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United States Mission to the OSCE

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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November 2 marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists. A free press is an essential foundation for prosperous, open, and secure societies, assisting citizens to access information, exposing abuses, and holding their governments accountable. In these and other ways, journalists play a critical role in sustaining comprehensive security. All participating States should support efforts to ensure their safety.

Unfortunately, some journalists in the OSCE region continue to be subject to acts of violence. Impunity for murders of journalists and other attacks against them is all too common. Not only do the perpetrators need to be brought to justice, but those who ordered the attacks or murders are equally to blame and must be prosecuted.

Nine years ago on October 7, renowned Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya was shot and killed in her apartment building. While we welcomed the conviction of five men last year for her murder, we continue to urge the Russian Government to bring to justice those who ordered this crime. The conviction in July of those behind the double murder of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta reporter Anastasiya Baburova show that, when there is political will backed by government action, convictions of both perpetrators and those who order these crimes can be accomplished. Regrettably, impunity for the murder of other journalists in Russia, including Paul Klebnikov, Natalia Estimirova, Timur Kuashev, Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev, Kazbek Gakkiyev, and others contributes to a climate of fear and self-censorship and puts journalists' safety at risk.

In Azerbaijan, local observers reported 64 physical assaults on journalists during 2014, the most recent the tragic death of independent journalist Rasim Aliyev. The attacks mainly targeted journalists from Radio Liberty, Azadliq and Yeni Musavat newspapers, the Turan Information Agency, and Obyektiv Television. There were reports that police and security officers harassed and in some cases physically harmed journalists trying to cover protests. The deaths of journalists such as Elmar Huseynov and Rafiq Tagi remain unresolved.

We were deeply disturbed by the attack on Turkish journalist Ahmet Hakan on October 1 and welcomed Turkish authorities' swift investigation of the attack. We continue to urge the prosecution of both the perpetrators and those who ordered these crimes in accordance with Turkish law. Turkey needs more, not fewer, voices discussing critical issues right now.

Recent attacks on journalists in several Balkans states and longstanding cases of impunity in the region are also a concern. We urge all OSCE participating States to uphold their

commitments to ensure the safety of journalists. Impunity for violent attacks against journalists and media outlets must not be tolerated.

In his visit to Central Asia last week, Secretary Kerry discussed at length and repeatedly the importance of progress on human rights and media freedom.

We thank the efforts of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM) for playing an essential role in notifying participating States of attacks against journalists in the OSCE region and for standing ready to assist participating States in implementing our commitments to ensure the safety of journalists. We welcome the conferences on safety of journalists that have been organized by the Office of the RFOM , which have led to substantive discussions about how the OSCE can support and enhance these commitments on the subject.

We welcome and support the initiative of the Serbian Chairmanship to prioritize the safety of journalists and in putting forward a draft decision on safety of journalists for a possible Ministerial decision in Belgrade. This initiative, along with other efforts to support freedom of expression both online and offline, should be seen as a powerful tool for OSCE participating States to strengthen fundamental freedoms for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.