



CONCEPT NOTE

Expert Presentation Meeting

Organized by the Information for All Programme on:

“DarkNet: the New Societal, Legal, Technological and Ethical Challenges”

14 September 2017

UNESCO Headquarters, Room IV

10h00 – 13h00

SUMMARY

Not all content available in cyberspace can be accessed using standard search engines. In reality, there is an entire online parallel world – commonly called the DarkNet, which is in reality describing the part of the Internet that can be accessed anonymously and is frequently used for the purpose of illegal activities, including exchanges of sensitive data, pornography, drug hubs, weapons trafficking etc. It is also more and more used by terrorist and extremist groups promoting racism, hatred and violent extremism.

Accessing the DarkNet requires specific software, configurations or authorizations. DarkNet websites are accessible only through special software such as TOR (“The Onion Router”) and I2P (“Invisible Internet Project”). Identities as well as locations of DarkNet users stay anonymous and cannot be tracked due to the layered encryption system. The DarkNet is therefore a complex phenomenon that is constantly evolving, thus implying a number of privacy and security issues and needs to be tackled by a holistic and contextualized approach.

The Expert Presentation Meeting, organized by the Information for All Programme (IFAP) and the Knowledge Societies Division of UNESCO under the theme “***DarkNet: the New Societal, Legal, Technological and Ethical Challenges***” will take place on 14th September 2017 at UNESCO’s Headquarters, in Room IV with simultaneous interpretation in English and in French. It will allow discussing challenges of cyber threats and ways to improve national strategies through innovative and global solutions in that respect.

In the presence of the representatives of Permanent Delegations and Observers Missions to UNESCO, as well as a number of outside UNESCO participants interested in this subject, the Meeting will be an opportunity to enable the public to understand better the challenges described above.

BACKGROUND

With its unique mandate in the field of education, sciences, culture and communication, UNESCO has long recognized the power of information and knowledge as a vehicle for positive social transformation, innovation and sustainable development. With the digital revolution and the expansion of Information technologies (ICTs), new horizons are constantly arising for improving lives and livelihoods of people, promoting, inclusion, dialogue mutual understanding and diversity of cultural expressions. Despite these undoubtable potentials, there are equally many risks and

challenges to address, including the ethical and legal dimensions of the Information and Knowledge Societies.

The Meeting also reflects UNESCO/IFAP active engagement in the field of fighting radicalization leading to violence of youth in cyberspace. In order to raise awareness about this problem, IFAP has organized several major international conferences that resulted in specific outcome documents and initiatives relevant for establishing effective measures to preventing online radicalization, and stimulate the use of Internet for peace, understanding and inter-cultural dialogue.

The first-ever UNESCO conference on this topic: *“Youth and the Internet: Fighting Radicalization and Extremism”* was held in June 2015 in Paris. It was followed by the international conference *“Internet and the Radicalization of Youth: Preventing, Acting and Living together”* organized by UNESCO and the Governments of Quebec and Canada in November 2016. The third conference, organized in May 2017, in Lebanon, on *“Youth and Information and Communication Technologies: Preventing Violent Extremism in Cyberspace”* addressed during the session on “The DarkNet – Risks and Opportunities”, the legal and ethical concerns about this emerging global problem.

CONTEXT

A platform for Violent Extremism

The DarkNet and extremist groups are more and more closely affiliated. The conventional Surface Web is becoming too risky for anonymity-seeking entities. In contrast, on the DarkNet, decentralized and anonymous network facilitates evading arrest and the closure of terrorist platforms. Extremist groups and ISIS have sought shelter in the anonymous cloud of the DarkNet in growing number. The hidden networks are used to distribute material for recruitment, to provide training and information to fellow terrorists, to radicalize and spread propaganda, to raise funds and to coordinate actions and attacks. Through encrypted jihadi forums, chat rooms and messaging apps, the DarkNet has become ISIS’ number one recruiting platform.

Ethical implications

The anonymity provided by the DarkNet also gives cover for people in repressive regimes that need the protection of technology in order to surf the Web, access censored content and otherwise exercise their genuine right to free expression. In non-democratic countries, the presence of anonymity is the only way that people can voice contrary points of view. Thus, the alarming infiltration of Internet-savvy terrorists to the “virtual caves” of the DarkNet should trigger an international search for a solution to combat illegal and nefarious activities, but one that should not shutter anonymity networks as it will be costly to those people that genuinely benefit from these encrypted systems.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

- Increase awareness about the evolving dynamics of the DarkNet.
- Identify strategies and policy responses to these challenges.
- Consider ways for UNESCO to reinforce its work in that area.