



WHO Director-General's introductory remarks at the UNGA side event on infodemic management

WHO, UNICEF, UN Global Pulse, ITU, UNESCO, IFRC and UNDP

23 September 2020

Mr Secretary-General,

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

I would like to start by thanking the governments of Indonesia, Thailand and Uruguay for co-hosting this event.

I also want to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and all of our partners who have been working hard with us to help countries manage the infodemic.

Just as COVID-19 has spread around the world, so too have rumours, untruths, and disinformation. And they can be just as dangerous.

Far too many people have done themselves harm based on falsehoods, self-medicating with toxic chemicals or dangerous medications.

Others have not taken the precautions they should have.

False information has also increased stigmatization, which becomes a barrier to seeking care for those who need it.

In some cases, it has led to violence against health care workers, individuals, or vulnerable groups such as minorities or refugees.

Misinformation also has an impact on trust - trust in science, trust in institutions, and trust in health systems.

In this pandemic, as in all health emergencies, trust and solidarity are critical. Everything that undermines that puts lives at risk.

But we can bring this virus under control if people have accurate, timely information about the basic measures that they can take to protect themselves and others.

Throughout the pandemic, WHO has worked with numerous media and tech companies including Facebook, Google, Instagram, LinkedIn, Messenger, Pinterest, SnapChat, Tencent, TikTok, Twitter, Viber, WhatsApp, YouTube and more to counter myths and rumour with reliable, evidence-based advice.

I would like to thank the leaders of all these institutions – we have been working very closely with them – for their leadership in fighting misinformation and funding the Solidarity Fund.

As you know, WHO is now involved in a global effort to develop a vaccine.

And yet, even if we are successful with the science, even the most effective vaccine will fail if the public does not have confidence in it.

This is why it is so important we work together to provide the public and policymakers with accurate information and stop the spread of falsehoods that undermine this response.

Today, WHO and our partners are calling on all countries to put in place national action plans to promote science-based health information and to combat misinformation.

And we call on the media, technology companies, civil society, researchers, and people everywhere to keep the infodemic from spreading.

Because now more than ever, the truth matters.

I thank you.

Subscribe to the WHO newsletter →