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2021 Joint Declaration on Politicians and Freedom of Expression

Today, the specialised mandates tasked with promoting and protecting freedom of expression at the UN, OAS, OSCE and African Commission launched their annual statement, the Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression. The Joint Declaration, which was drafted with the assistance of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), sets out standards which States and a range of non-State actors should respect regarding communications by politicians and senior public officials.

“The 2021 Joint Declaration breaks important new ground in several respects”, said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. “It includes a significant focus on the need for different actors – including States, politicians, social media companies and the media – to take steps to address political speech which promotes intolerance or hatred, or which constitutes disinformation, such as calling on political parties to adopt codes of conduct for officials and candidates and for the media to implement policies on how they report on such statements when they are disseminated by politicians.”

Some of the many specific standards in the Joint Declaration include the following:

- States should never try to influence the views of the public for party political purposes.
- Elected officials, candidates for elected office and senior public officials should be required to make transparent asset declarations.
- Politicians and public officials should treat participants at press conferences equitably and with respect.
- Social media companies should allow users to opt out of having their personal data used for purposes of targeted political advertising.
- The media should disclose any conflicts of interest which may affect the way they report on an issue.

The Joint Declaration is available at: <https://www.law-democracy.org/live/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Joint-Declaration.2021.pdf>.

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