

MUNLawS Position Paper

Committee: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Delegation: New Zealand

Topic: Countering Disinformation



New Zealand believes the spread of disinformation to be an increasingly pressing challenge of the modern era. False and manipulated information can destabilize society, reduce trust in institutions and threaten democratic governance. As a small and open island nation with one of the world's highest levels of press freedom and digital connectivity, New Zealand believes that access to accurate and reliable information is crucial for good governance and for protecting the right of freedom of speech set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We, therefore, invite the United Nations, Member States and NGOs to work together with the private sector to protect the authenticity of information and to develop a coordinated global response to this escalating threat.

In recent years, New Zealand has experienced different cases that clearly demonstrate how disinformation threatens both human rights and democratic stability. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, various campaigns spread false narratives about vaccines and safety measures, putting people's safety at real and immediate risk¹. The tragic Christchurch terrorist attacks in 2019² further exposed how radical ideologies can grow online, spread hate and ultimately result in devastating acts of violence. Furthermore, national surveys indicate that over 80% New Zealanders express concern about the spread of misinformation online, pushing the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) to recognize this issue as a threat to national security in 2023.³ New Zealand therefore reiterates its concerns over the role and spread of online misinformation and welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Human Rights Council to address this issue via cooperation and consensus building among nations.

New Zealand believes it is fundamental to adopt an appropriate response to this issue, which has developed into a worldwide threat. New Zealand is ready to act and has already presented the Strengthening Resilience to Disinformation Program, used by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to develop long-term strategies against dangerous information manipulation⁴. We believe, this program will emphasize the importance of engagement and transparency rather than censorship, in full alignment with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act from 1990, which guarantees freedom of expression

¹ "The Battle against the Infodemic Threat." The Battle against the Infodemic Threat – University of Auckland www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2022/10/25/battle-against-infodemic.html

² Jutel, Olivier, and Leon A. Salter. "Platform Imperialism and Disinformation in Aotearoa-New Zealand." *Platforms & Society*, vol. 2, Jan. 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/29768624251325128>

³ "Public Research and Insights into Disinformation." Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), July 2024, www.dPMC.govt.nz/our-programmes/national-security/strengthening-resilience-disinformation/public-research-and-insights-disinformation

⁴ "Strengthening Civil Society Resilience to Mis- and Disinformation in Aotearoa New Zealand." Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), Feb. 2024, www.dPMC.govt.nz/publications/strengthening-civil-society-resilience-mis-and-disinformation-aotearoa-new-zealand

within a democratic society, as well as with New Zealand's broader international human rights commitments⁵. New Zealand also recognizes that countering disinformation must not limit free speech; thus, agreed international guidelines are needed to ensure transparency, supporting a strategy based on openness rather than censorship.

In 2022, former Prime Minister Jacinda Arden stated that "In a disinformation age, we need to learn how to analyze and critique information" calling for global cooperation to protect trust in the press⁶. Building on her vision, our government has declared disinformation as a national security threat and calls for enhanced cooperation among interested parties, including nation states, NGOs and the private sector, to develop shared strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of information, transparency and accountability for dangerous materials circulating online.

New Zealand also recognizes the significant influence of social media companies, big data platforms and algorithm systems in increasing disinformation. As digital technologies evolve, it is fundamental that these actors demonstrate stronger transparency, content moderation and cooperation with governments and international institutions. In New Zealand, there are also ongoing discussions about new safety measures, including a proposal to limit social media use for people under 16⁷. This proposal shows New Zealand's commitment to protect young people from harmful or unsafe online content.

New Zealand respectfully calls upon the Human Rights Council to support the establishment of a UN Global Observatory on Information Integrity, used to monitor disinformation, share technology and best practices among states and the private sector. This mechanism would be fundamental for all states since it would help control our resilience against foreign information manipulation and online hate. Additionally, New Zealand calls for the integration of digital programs within the UN's Agenda 2030 and SDGs as this would help decrease misinformation and increase global defense against it.

New Zealand believes that addressing the issue of disinformation is not only a national matter, but an international objective shared by every country. By promoting the framework proposed, the UN Global Observatory on Information Integrity, all Member States can together monitor and solve the issue of misinformation once for all, and support vulnerable nations in building strength against manipulation and fake news. These initiatives can have powerful impacts since they reaffirm that both democracy and human rights are directly connected to each other. To conclude, if all Member States take action together, the digital space can become a platform for empowerment, dialogue and accountability rather than division and hatred.

⁵ Parliamentary Counsel Office. "New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 No 109 (as at 01 July 2013), Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation." www.legislation.govt.nz, 1990, www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1990/0109/latest/DLM224792.html

⁶ "Harvard Commencement Speech - Democracy, Disinformation and Kindness." *The Beehive*, www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/harvard-commencement-speech-democracy-disinformation-and-kindness

⁷ Corlett, Eva. "New Zealand's Prime Minister Proposes Social Media Ban for Under-16s." *The Guardian*, The Guardian, 6 May 2025, www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/06/new-zealand-pm-luxon-social-media-ban-children

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Topic: The Implications of Plastic Pollution on Human Rights



New Zealand views plastic pollution as a serious environmental and human rights challenge. Plastics harm marine ecosystems, contaminate food and threaten the health and wellbeing of each individual but most importantly the communities who depend on the ocean. As an island nation deeply connected to the Pacific and home to the Māori communities whose identities are closely tied to the environment, New Zealand believes a clean ocean is essential for the protection of basic human rights, including the right to safe food, clean water and health. Thus, we call upon Member States, the United Nations and NGOs to work together with the private sector to reduce plastic pollution and support a global action.

Over the past years, New Zealand has closely observed that plastic pollution poses serious threats to the environment and human health. Microplastics have been found in our ocean, beaches and marine ecosystems. For instance, a scientific study from Auckland University found the presence of microplastics on Auckland beaches to be 50 times higher than how it was previously estimated⁸. Moreover, studies have also detected 11,000 plastic particles per m² in shellfish, indicating that plastic is even entering food chains⁹. These impacts are affecting the Māori community deeply since their lives and cultural practices depend on the ocean. Pollution in popular fishing areas damages sacred environments and weakens cultural connections protected under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹⁰. New Zealand, therefore, restates its deep concerns with plastic pollution and supports the efforts of the Human Rights Council to address this issue through international cooperation.

New Zealand believes it is fundamental to develop a rapid and human rights-based response that can significantly decrease plastic pollution, which has now developed into a global crisis. New Zealand is ready to act and has already implemented strong measures to decrease the use of plastics, including national ban on plastic bags, straws, cutlery and polystyrene packaging. These actions are part of New Zealand's Waste Strategy 2023¹¹, which focuses on circular economy and protecting the environment. By using this strategy, we believe it will significantly strengthen environmental protection and our commitments to human rights. New Zealand also recognizes the importance that while responding to the

⁸ "Microplastics Research Reveals Alarming Pollution Levels on Auckland Beaches - the University of Auckland." www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2023/12/18/microplastics-pollution-auckland-coastal-environment.html

⁹ De Lena, Anna, et al. *Microplastic Contamination in Te Tai Tokerau-Northland (Aotearoa-New Zealand) Beach Sediments*. <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/media/on0lgzyf/microplastic-contamination-in-te-taitokerau-northland-aotearoa-new-zealand-beach-sediments.pdf>

¹⁰ United Nations. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 13 Sept. 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>

¹¹ "Government Waste Work Programme." Ministry for the Environment, 9 Oct. 2025, <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/waste/work-programme-on-waste/>

issue of plastic pollution is important to protect indigenous rights; therefore, many of our principles are guided by Māori principles.

New Zealand also believes that the implications of plastic pollution is not only a national issue but an international one. Therefore, we are continuing to work closely with Pacific Island nations, who like us, are deeply affected by plastic pollution despite contributing the least. Through the Cleaner Pacific 2025¹² initiative, New Zealand supports coastal monitoring and community-based governance since, we believe that Pacific cooperation is essential in order to protect health, the environment and food security. New Zealand also recognizes the fundamental role of global supply chains and industries in generating plastic pollution. As international trade continues to expand, it is essential that private corporations increase their production in environmentally friendly products and adopt stronger transparency on their waste management practices. We believe that private corporations should take complete responsibility on the impact from the products they produce.

New Zealand therefore respectfully calls upon the Human Rights Council to strengthen international cooperation in decreasing the presence of plastic pollution in the oceans and in the environment. We support the work of the International Negotiating Committee¹³ in developing a global treaty on plastic pollution and including human rights and indigenous rights. New Zealand, therefore, proposes the establishment of a Worldwide Special Report on Plastics, where governments and private corporations must every year report on the progress in countering plastic pollution, supporting states struggling and highlighting the experiences of vulnerable communities including indigenous communities and developing states. Additionally, New Zealand proposes that all countries and corporations that reported a percentage of plastic pollution higher than agreed international standards, will be subject to a fine. This funding will then be used for ocean cleaning initiatives and supporting developing nations.

Additionally, New Zealand highlights that cooperation between governments, NGOs, private sector and institutions is urgently required. It is possible to see significant improvements only if governments and corporations start cooperating. To conclude, New Zealand reaffirms that plastic pollution is not only an environmental challenge but a dangerous and direct threat to human rights. Therefore, by promoting transparency, determination and by respecting the indigenous communities, states can protect oceans, natural environments, developing islands states and ensure a better and healthier future for the next generations.

¹² *Sustainable Development in the Pacific: Progress and Challenges*,

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/1326_7636_commitment_cleaner-pacific-strategy-2025

¹³ Plastic Pollution Resolution, UNEP www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/what-you-need-know-about-plastic-pollution-resolution