

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

L-iSpeaker

The Speaker

MaltMUN 2018

Universal Deceit: Control, ALT, Delete

Speech delivered by the Honourable Anglu Farrugia

Speaker of the House of Representatives

Parliament of Malta

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Valletta

*Esteemed guests,
Participants,*

As the 2018 Malta Model United Nations Society Conference comes to its closing session, I am pleased to declare that the MaltMUN has once again successfully delivered an outstanding 3-day conference discussing central topics and issues of common concern. As in the past years, MaltMUN provided its participants with an excellent opportunity to enrich their knowledge portfolio on matters of an international nature, whilst further sharpening their oratory and diplomatic skills. The format, structure and content of the committee sessions reflect the UN's working methods and thus serve as an all-inclusive learning experience for its participants.

I am delighted that the House of Representatives has for the fourth consecutive year hosted the MaltMUN Annual Conference. As Speaker of the House of Representatives I strongly believe in the importance of providing young people with the tools and opportunities to further develop inter and intra-personal skills and ultimately help them transform into the leaders of tomorrow.

This year's topic **Universal Deceit; Control, ALT, Delete**, is a very interesting and central topic to ongoing regional and international affairs. The internet is now part and parcel of every aspect of our lives. From one simple device, our mobile phones, we are able to enter into an infinite world of knowledge, interactions and data. With just one swipe we travel back and forth between local news and international affairs, and between tabloid gossip and investigative journalistic articles. As quoted by the late Prof. Stephen Hawking, "*We are all now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain*"¹. Our posts, searches and uploads are now part of a unique virtual human dimension. The myriad of opportunities that dawned with the spread of the internet brought revolutionary changes to the way we interact and receive information. Whilst recognizing the positive contribution the internet had to facilitate human interaction and the exchange of knowledge, it is important to also recognize that it also transported negative streams of deceit. Presently we are living in an info-Babylonia of facts, counter-facts and conspiracy theories.

The fabrication of news, dubious posts and the wave of politically laden articles disguised as news, are an everyday occurrence. As soon as we wake up in the morning and log in on our social media accounts, we are presented with various information about local and international news. As we get out of bed and switch on our laptops or TV, we are again bombarded with a tidal wave of information, paid adverts and algorithmic search engines that 'facilitate', or dare I say manipulate our research. This wave is further echoed through the use of hashtags to attract attention and accompanying media hypes. Sometimes social initiatives that start on virtual platforms have a direct impact in real life and transform into historical milestones. One has to only recall the role played by social media during the Arab Spring and the effects of tweets by world politicians on issues of concern such as climate change and migration.

¹ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/2014/12/02/stephen-hawking-intel-technology/18027597/>

Participants,

It is imperative to question who are the architects designing online content and who contributes to its spread?

Whilst recognizing that the internet provides a platform for all, and is sometimes used by cyber-groups to launch coordinated waves of mis-information, it is important to highlight the role of journalism. Journalists, especially before the use of radio, television or the internet, acted as our windows of knowledge and truth. Despite the digital age, they continue to fulfil this purpose today. However, journalists are nowadays faced with increased pressures to issue the news in the shortest possible time and quickly disseminate it across virtual channels. Journalism today places great attention to contents circulating on social media and personal blog posts of prominent people. This creates a new web of intricate information sources and opportunities for sensationalistic news. Journalists are now on a marathon of information gathering and dissemination. Unfortunately, this marathon, more like a constant breath-taking sprint, overshadows the journalists' capability and responsibility to fact-check and provide trust worthy sources. With the increased competition to secure the biggest number of online readers or Facebook likes, ethical journalism has taken a downward plunge. Accurate fact-checking of sources, reporting of facts by discussing all perspectives and a thorough analysis of the issues at hand are three golden rules of ethical journalism. Regrettably, today, only few journalists employ similar standards. Most journalists jump on scattered rumours or fragmented information snippets and transform them into an exclusive breaking news story. Even when the news reported has been established as untrue, various media houses do not correct their mistake and remain silent in the face of facts. This is a very dangerous game and one which counter-acts the role of journalists as the gateway bridge to informative facts.

Participants,

As you have most probably mentioned during the past days, we are now living in a post-truth era, where the boundary between truth and fiction is blurred and objective facts are less influential to shape public opinions. Appeals to emotions, personal belief and sensationalistic media are having a direct effect on how people digest their news and in turn formulate personal views on issues of common concern. The constant tension between facts and counter-facts, reality and interpretation, creates a bubble of loud noises that are difficult to harmonize in a symphonic orchestra. It is important to highlight that mis-information is not something that can be fixed through simple legislation or technological tools but is rather a social condition that needs constant monitoring and a flexible multi-disciplinary approach. This social phenomenon is contributing to a break-down of trusted information sources and is pushing forward a mentality that promotes quick and brief semi-facts as opposed to more in-depth analysis of an issue.

When it comes to the tools employed to effectively recognize quality information from fabricated news, it is important to reaffirm the role of critical literacy. Through critical literacy a person is equipped with the necessary tools to question the content, the source and the institutional or administrative authority from which it originates. In the world of digital news, critical literacy is given additional layers of analysis as it includes also familiarity with digital features, design and the internet's production and consumption processes. These are important tools that each and every one of us should possess to filter accurate, researched

material from fabricated counter-facts and conspiracy theories. This type of exercise is imperative to ensure citizens, especially influential individuals such as politicians and religious figures, are well informed on a particular issue and do not end up re-posting false and malicious content as established facts. As policy makers we need to develop inclusive frameworks that strike a balance between freedom of speech and content restrictions. Most importantly, we need to equip our societies with inter-personal tools to recognize facts from fiction and refrain from propagating false messages.

It is therefore our shared interest to promote critical literacy at an early stage, and therefore starting at home and in schools, and at different levels through the close collaboration with social media platforms, academics and experts in the field.

Participants,

To conclude, I wish to once more reiterate our shared responsibility to promote fact-checking principles and ensure our sources are genuine and backed by researched and investigative texts. Members of Parliament too should strive further to ensure online presence is conducive to positive outcomes and promote the use of the internet as a peaceful and unifying tool. As Speaker of the House of Malta, I will continue to promote further the importance of honest and fact-based information and emphasize the need to employ a joint holistic approach to counter the universal deceit of the digital age.