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TO THE OSCE

Statement in response to the biannual report of the
Representative of the Freedom of the Media

Delivered by Ambassador Anne- Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 25 November 2021

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Thank you, Mdm. Chair,

Norway aligns with the statement just made by the Netherlands, but I would like to add the following in my national capacity.

I would like to thank the Representative of the Freedom of the Media for her broad situational overview in spring and found her more activity- oriented reporting today equally useful.

Mdm. Chair,

An independent, critical press is one of the most important institutions in any democratic society. It is the task of the media to report on matters of public interest, expose issues of concern and abuses of power, and facilitate an open and informed debate. A wide range of independent media channels, including local media outlets in various languages, is of great importance in ensuring that all groups in society have the chance to gain insight into and influence matters that affect them.

We agree with Ms. Ribeiro that freedom of the media and freedom of expression should be the norm. The most important element of the mandate of the Representative is to assist States in their commitment to furthering a free, independent, and pluralistic media. After hearing her reports this year, I ask whether we really see the necessary commitment from all participating States that would allow her to fulfill this mandate?

Journalists who investigate and report on abuses of power and criminal activities are particularly at risk of persecution and reprisals aimed at silencing them. Many journalists who report on the political opposition are subject to harassment. The

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pandemic has exacerbated a trend where leaders use their power at the expense of fundamental freedoms and individual rights.

Ms. Ribeiro's description of increasingly hateful rhetoric from politicians and public officials is therefore particularly worrying. When politicians and public officials themselves commit such acts, they also contribute to the general sense of impunity in society. Protecting journalists means protecting access to reliable information and the right to freedom of expression. Women journalists are especially targeted by online violence and fall victim of increasingly vicious attacks. Online violence leads to self-censorship and can be just as serious as physical abuse. Increasingly, we see that online violence is also moving offline. Reports show that 20% of female journalists who are victims of online violence then fall victim to physical violence.

If I may, I would therefore like to ask Representative what we as States can do to make sure that women have equal access to information and an equal place in the newsroom?

Norway recently launched a new Freedom of Expression strategy. The digital transformation we have seen was one of the most important reasons for this initiative. The digital space has become more important to access and share information and news, and to participate in the public debate.

It is long overdue for this organization to look at the issue of freedom of expression online. Through the current drafting sessions of the Human Dimension Committee, we have had in-depth and useful discussions. We hope that continuing this work will lead to consensus on how to move this agenda forward in the OSCE.

Norway will continue to protect journalists, artists, human rights defenders, and those who speak truth to power.

Mdm. Chair,

We encourage all participating States to make good use of the toolbox, competence and capacity of the Representative of the Freedom of the Media and of her office. We hope to be able to receive the Representative in Norway in the near future. We look forward to celebrating the 25th anniversary of the important mandate of the RFoM next year.

There is indeed "no security without media freedom".

Thank you.