Interviewer: Khrystyna

Participant country: Mauritania

1. First Impressions: What struck you as most interesting and insightful about this interview?
   1. Disinformation is an offense under law.
   2. Government is actively communicating with the public to prevent fake news. Media is powerful to observe government activities.
   3. Falsehoods are sophisticated enough to suspect foreign influence.
2. What existing information threats did the participant identify? (list)
   1. Media try to sell “breaking news”.
   2. Sophisticated falsehoods (deepfakes) disseminated by the local actors.
   3. “Mustache leaks” – attempts to spread disinformation during the elections or discredit the government (spoofing emergency service website and sending fake flood warnings to paralyze the country).
3. What was the most insightful in participant’s description of threats from China?
   1. It is hard to attribute to China. But the level of sophistication, deepfakes, may indicate foreign influence.
4. What needs did the participant identify?
   1. Government needs to communicate with the population – otherwise, there will be rumors.
5. What support did they identify that they would like to see from the US?
   1. NA.

### Interview with MAURITANIA (at ALFS)

* We have an information threats act. It is about the passage of true information.
* I am in charge of the military national emergency response center [KH: might be in charge of a department]. We, officers, interact a lot with the media. To prevent fake news, we are trying to build relations with the media.
* We send information to the population. We do a lot of official communication. We have our own website and other official communications. We give out a lot of information about emergencies – relevant information, contact numbers.
* [Disinformation] is an offense under the law. People will be punished by law for spreading false information. If a person spreads fake news, it is not fine; they would face prison under the current law.
* Police are concerned – develop police-public relationships. We do a lot of work with the communities. Communication between police and the public is very good.
* Community policing – reach the community. They should be able to come to you – full democracy for the people with the people. We cannot create a state separate from the people.
* Rule of law, people are looking inside your government. They can publish a thing against the government. The government is committed to human rights. They can file complaints against the Armed Forces. Media is very powerful. So, we need to work with the media. If someone [in the government] goes against the media, they become a liability.
* We need to advertise. If there is no news, people will work with rumors that distort reality. We need to be giving correct information. That will protect them from fake news.
* In 1999, we had [major riots](https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/mauritan.html) because of misinformation and disinformation about a person who died in police custody. Police killed 2 more. There was riot, people breaking into banks, supermarkets, burning cars. They were on the brink of attacking armed forces. We gave them a picture of what was happening. We talked to them. We said that we have many more weapons than you. We want to maintain neutrality and will use force only out of necessity to maintain democratic unity. If you [the people] take arms, we will use force. So please don’t use force. We are a democratic country. Police should safeguard the communities.
* There are a few exceptions to the rule – trust of population.
* Within the country, we had a drug problem. They are always trying to bring AF down, to raid somebody’s house. So much propaganda – but people do not believe them.
* We talk about misinformation and explain accountability for your actions.
* We have an advanced flood watch and a heavy rain warning. We have torrential rains. Then the public sector doesn’t go to work, schools are closed. They are trying to impersonate the government – using our insignia on a fake website and issuing fake flood warnings.
* Fake news is spread by rogue actors. For example, during elections, we intercepted attempts to overturn the government. There was a lot of communication about the prime minister and his wife. We call this a “mustache leak” because it is guys with mustaches who do that. They wanted the government to go down. The government lost six to nothing, went down to zero [KH: not sure what he meant, but he repeated it twice]. The people were fed up as it was impossible to tell what was true or not.
* The reason why the government lost is because they got in trouble with the media. We made media strong enough.
* Not all journalists are fake; some are good. But they always attempt to sell their newspapers. So, we have to be careful. We have to be sensitive when we counter information that might not be true. Front pages and breaking news are often fake. but people believe it, and then it is too late.
* It is not China that is doing it. We had deepfakes that were done instead of the country, but they had to get help from other countries – like Israel. It is impossible to do locally. You need a lot of money to intercept conversations about everybody.