

Global Fact 7 - Opening remarks (June 22, 2020)

Baybars Orsek

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening!

Welcome to the first-ever virtual edition of the Global Fact conferences!

Today, we are reaching out to you from St. Petersburg, Florida, the headquarters of Poynter Institute, home of the International Fact-Checking Network!

International Fact-Checking Network, the premier alliance of fact-checking organizations, is proud to organize the seventh edition of Global Fact conferences. Since 2014, Global Fact has been the annual and must participate gathering of fact-checkers of the world.

In 2014, a room of fact-checkers in London rooted the origins of IFCN by convening for the first time and committing to build a community to learn from one another.

Since then, the fact-checking community has been able to build the Global Fact conferences as what it is today for fact-checkers and advocates of good information.

Over the last 6 years, Global Fact has traveled around the world. After the first two gatherings in London, hundreds of fact-checkers met in Buenos Aires, Madrid, Rome, and Cape Town. Last year 241 participants from 44 different countries traveled to Cape Town, the first one held in Africa.

While we were planning to meet in Oslo for this year's conference, COVID-19 interrupted our plans and forced us to meet virtually. In order to provide a sense of clarity and certainty, we decided to cancel the in-person part of this year's conference back in early April.

The decision surely was not one we took lightly. Today, we are opening the first-ever, virtual Global Fact conference in the form of week-long festivities to celebrate our work and credit the heroes of this community.

In the next 5 days, you will hear from 102 unique speakers in more than 20 different livestreamed publicly available panels, followed by two days next week scheduled with deep-dive conversations, workshops, and trainings organized by more than 50 facilitators, exclusively for the 607 registered participants of this virtual conference.

Our speakers will be participating in livestreamed panels from 16 different time zones and 43 different countries. We have designed these live panels not only considering our

local time here in the East coast of the United States, but also mornings in Africa, Europe, India, and the Asia Pacific.

We are confident that we have come up with a format that will allow us to honor our tradition and commitment to learning from each other while staying safe, healthy, and hopeful..

So while it won't be the wonderful environment in Oslo -- until next year -- we hope you enjoy the largest and the longest Global Fact conference in the comfort of your homes.

Founded in late 2015, the IFCN has gone from being an aspiring initiative to an essential reference point and go-to resource for fact-checkers and friends of fact-checkers.

The fact that this conference is live streamed on multiple destinations and followed by thousands of viewers in addition to more than 600 hundred registered online participants, is a testament to this visibility and relevance of this network.

Fact-checkers have been the champions of holding the powerful in their societies accountable and helping users to sort truth from fiction online. According to the Duke Reporters Lab, 280 organizations from 80 countries, are publishing regular fact checks.

91 of those fact-checking organizations from 53 countries are verified signatories to IFCN's Code of Principles. The criteria and values set out in the Code has proven to be an industry-standard in fact-checking.

While fact-checking keeps growing, so does our commitment to the integrity of our Code of Principles.

We recently updated the Code to strengthen the vetting process by introducing longer publishing requirements for application, adherence to corrections policies for the parent organizations and larger and randomized samples to judge the non-partisanship in fact checks by our 130 and growing independent assessors across the globe.

I encourage you to help us in our commitment to hold ourselves accountable as the fact-checking community by monitoring our process and fact-checking the fact-checkers in a time where facts matter more than ever and the need for trust and transparency is increasing every day.

We are living through unprecedented times. Bad information has always been a problem, but its impact on our lives is increasing exponentially.

Health-related falsehoods have proven to have fatal consequences. COVID-19 has introduced the first-ever infodemic to our lives. In a time of uncertainty, the international

fact-checking community rapidly mobilized and brought forces together to provide reliable and accurate information to citizens of the world.

The IFCN initiated the CoronaVirusFacts alliance, which has published more than 7,000 fact checks around coronavirus related falsehoods. Coordinated by my colleague Cristina Tardaguila, the alliance showed that our global fact-checking community has the capacity to position itself as a first responder during such information disorders.

The IFCN has built a database of fact checks not only in English but also in Spanish, Portuguese and Hindi. Launched the first-ever global fact-checking chatbot in one of the most used messaging apps in multiple languages, invited researchers to study the spread of mis-and-disinformation across borders and languages, and raised millions of dollars from Internet companies to support fact-checkers with resources and capacity during these unprecedented times.

Fact-checkers don't necessarily rely on traditional media to disseminate their work anymore. In a time where falsehoods travel faster than the truth, scalability has risen as a key priority for this community.

Our work has never been more crucial to tackle misinformation. Reuters Institute's recent digital news report indicates that the coronavirus crisis has substantially increased news consumption for mainstream media in almost every country compared to the pre-pandemic era.

Consumption of printed newspapers has fallen as lockdowns hurt physical distribution, so there is a strong trend towards an all-digital media future.

People switch to messaging apps and online groups to communicate and share information with others, eventually being more vulnerable to unchecked and potentially bad information.

The subsequent increase in online news and information consumption makes scalability the leading challenge as fact-checkers face an unprecedented volume of coordinated and organic inauthentic behavior on social media. .

According to our newest state of the fact-checkers report, more organizations find it sustainable to conduct their activities as for profit organizations and larger media companies are launching fact-checking units to empower their newsrooms with new skill sets.

Once a practice within journalism focusing on generating impact through traditional media's amplification capacity, the fact-checking community now puts its ducks in order to tackle the misinformation problem on the Internet scale.

We may not have the technical solution yet to match every falsehood in the globe with fact checks, but we have the responsibility and experience to surface the right questions and influence decision making processes of Internet companies to promote good information over bad ones. Efforts around automation and impact-oriented tactics are now embraced by a growing number of fact-checking organizations.

As excellently put by my predecessor Alexios Mantzaris in Rome two years ago during his last Global Fact opening remarks, the fact-checkers are no-longer a fresh-faced movement, but the one that works for the future of the Internet.

Year by year, we see the work of fact-checkers become a bigger part of our daily news consumption. Fact checks now have more visibility and impact on search engines, social networks, and even on messaging apps.

The International Fact-Checking Community is committed more than ever to help the Internet companies for their efforts to surface more authoritative sources on their platforms while holding them accountable for their actions, or the lack of.

It should be fair to say that our work has never been more scrutinized and microscoped. Fact-checking found itself under the spotlights during congressional hearings here in the United States, parliamentary sessions in Brazil, courtrooms from Germany to the Philippines, and in regulation efforts pretty much around the world.

Coming from a country that doesn't share a matching democracy tradition, I'm deeply concerned for the people doing the good fight in different settings where the boundaries of political power are a bit on the grayer side. I and my partner in crime Cristina Tardaguila have traveled to, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Lebanon, India, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore and met with hundreds of fact-checkers to hear from them and offer our resources to support their work, while many conversations have deeply been US centric.

When the biggest revenue and support lines for fact-checkers turn out to be investments by Internet companies, sustainability has become the elephant in the room we need to address when at a time newsrooms have been deeply impacted by layoffs and furloughs amid the economic crisis which the media is in.

On the other hand, governments have set up quote and quote 'fake news centers' and marginalizing real fact-checkers. It's not surprising to see that those centers often aim to control the flow of information and suppress dissidents and their right to speech and assembly while discrediting the practice of fact-checking in the public level due to their ill-intended approaches around misinformation.

It's also remarkable to see that fact-checking has not only been attacked by governments or politicians, but also been emulated, even in mature democracies.

The ability to tell the difference between genuine fact-checking and the ill-intended ones rests on the importance of holding them accountable and recognizing the ones that do this practice in a non-partisan and independent manner.

Transparency and accountability in our work should set out the highest standards to earn the trust of our audiences and marginalize partisans and masqueraders before the eyes of the public

Coming from a non-profit and political fact-checking background, I see myself obligated to remind the fact-checkers to always remember our commitment to hold the powerful in the society accountable for their claims and actions and build a community around truths to drive social progress through media literacy and education.

People around the world are being exposed to falsehoods, conspiracy theories, and misinformation is not always coming from the bottom. It often does come from the top, too. It's not as easy as it was in the past to say authoritarian leaders in developing countries deceive their constituents and mobilize supporters. Many mature democracies also struggle from misleading political claims and the lack of public awareness on the need of fact-checked information.

The intersection of user-generated misinformation and politics can be found in content moderation debates. The fact-checking community has been at the center of discussions around content moderation and growingly being instrumentalized for the sake of political and cultural debates around the world.

As fact-checking has become a household name recently, I hope this conference will help to set the record straight and show who those people are and what they do and what they don't and whether they are agents of censorship or promoters of truth working under tough circumstances.

You will hear from the pioneers and thought leaders of this field. Facilitators of change and innovation will walk you through the horizons of fact-checking. I'm grateful for every one of our speakers you will be hearing from in the next 7 days.

Conferences are about their participants. What you will see over the course of this virtual Global Fact, is the outcome of the work done by this community. I salute every single fact-checker who has put their souls and minds to this virtual gathering by participating in a number of rehearsals and tech checks to share their know-how with their fellow colleagues.

I appreciate the time and dedication you have not spared from others. We have shown that we still can care for each other even though we had to meet virtually from different parts of the world.

Before I leave the floor, well, not the floor, but the screen to Bill Adair, the director of Duke Reporters Lab, a.k.a the Dean of fact-checking, I'd like to thank Cris for her passionate dedication to this community, Harrison for his quality reporting and journalism, and Ferdi for coming to our rescue when we most needed.

I couldn't be prouder and fortunate to work with such a team along with the broader Poynter family. It goes without saying that being able to rely on the experience and wisdom of our advisory board during challenging times was also a blessing.

A special thanks goes to our funders of Global Fact 7; Luminate Group, Google News Initiative, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, National Endowment for Democracy, and Duke Reporters Lab who made this conference and our overall activities possible.

Now, if I may, I'd like to turn to Bill and ask him to take it from here.

Bill, good to see you!

informal handoff to Bill

Bill Adair

Good morning! Good afternoon! Good evening! Good night!

I'm going to fact-check my opening remarks with this antique Pants on Fire button.

It's great to be here in Oslo! (Pants on Fire!)

I love Oslo because I've always loved the great plastic furniture I buy from your famous furniture store IKEA! (Pants on Fire!)

I am accompanied today by this Norwegian gnome, which I know is very much a symbol of your great country! (Pants on Fire!)

I'm actually here in my home office in Durham, North Carolina,, but thanks to the magic of pixels and...Baybars!...I'm with you! I'm going to talk briefly this morning about community.

Back in 2014, when we started planning the first meeting of the world's fact-checkers, Tom Glayser of the Democracy Fund gave me some important advice. Build a community, Tom said, not an association. The way to help the fact-checking movement was to be inviting and encourage journalists to start fact-checking. We've done that because this meeting, and our group, keeps getting larger. You could even say that ... fact-checking keeps growing!

And as a bonus, we also managed to establish the Code of Principles, which provides an important incentive for transparency and fairness in your fact-checking.

My favorite example of the IFCN's spirit of community is the simplest: our email threads. They are often amazing! A fact-checker will write with a problem they are having and community members from all over the world will respond with suggestions and even help them do the work.

Did you see the amazing one a couple of months ago? Samba of Africa Check wrote about a video that claimed to show violence against Africans in China. He knew it was fake but was not sure where it was from, so he circulated the video by email. That led to a remarkable exchange.

A coordinator from Witness in the US said the video had been posted on Reddit, suggesting it was from New York. Jacques Pezet of Liberation in France took the image and used Google Maps to find the New York intersection where it was filmed. And then Gordon Farrer, an Australian researcher, used Google Street View to identify the business – a dental office called Brace Yourself.

All of this showed up in Samba's fact-check in Africa Check in Senegal.

Amazing! All the product of our community!

Another great example: the tremendous work by the IFCN bringing together the world's fact-checkers to debunk falsehoods about COVID-19. The Corona Virus Alliance has now collected more than 6,000 fact-checks. It, too, is a product of community, organized by Baybars and Cris Tardaguilla.

Finally, I want to give some shoutouts to two marvelous people who embody this commitment. Peter Cunliffe-Jones has been an amazing builder who has done extraordinary things to bring fact-checking to Africa. And Laura Zommer has been tireless helping dozens of fact-checkers get started in Latin America.

Together, they show what's wonderful about the IFCN: they believe in our important journalism and they have given their time and energy to help it grow.

Our community grows thanks to these wonderful leaders. I look forward to sharing a glass of wine with them — and you — next year in Oslo!

Neil Brown

THANKS, BILL. AND THANKS BAYBARS....

AND HELLO TO ALL OF YOU TUNING IN ...AND SIGNING ON FROM XXX COUNTRIES ACROSS MORE THAN 16 TIME ZONES....

I TOO HAD HOPED TO SEE YOU ALL IN OSLO....

ALAS, WE CAN'T BE TOGETHER IN PERSON -- AND I DO HOPE ALL OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES ARE WELL AND TAKING GOOD CARE.

BUT WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO BRING GLOBAL FACT 7 TO YOU WITH A GREAT LINEUP OF PROGRAMS IN A HIGHLY PRODUCED VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE.

GLOBAL FACT HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN INSPIRING -- EVEN MAGICAL -- GATHERING OF TRUE BELIEVERS WHO DO IMPORTANT AND COURAGEOUS WORK TO HELP CITIZENS HOLD THE POWERFUL TO ACCOUNT...

WITH YOUR PARTICIPATION AND SMART CONTRIBUTIONS -- WE HOPE TO CREATE A NEW KIND OF GLOBAL FACT MAGIC ---- ONE THAT ALLOWS MORE OF US THEN EVER TO JOIN IN THE CONVERSATION AND THE CELEBRATION OF OUR WORK...

SO THANK YOU FOR JOINING US... AND PLEASE ACCEPT MY WARM WELCOME TO THE POYNTER INSTITUTE...

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE NEW TO POYNTER, ALLOW ME TO GIVE YOU A BRIEF INTRODUCTION....

POYNTER IS A GLOBAL LEADER IN TRAINING JOURNALISTS...

WE FIGHT FOR FACT-BASED EXPRESSION...

AND WE ADVOCATE FOR EXCELLENCE AND ETHICS IN JOURNALISM.

WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF PROGRAMS, POYNTER SERVES AS A CROSSROADS....

WHERE JOURNALISTS, COMMUNITY ADVOCATES, AND LEADERS OF BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT AND EDUCATION COME TOGETHER AND TALK ABOUT HOW JOURNALISM CAN HELP SOLVE SOME OF SOCIETY'S MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS.....

OUR TEACHING PROGRAMS REACH SOME 60,000 PEOPLE WORLDWIDE EACH YEAR...THROUGH POYNTER'S ONLINE NEWS UNIVERSITY, AND -- BEFORE THE PANDEMIC -- WITH IN-PERSON TEACHING PROGRAMS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND IN MOST REGIONS OF THE WORLD..

YOU KNOW, OF COURSE, THAT POYNTER IS THE HOME OF THE IFCN....

WE HAVE PROUDLY GROWN THE IFCN TEAM FROM ITS SINGLE PIONEER EMPLOYEE, ALEXIOS MANTZARLIS, TO A 4-PERSON TEAM, LED BY BAYBARS AND FEATURING CRIS TARDAGUILA, HARRISON MANTAS AND FERDI OSZOY....OUR COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL FACT-CHECKING IS PERSONIFIED BY THESE AMAZING PROFESSIONALS....

POYNTER IS ALSO THE HOME TO TWO VERIFIED SIGNATORIES OF THE IFCN'S CODE OF PRINCIPLES --

POLITIFACT, WHICH IS THE LARGEST POLITICAL FACT-CHECKING OPERATION IN THE U.S. AND IS AN ORIGINAL SIGNATORY, CONTINUES TO DO CRITICAL WORK AROUND THE PANDEMIC, THE FIGHT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE UNITED STATES AND OF COURSE THE U.S. ELECTIONS COMING IN NOVEMBER....

AND MEDIA WISE, OUR MEDIA LITERACY PROGRAM, IS ONE OF THE NEWEST SIGNATORIES...

LAST YEAR MEDIA WISE REACHED 5 MILLION AMERICAN TEENAGERS ON INSTAGRAM, AND OTHER PLATFORMS, TO HELP THEM SORT OUT FACT-FROM FICTION ONLINE...

MEDIA WISE CREATED A UNIQUE TEEN-FACT-CHECKING NETWORK, WHICH HAS NOW PRODUCED 400 FACT CHECKS...AND IT IS ALSO DOING FACT-CHECK TRAINING AND GETTING ACCURATE INFORMATION TO FIRST-TIME VOTERS ON 10 COLLEGE CAMPUSES -- AND WE'VE STARTED SIMILAR PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS AND THOSE 50-YEARS AND OLDER.

AT POYNTER, WE'RE ALSO TRYING TO ATTACK MISINFORMATION THROUGH ETHICS TRAINING AND AWARENESS

FOR INSTANCE, WE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH YOUTUBE CREATORS -- WHO ARE NOT JOURNALISTS -- TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT THEY HAVE AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY NOT TO PERPETUATE MISINFORMATION IN THEIR CONTENT OR FROM THEIR GUESTS....

SO WE APPROACH THE CONVERSATION ABOUT FACTS AND ACCURACY FROM A VARIETY OF ANGLES....

WE ATTACK MISINFORMATION WITH QUALITY FACT CHECK JOURNALISM

WE DEVELOP INITIATIVES THAT HELP CITIZENS -- YOUNG AND OLD -- VALUE FACTS AND SUPPORT THE WORK OF FACT-CHECKERS

AND WE SEEK INNOVATION TO BATTLE THE FLOW OF MISINFORMATION IN NON-TRADITIONAL WAYS...

LIKE BILL AND BAYBARS, I TOO MARVEL AT HOW LARGE AND INFLUENTIAL OUR COMMUNITY HAS GROWN....

I REMEMBER THE FIRST SUMMIT AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS WITH SOME 50 PARTICIPANTS....THEN WE TALKED ABOUT THE POWER OF VERIFICATION, AND THE BASIC TOOLS TO DEBUNKING BAD INFORMATION...

TODAY, OUR NUMBERS ARE VASTLY BIGGER AND ARE CHALLENGES ARE ALSO ENORMOUS...

WE MEET AMID A GLOBAL PANDEMIC, WITH JOURNALISTS UNDER ATTACK IN ALL REGIONS OF THE WORLD AND WITH THE VIRUS OF MISINFORMATION THREATENING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS...

...THE STAKES OF OUR WORK HAVE NEVER BEEN HIGHER...

WE CONTINUE TO SHOW THAT WE ARE UP TO THE CHALLENGE --

OUR ABILITY TO COME TOGETHER WITH AMAZING SPEED AND CREATE AN ALLIANCE THAT HAS CHECKED MORE THAN 7,000 CORONAVIRUS CLAIMS....REFLECTS THAT GROWTH AND POWER...IT IS NOT JUST INSPIRING -- IT IS ACTUALLY HELPING PEOPLE....

SO AS WE EMBARK ON CONVERSATIONS THIS WEEK...ALLOW ME A FEW BRIEF OBSERVATIONS:

FIRST, OUR WORK EXPOSING FALSEHOODS AND PHONY CLAIMS IS VITAL...

BUT IN ADDITION TO BEING GOALKEEPERS AGAINST FALSEHOODS, LET'S PLAY MORE OFFENSE AND REACHOUT TO OUR AUDIENCES ON THE FRONT END WITH STORIES ABOUT WHAT IS VERIFIED AND TRUE. LET'S PROVIDE RELIABLE SOURCES UPFRONT SO THAT THE CITIZENS ARE LESS SUSCEPTIBLE TO BAD ACTORS AND MANIPULATION.

SECOND, MANY FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS LACK THE RESOURCES TO THRIVE, AND THE COMMUNITY MUST CONSIDER HOW TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, WHETHER ITS COMBINING EFFORTS TO FIGHT CENSORSHIP OR CONFRONT THREATS TO OUR JOURNALISTS...

BUT THERE ARE ALSO SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FACT-CHECKING , MADE POSSIBLE BY THE PLATFORMS AND PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS...

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT NEWS ORGANIZATIONS THAT ENJOY FINANCIAL SUCCESS, REINVEST THE PROCEEDS TO EXPAND FACT-CHECKING, PARTICULARLY AT A TIME WHEN ELECTIONS ARE UNDER THREAT FROM CORRUPT, AUTHORITARIAN POLITICIANS AND STATE-SPONSORED CYBER ATTACKS

LASTLY, WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WORK REQUIRES HUMILITY AND SELF-CARE...

OUR JOURNALISM IS DIFFICULT, STRESSFUL AND WE ARE HUMAN. WE WILL MAKE MISTAKES, AND WHEN WE DO, WE SHOULD MAKE THINGS RIGHT AND MOVE ON...THAT'S A KEY COMPONENT OF THE CREDIBILITY AND TRUST THAT WE PROMOTE TO OUR AUDIENCES..

AND BEYOND THE OBVIOUS HEALTH RISKS, WE MUST SUPPORT OUR JOURNALISTS AND ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO ENSURE THAT WE CAN BATTLE ON FOR THE LONG TERM....

OUR WORK HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT --

I WISH YOU A WONDERFUL AND PRODUCTIVE GLOBAL FACT 7, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU IN PERSON SOON