



YOUR X IS YOUR SAY

UPDATE ON DIGITAL DISINFORMATION INITIATIVE

5 MAY 2019

Centurion – A month after the launch of a pilot project to combat digital disinformation, the Electoral Commission has received more than 70 complaints via the online reporting platform www.Real411.org.za

Of the over 70 complaints received, 34 have been finalised and the remainder continue to be processed as they are received. To date no instances of deliberate disinformation have been found by the committee set up to assess complaints.

A number of the complaints, while not disinformation, have related to the tone and content of messages by political parties and contestants which have the ability to cause offence and/or undue political tension and rivalry. In these cases, the Electoral Commission is addressing these complaints with the relevant political parties.

Several complaints refer to news articles or opinion pieces on news media websites. Complainants have been referred to the Press Council where appropriate. However, it is important to note that journalists reporting on what politicians say is not disinformation. A free press is critical for free and fair elections and encourages accountability and keeps the electorate informed.

Another area of potential confusion relates to the nuances of satire. Satire has an important role to play in political commentary and the Electoral Commission is committed to ensuring that free speech is not undermined in this disinformation initiative. However, in using original images of political party material, there can be confusion as to what emanates from the political party and what does not and

publishers of satirical material would be well served to indicate content as satire to mitigate people reporting such to the online platform.

Ms Janet Love, Vice-Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of South Africa, says: “The complaints received have served to highlight the challenges of combating disinformation and the continuing need for education regarding what constitutes disinformation. At the time the number complaints and interactions demonstrates that South Africans are taking the time to engage with political messages and reporting in digital media.”

Mr William Bird, director of Media Monitoring Africa which is partnering with the IEC in the initiative, says: “We applaud the IEC for launching this world first mechanism for empowering the public and helping people combat disinformation. For a platform that is just in its infancy we have seen already great interest and support for what we are trying to do which can inspire us all as we build our democracy.”

With just days to go before the elections, the Electoral Commission and Media Monitoring Africa continue to advise all South Africans to cast a critical eye on what they read and share online, and to continue to report possible disinformation to www.real411.org.za.

The Commission is also grateful for the support and initiatives undertaken by social media platforms – including Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter – to highlight the dangers of fake news and disinformation.

ISSUED BY THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Ensuring free and fair elections

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For media interviews with Electoral Commission officials please email requests to spokesperson@elections.org.za

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