



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

HDIM 2016. WORKING SESSION 6. FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

As delivered by Counsellor Hilde Austad,
Warsaw, 22 September 2016

Mr Moderator,

Regrettably, freedom of expression is increasingly under pressure from both state and non-state actors. All too often, individuals who use their freedom of expression are subject to intimidation, harassment and arbitrary detention. Some are even killed because they do their job. Impunity for perpetrators prevails. Censorship and blocking of social media is widespread. Self-censorship is increasing.

In some cases, human rights obligations are not respected because states are too weak and lack the means to do so.

But just as often, it is due to a lack of political will.

Governments, whose responsibility it is to protect and implement human rights, are instead imposing laws and policies that undermine freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Others misuse existing legislation to prevent criticism and dissent, or to restrict access to information.

Unfortunately, governments that limit the space for free debate and information sharing are learning from and copying each other. 'Worst practices' are being shared between countries.

We want to contribute to reversing these trends.

Last January, Norway therefore launched a strategy to support strengthening freedom of expression in our foreign and development policy. We will focus our efforts on three key areas.

First, we will support independent media. There must be room for a wide range of voices, both online and offline.

Protection of sources and digital security are crucial for journalists in their work.

It is important that journalists have the skills they need to work in a professional way.

Norway will therefore support the training of journalists and other media staff.

The second focus area is protection. No one should risk harassment, persecution or attack because of the opinions they express.

For every journalist who is attacked for using his or her freedom of expression, many others are pressured into silence. These cases must be investigated and the perpetrators must be punished.

Third, we will focus on access to information. Only when people have access to information can they make informed decisions about their own lives, and have informed opinions.

With the right policies, internet is a unique global platform for accessing information and connecting people. To promote internet freedom and fundamental rights online, Norway recently joined the Freedom Online Coalition.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right, but it is not absolute. Distinguishing between lawful and unlawful expressions is complex and controversial. We must continuously discuss where to draw the line.

We have to find ways to deal with hate speech without undermining people's freedom of expression.

Hate speech can have serious negative consequences for individuals and groups. It can contribute to discrimination, intolerance and violence. My government is working on a strategy to combat hate speech in Norway. This is done in close consultation with civil society organisations.

We commend the work done by the Representative on Freedom of the Media on these sensitive issues. Her office provides facts, analysis and recommendations to help us tackle these challenges.

Thank you, Mr Moderator