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Big Tech: New Internet Guidelines

In a press conference on November 27 at Westminster (in the UK), Members of the 'International Grand Committee' on Disinformation and 'Fake News' signed a declaration on the Principles of the Law Governing the Internet. Canadian parliamentarians joined six other nations in late November to sign a ceremonial declaration on Internet guidelines. The International Principles for the Law Governing the Internet, as it was dubbed by the inter-parliamentary group, is the formal product of the committee's hearings in London. Canada's signatory, Conservative MP and chair of the Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics committee, Bob Zimmer, was joined by his fellow committee members, Liberal MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith and NDP ethics critic Charlie Angus.

According to an article in iPolitics on the subject:

Twenty-four members representing nine international parliaments took part in hearings throughout the day. Zimmer's counterparts from Argentina, Brazil, Ireland, Latvia, Singapore and the U.K. each signed the declaration of laws governing the Internet. The agreement's principles are not legally binding, but serve to put Big Tech on notice. The seven signatories made five declarations, including:

- The Internet is global and law relating to it must derive from globally agreed principles;
- The deliberate spreading of disinformation and division is a credible threat to the continuation and growth of democracy and a civilizing global dialogue;
- Global technology firms must recognize their great power and demonstrate their readiness to accept their great responsibility as holders of influence;
- Social media companies should be legally liable to act against known sources of harmful and misleading content on their platforms, and should be regulated to ensure they comply with this requirement; and
- Technology companies must demonstrate their accountability to users by making themselves fully answerable to national legislatures and other organs of representative democracy.

Central to the committee's discussions is the role Facebook plays in spreading disinformation. The committee had hoped the social media network's founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, would appear to testify, as he did to the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and the European Parliament earlier this year, but he refused multiple invitations. The committee didn't take the rejection lightly, despite Richard Allan, Facebook's vice-president of policy solutions, appearing in Zuckerberg's place for several hours of questioning.

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