Opening Speech by Ambassador Thomas Schieb, Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OPCW, on the Occasion of the Panel Discussion "Countering Disinformation: A shared responsibility" held on 23 February 2023

Colleagues, distinguished guests,

A very warm welcome to this event, titled "Countering Disinformation: A Shared Responsibility", jointly hosted by CBWNet and the Permanent Representation of Germany to the OPCW.

"Another event on this topic?", some of you might ask. We asked ourselves the same question, but quickly concluded: yes, absolutely.

This phenomenon is becoming bigger and more problematic rather than gradually disappearing; disinformation campaigns are getting increasingly professional while the costs continue to decrease; in fact, it seems that a sort of industry has emerged, which develops and spreads sophisticated counter-narratives for every need. The recent revelations by an international research collective concerning the group known as "Team Jorge" and its influencing of electoral campaigns have made that clear to us once again.

We particularly notice it here in The Hague – the international organisations who are based here find themselves targeted time and again by disinformation attacks.

To cite just two examples from the recent past: Using a propaganda cocktail of manipulated information and unproven accusations, Russia is sowing doubt in the conclusions of the international team investigating the shooting down of flight MH 17 and in the report by the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team on the chlorine gas attack in Douma.

These are targeted attempts to undermine the professionalism, the independence and thus the credibility of international organisations. False information is being spread intentionally and systematically in order to confuse people, sow doubt and shake civil societies' confidence in the actions and decisions of state and non-state actors. At its heart, this is about discrediting the international rules-based order as being "dominated" or "infiltrated" by the West, about debilitating it with incessant propaganda.

While these attacks predate the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, they have gained a new intensity since. We should have no illusions – these narratives, which sometimes appear downright bizarre, are absolutely having an effect.

Ladies and gentlemen,
It must therefore be our aim to counter these narratives, to expose them for what they are – pure propaganda. Considerable efforts have been undertaken to this end. The German Government, too, has made the topic of "strategic communication" a priority for years now. What is clear is that the better the individual stakeholders – be they governments, representatives of the relevant international organisations, or representatives of the media and civil society – coordinate with and learn from one another, the more effective the counter-

measures and the fight against the phenomenon of disinformation will be. It is thus a question of "shared responsibility", as the title of this event makes clear.

We now want to discuss what experience has been gathered to date in the fight against disinformation and what possibilities there are for effective joint action.

I will now hand over to Professor Thilo Marauhn, of Justus Liebig University Giessen and the Asser Institute in The Hague, who will be hosting our discussion today. But first, allow me to welcome the four panellists:

- Chelsea Fewkes, IIIM
  (Legal Officer with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) of the UN in Geneva, Switzerland)

- Raimonda Miglinaite, EUvsDisInfo
  (Information and Communication Officer – Disinformation Expertise with the East StratCom Task Force, EEAS)

- Fadel Abdul Ghany, Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
  (Founder and CEO of the Syrian Network for Human Rights)

- Chloe Hadjimatheou, BBC
  (Investigative journalist with the BBC)

I hope you enjoy an interesting discussion. On behalf of the German OPCW team, I would like to thank you once again for your interest!