the non-renewal of franchise and closure of ABS-CBN network and attempts to shut down Rappler.



The mission’s delegation during the roundtable discussion with civil society and members of the academe. © APHR

Meanwhile, the online troll attacks on individuals intimidated and made media practitioners think twice to pursue sensitive stories. Red-tagging fears and arrests further stifled critical reporting. These orchestrated attacks often coincided with political events further amplified by influencers aimed at achieving specific goals.

It was nevertheless clear that false information or misleading context consistently benefitted the administration. The consistent beneficiaries of this disinformation were former President Duterte and then-candidate Marcos Jr., particularly in cases related to the latter's family history and electoral protests when he lost in the 2016 elections for Vice-President. Disinformation often employed kernels of truth within misleading contexts to bolster its credibility.

From disinformation to outright suppression

Consultations during the mission revealed that disinformation evolved to combat perceived threats to press freedom. Long-term precedents and events that transpired long before 2016, including attacks on GMA-7 network's media personalities, the ABS-CBN shutdown, lawsuits against Rappler in an attempt to shut it down, set the stage for this erosion of rights.

Amplified reach of dissemination of disinformation across platforms lead to harm or harassment

Video sharing platforms such as YouTube and Tiktok, along with cross-platform sharing played a huge role in expanding the reach of disinformation. Tactics included portraying journalists as paid by drug syndicates or linked to communist rebels, and sharing journalists' faces in military-linked social media pages. This widespread dissemination amplified the potential for harassment and physical harm against the journalists.



The delegation meets with APHR members in the Philippines to understand the current political and human rights landscape in the country. © APHR

4 Fact-checking initiatives insufficient to combat spread of disinformation

While several groups engaged in fact-checking work, their efforts proved inadequate against the rapid and pervasive spread of disinformation. The sheer volume of false information overwhelmed election monitors, civil society, journalists, and academics involved in fact-checking initiatives, diverting them from their primary responsibilities. Additionally, well-funded public relations companies driving the disinformation campaigns outmatched the resources available to the mostly fact-checking and other volunteer groups.

Furthermore, disinformation spread rapidly through private messaging channels like Facebook messenger and family group chats, where exchanges occurred privately making it harder to monitor and fact-check.

Therefore, fact-checking, while essential, is not the only and ultimate solution in the fight against fake news as it has to contend with the speed at which disinformation spreads. The mantra of "verify," as emphasized in fact-checking, is yet to catch up with the real-time spread of dis/misinformation.



APHR Meeting with journalists and fact checkers during the Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022. © APHR

Recognizing these limitations, it is imperative that digital and media literacy accompany these efforts. Educational reforms are urgently needed to incorporate media literacy to the curricula to give young people the tools to discern truth in an increasingly complex media landscape. Strategies must cover formal and informal education, extending to adult learning to raise awareness and build skills for navigating disinformation.

It is also crucial for technology platforms, government bodies, and educational institutions to collaborate and develop a comprehensive approach in addressing the challenges posed by disinformation. Such partnerships can facilitate the development of effective countermeasures, including advanced algorithms, educational programs, and policy frameworks that collectively contribute to building a more resilient and informed society.



Supporters of Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, a presidential contender in the May 2022 national elections, cheer during a thanksgiving event in Quezon city, Metro Manila, Philippines, 13 May 2022. © EPA-EFE/FRANCIS R. MALASIG

5 Imperative for Electoral Reforms in the Philippines

The imperative for electoral reforms in the Philippines has become increasingly apparent in the wake of the pervasive influence of online disinformation, which has undermined electoral integrity and democracy itself.

Social media has irrevocably transformed how campaigns are conducted, and existing election rules must adapt to these changes to keep up with time. The Philippines COMELEC has acknowledged this challenge as disinformation not only attacked political candidates but also undermined democratic institutions such as COMELEC.

In the 2022 elections, COMELEC launched a task force to monitor fake news and partnered with major social media platforms such as Meta, Twitter, and Tiktok to help combat fake news. However, it admitted that its current efforts are insufficient and seeks additional powers from Congress to regulate campaigning in social media during elections. COMELEC's goal is to regulate campaign conduct, not content. At present, there is no existing law that covers this.

COMELEC recognizes how politicians and electoral candidates abuse the current system. Electoral experts emphasize the need to enforce current campaign finance laws and update them for the digital age. Revised policies should include robust mechanisms to track online trolls, monitor candidates' social media spending, and enhance transparency. While reforms are necessary, policymakers must be cautious when considering content regulations. Criminalizing fake news, even with good intentions, presents the risk of abuse and censorship.

6 Social media platforms play a big role in safeguarding electoral democracy, accountability is vital to address widespread disinformation

There is common agreement that while disinformation did not start in social media, they undeniably amplify its spread. This reality poses a unique challenge for safeguarding electoral democracy.

During the fact-finding mission, the delegation had the opportunity to speak with Facebook and TikTok representatives. These two social media platforms are among the leading platforms used by many Filipino social media users. Both companies cited community standards and policies as their basis of combatting disinformation. Facebook partners with fact-checkers such as Rappler, AFP, and the Vera Files to aid in checking content, and they have existing policies against inciting violence.

Notably, Facebook allows political advertisements in their spaces, a practice that other platforms like Twitter, Google, and TikTok have banned. Local electoral stakeholders were supportive of this policy, believing it creates opportunities and provides platforms for smaller and lesser known candidates and smaller political parties. The Mission was informed that Facebook implemented a verification system to track the origin and funding of ads.

Despite these efforts, the scale of online campaigning and disinformation cannot be fully monitored. COMELEC lacks the tools and mechanisms to oversee these practices. Some candidates resort to using proxy accounts or influencers to promote their candidacy, further obscuring the true sources of content. Given the current legal framework, COMELEC cannot go after proxies or even trolls.

TikTok on their part emphasized that their platform is primarily an entertainment platform and not a place for political debates. However, political content inevitably finds its way into the platform and they do not intend to censor what is deemed as genuine political expression. Both Facebook and TikTok use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for content regulation, but the challenges in monitoring disinformation persist. The absence of a mechanism for entities like COMELEC to monitor and address the issue reflects a gap in regulatory oversight.

The call for transparency from social media giants, particularly in revealing the workings of their algorithms, is crucial. The observation that these algorithms contribute to creating "echo chambers" that reinforce users' biases raises concerns about the potential impact on public discourse and democratic processes. Though social media giants claim to have privacy policies, certain data are shared with partners such as app developers or sold to advertisers. Personal data of social media users are at risk, as every view, click, purchase, and interaction are tracked as they form online behavior patterns and trends that are analyzed and monetized.²³ This model incentivizes the spread of disinformation and divisiveness, with alarming consequences for democracy and social cohesion worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The 2022 elections in the Philippines underscored the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat online disinformation and protect the integrity of democratic processes such as elections. As technology evolves, so too will the methods employed by those seeking to undermine democratic processes for their own individual gain.

The fight against disinformation is fundamentally a fight for equality and social justice. Disinformation campaigns disproportionately targeted the vulnerable, especially women. The attacks were largely misogynistic in nature seeking to silence activists, political opposition members, and even members of the press.

The 2022 elections serve as a stark warning call for the Philippines and other democracies worldwide grappling with the weaponization of online information.

The disinformation pandemic that plagued the Philippines and other countries in the region is too broad to be addressed with piecemeal measures. It needs to be addressed on a massive scale and demands coordinated response from governments, tech platforms, and civil society, prioritizing transparency and public education.



APHR Press Conference during Fact-Finding Mission in the Philippines, August 2022. © APHR

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE THE CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES

- To **conduct an inventory of policies** and streamline them before new laws are proposed, to include review of policies that restrict fundamental freedoms;
- To **amend or repeal provisions** in the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 to decriminalize libel;
- To **carefully assess proposed anti-fake news bills**, ensure all provisions that undermine democracy, infringe on people's fundamental freedoms, and threaten privacy rights are removed;
- To **review and develop up-to-date legislation** on campaign financing to incorporate regulations on campaigns in social media platforms;
- **Build long term infrastructures and propose legislative reforms** targeting political financing, and empowerment of COMELEC;
- To **use an oversight function** to investigate allegations of state-sanctioned disinformation campaigns and troll farms, and strictly monitor use of government funds;
- To **probe and seek accountability** from digital platforms that allow for dissemination of disinformation and hate speech and violate data privacy;
- To **enforce transparency** in work of the COMELEC and other government agencies;
- To **develop policy that supports investments** for digital literacy and fact-checking;
- To **undertake legislative inquiries on use of government resources**, and on data-sharing and transparency mechanisms on the part of algorithms of social media companies;
- To **promote observance of proper ethics** of government officials;
- To **focus more on optimizing the current policies** to strengthen and empower citizens of their social media rights and responsibilities, particularly in an environment that optimizes technology, macro and micro influencers, and even artificial intelligence in the proliferation of false information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

- For the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to **revisit its mandate and to take a more active stance** in regulating business practices of social media companies;
- For the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) to **strengthen its efforts to inculcate a sense of history** among the people to counter revisionist narratives;
- For the Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission (HRVMC) to **preserve the memories** of atrocities of the Martial Law regime;
- For the National Center for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) to reinforce culture of excellence and cultural enrichment as culture should evolve and not devolve;
- For education departments, Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to be **involved in policy making of integrating media and information literacy**, and voter and democracy education;
- For all concerned government agencies to **raise awareness about gender equality and rights**, and empower women and other gender minorities on how to protect their personal data and defend their rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE COMMISSION OF ELECTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

- To **advocate for comprehensive electoral reforms** to include undertaking review and providing recommendations for a campaign finance law that will cover monitoring of online trolls and tracking of social media pages used by candidates during and outside of election period;
- To **consider a policy to support** the funding of an open platform and network of political parties, CSOs, and universities on fact-checking and for social media fact checking groups;
- **Strengthen collaboration** with civil society, media, academe and provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to the efforts of the Commission to fight disinformation.

TO MEDIA PRACTITIONERS, ACADEME, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- To **strengthen fact-checking collaborations**, especially ground-level initiatives;
- To **develop consensus**, foster unity among various CSOs and establish advocacy networks to bring legitimacy to their work from implementing short-term to long-term strategies such as on media literacy, infrastructure development, and advocacy on legislation;
- To undertake actions to **remain the voters' source of trustworthy election related-facts**;
- To **lead in organizing voters** to become a network of truth advocates and fact warriors to counter the networks of fake news purveyors;
- To **regularly conduct studies and research** to support advocacy work to fight disinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS/COMPANIES

- To **conduct independent human rights impact assessments** and the results should be made public;
- To **be transparent in all aspects of business**, from content moderation, algorithm impacts, data processing, to integrity policies;
- **Protect users' right to privacy**;
- **Strengthen fact-checking collaboration** with various civil society organizations, media outlets, the commission on elections, among others.

MEMBERS

OF THE MISSION



Hon. Maria Chin Abdullah

Member of Parliament of Malaysia

Member of APhR

Maria Chin Abdullah became a Member of Parliament after winning the Petaling Jaya constituency seat in May 2018. She is the Deputy Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group, Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDGs). She is presently co-convenor for the Parliamentary Caucus on Multi-Party Parliamentary Democracy. Maria has been a women's rights activist for over 30 years, playing a key role in advocating for gender equality. Her work is grounded in the realities of marginalized communities, low-income women and indigenous communities. She is a strong advocate for women's political participation, electoral and institutional reform and led the massive Bersih 4 & Bersih 5 rallies for free and fair elections. Just before the Bersih 5 rally, Maria was detained without trial under Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA) for 11 days in solitary confinement. Maria hails from Kampar, Perak, attended the Assunta Secondary School in Petaling Jaya, Selangor and obtained BSc Applied Economics from the University of East London and MSc Urban Planning from the University of London.



Hon. Pannika Wannich

Former Member of Parliament of Thailand

Member of APhR

Pannika Wanich was a member of Thailand's House of Representatives. She was also the Vice Chair for the Commission of Foreign Affairs and the Commission of Laws, Justice, and Human Rights. Pannika joined the Future Forward Party as a Spokesperson and Director of Communications in late May 2018. She obtained MSc in Global Politics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Prior to entering her political career, Pannika worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Voice TV. She is known for her TV commentary on International Affairs and political analyses.



Hon. Kelvin Yii

Member of Parliament of Malaysia

Member of APhR

Kelvin Yii is a Malaysian politician from the Democratic Action Party (DAP), a component party of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) opposition coalition. He has served as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Bandar Kuching since May 2018 and Chair of the Health, Science and Innovation Select Committee since January 2021. He has also served as the Youth Chief or known as the Chief of the Youth Wing namely Democratic Action Party Socialist Youth (DAPSY) since March 2022.

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