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1234th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

4 JULY 2019

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE GROUP OF FRIENDS

ON THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Mr. Chair,

I am speaking on behalf of the informal OSCE Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists, composed of the following participating States: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Free, diverse and independent media is a cornerstone of all democratic societies and is essential for comprehensive security. As states, we should ensure that journalists and other media actors have a safe and enabling environment in which to work, both online and offline. The right to freedom of expression includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Too often, journalists and media actors across our region are subjected to human rights violations and abuses, including killing, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, detention and expulsion, intimidation, harassment, and threats of all forms.

In this context, we welcome the fact that last year in Milan, and for the first time since 1994, the participating States updated their OSCE commitments on the safety of journalists, also encompassing non-physical aspects of safety. It is time to implement these commitments.

We would therefore like to warmly thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media for the two conferences dedicated to safety of journalists that he organised this year in Vienna in February and April, as well as for the South East Europe Media Conference that took place last month in Sarajevo. During these events we had the opportunity to hear testimonies of the risks that many media actors are facing today, as well as to discuss media developments, safety of journalists, impunity, the legal environment for media freedom, and possible sustainable solutions to ensure that journalists and media actors can work in a safe and enabling environment. We are convinced that the situation for journalists in the OSCE region merits our undivided attention and engagement.

We remain concerned by the specific risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work. Violence and attacks against journalists have taken a gender-specific turn in recent years, exposing women to particular threats and vulnerabilities. We welcome that the RFoM has highlighted the specific risks women face, particularly in digital contexts.

We commend the Representative on Freedom of Media and the International Press Institute (IPI) for their excellent documentary *A Dark Place* and hope that it will be screened in as many places as possible. The testimonies in this film remind us that it is time to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists and other media actors. Impunity for such crimes fuels and perpetuates the cycle of violence leading to self-censorship, which further restricts press freedom and deprives society of information and debate.

Mr. Chair, the informal OSCE Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists organised a side event on the margins of the international conference “Journalists Under Attack: A Threat to Media Freedom” on April 12, with the title “Turning Words into Deeds: Implementation of OSCE commitments on the Safety of Journalists”. In this event we discussed how the OSCE Ministerial Decision on the Safety of Journalists can bring practical benefit for journalists under attack.

We are also planning to organise a side event on the margins of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in September to further promote the issue of safety of journalists.

We look forward to the SHDM on Safety of Journalists that will take place on 7-8 October and we hope that the 3rd edition of the RFoM guidebook on the safety of journalists will soon be launched.

We remain committed to enhancing our efforts to ensure the safety of journalists and other media actors. Through the OSCE and its Representative on Freedom of the Media that we fully support, through other multilateral organisations and mechanisms, and in cooperation with civil society and the media itself, we will work tirelessly to this end.

Together we can break the vicious cycle of violence and impunity that journalists and media actors face.