Beirut, 22 April 2020 – As the Lebanese government battles the COVID-19 pandemic, a dangerous epidemic of misinformation has been circulating through different communication channels and in communities since the beginning of the outbreak preventing people to heed official health warnings. To counter the growing scourge of fake news, the Ministry of Information is taking further steps and announced today a new communications response initiative in partnership with WHO, UNICEF and UNDP to flood media and social media with facts and science.

Minister of Information Dr Manal Abdel Samad stressed the many risks linked to fake news, “Yesterday, the drop of the coronavirus infections was accompanied by a very dangerous rumour, which is the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon. This is a simple sample of misinformation that creates confusion and false hope. Today we announce a new partnership with United Nations organizations WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme to tackle the threat of fake news”. She added, "Our partnership includes several phases: a media campaign that we launched today along with a rumour log and at a later stage a website will be launched to verify information."

Rumours linked to COVID-19 are not only circulating in Lebanon but also across the globe. Conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus and the vaccines being developed to prevent it still arise on a daily basis. Posts or videos that promote unverified treatments and cures have collected thousands of views.

With the support of UNICEF, WHO and UNDP, the Ministry of Information will develop a rumour log to record locally monitored rumours, verify them and provide neutral, accurate, trusted information to each shared rumour. A reporting website will be also available to allow people to report and fact check any news they’ve heard of. A campaign will be disseminating on media and social media widely shared fake news along with their accurate answers.

“The battle against the COVID-19 outbreak is a double-fold struggle with the spread of misinformation that is harmful and could lead to serious repercussions to the health of individuals and their families,” stated Dr Iman Shankiti, WHO Representative in Lebanon. “Together with our United Nations partners and the Ministry of Information we will make sure to counter any and every rumour with solid facts putting the health of the public in the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

“Misinformation leaves children, families and communities, unprotected and vulnerable to the disease, and it also spreads fear and stigmatization”, said Yukie Mokuo, UNICEF Lebanon Representative. “This is a time for science and solidarity. Our collaboration today with the ministry of Information is more crucial than ever to spread the correct information and make it loud and clear among families to always consult reliable and trusted sources”.

“As with the courageous front-line healthcare workers engaged against the spread of the virus,

we can all join the fight against COVID 19 by promoting facts and science and embracing hope over despair and divisions. As part of our efforts to counter fake news, we have launched with LBCI the “Count to 10” campaign earlier last month and today’s partnership with the Ministry of Information, UNICEF and WHO marks another milestone in strengthening our collective efforts to combat misinformation, and rumors” said Celine Moyroud, UNDP Resident Representative.

To combat misinformation related to COVID-19, think carefully before sharing any news. Verify the source and its evidence, double-check with trusted sources like the websites of the Ministry of Information
,
Ministry of Public Health
,
WHO
,
UNICEF
and
UNDP
among others.

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