

International day to end impunity for crimes against journalists: joint statement



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Mr Chair,

I make this statement on behalf of the informal OSCE Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, namely Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Our Vienna-based Group has joined with similar Groups of Friends in UNESCO, the United Nations and Council of Europe in Paris, New York, Geneva and Strasbourg to issue a Joint Statement on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) on 2 November.

We welcome the focus given to the Safety of Journalists across international organisations, including the OSCE. Our collective decision adopted in Milan in 2018 on Safety of Journalists was correctly hailed as a pioneering decision. It recognized that for freedom of expression and media freedom, the ability of journalists to carry out their work under safe conditions, without fear of being subjected to repression, abuse and violence is of crucial importance.

In that Decision, we called on participating States to:

Take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists, by ensuring accountability as a key element in preventing future attacks, including by ensuring that law enforcement agencies carry out swift, effective and impartial investigations into acts of violence and threats against journalists, in order to bring all those responsible to justice, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.

However, despite our commitments to fight impunity, too few investigations into crimes committed against journalists and

other media actors in the OSCE region currently lead to accountability for those responsible. The Moscow Mechanism Report, released yesterday, is full of examples of reported human rights violations and abuses committed against journalists, media actors and free media that have gone uninvestigated.

Mr Chair,

The impact of such failure to ensure accountability cannot be overlooked. The prevailing impunity results in a wider impact on media freedom where a climate of fear, intimidation and violence that can lead to self-censorship and enables further crimes against journalists, media actors and repression of the free media as a whole.

The growing threat to the safety of journalists and other media actors and lack of accountability for crimes against journalists and media actors is felt more than ever.

Across the OSCE region incidents of intimidation of journalists and other media continue to multiply, and journalists continue to be subjected to violence and intimidation - from destruction of property to physical attacks and threats to themselves or their families. Many recent statements and reports to the Permanent Council have also noted alarming increase in incidents of detentions of journalists and media actors even when they are clearly identified as media representatives, as well as unreasonable restrictions on media accreditation and restrictions to Internet access.

Mr Chair,

The safety of women journalists continues to be a particular concern. Video testimony from women journalists from the OSCE region, produced by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) as part of their cooperation with the International Press Institute (IPI), are a reminder of the seriousness of the threats posed to women journalists. We commend the RFoM for its work in this area, and welcome the launch of the RFoM's Safety of Female Journalists Online Resource Guide, which coincided with this year's International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. It is another example of the excellent work of the Office of the RFoM in promoting the safety of journalists in the OSCE region.

Mr Chair,

This organisation has played an important role in promoting commitments on media freedom and the safety of journalists. Whilst we should be proud of those achievements, we as participating States have a lot more to do in implementing what we have freely committed to by signing up to the Ministerial Council Decision in 2018.

It should be done not only by improving the investigation into acts of violence and threats against journalists and other media actors, in order to bring all those responsible to justice. We have also taken up the commitment to “condemn publicly and unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists”, “to immediate[ly] and unconditional[ly] release all journalists who have been arbitrarily arrested or detained, taken hostage or who have become victims of enforced disappearance”.

As participating States we have also committed to “encourage <...> law enforcement agencies to engage in awareness-raising and training activities related to the need to ensure safety of journalists”, as well as to “establish or strengthen, where possible, national data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists”.

Mr Chair,

On the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists we call on all participating States to close the gap between existing commitments and national actions.

We have made clear on numerous occasions, both as a Group and as individual participating States, the importance of a free and independent media environment for a democratic and open society, accountable systems of government and the safeguard of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

Independent free media have an essential role to play in providing the public with accurate and candid information in situations of crisis, such as we face today with the coronavirus pandemic. We all should be reminded that by ending impunity and doing the utmost to protect journalists and other media actors we would safeguard one of the main cornerstones of the OSCE’s vision of comprehensive security.

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