



The Representative on  
Freedom of the Media

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**  
*Journalists under attack: a threat to media freedom*

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**OPENING SPEECH**

*To be checked against delivery*

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all here today in Vienna, for our Conference “Journalists under attack: a threat to media freedom”.

It is an honour in particular to welcome today journalists from over 30 countries who will share their stories and experiences after having faced the most horrendous threats and attacks over the past few years.

We are also joined by representatives of NGOs and civil society actors involved in the defense of media freedom.

Since I was appointed as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in July 2017, I have addressed hundreds of attacks, threats and even several murders of journalists in the OSCE region.

The assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta in October 2017, of Ján Kuciak in Slovakia in February 2018, the shooting at Olivera Lakić in Montenegro in May 2018, the killing of five Capital Gazette staff in the US in June 2018, the murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi in his consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, and, before that, the killing of Pavel Sheremet in Ukraine in July 2016 and the terrorist attack against the Charlie Hebdo journalists in France in January 2015; these are among some of the shocking and terrible examples of the environment which confronts media actors today.

No country or region has been immune.

These journalists and their colleagues do not only deserve admiration for their work and daily courage. First and foremost they deserve protection and justice for the crimes committed against them.

It is not only journalists that are attacked but the very foundations of democracy and freedom; it is the role of the press to hold those in power accountable which is attacked. It is freedom of speech and freedom of opinion. It is the right of citizens to be informed, including on corruption or other matters which affect their daily lives.

When journalists are targeted, it is everyone's freedoms which are at risk.

We are particularly alarmed by the combination of threats against the free media for political, economic, or ideological reasons. With the systematic denigration of the press, more and more people now consider it acceptable to attack the messenger because they don't like the message; to silence a journalist for being too critical, or for speaking out the truth.

It is essential that we stand up for the protection of journalists and that all voices be heard.

That's why I want to thank all the threatened and attacked journalists who have joined us today and among them Matthew Caruana Galizia, Olivera Lakić, Tatiana Felgenhauer who was stabbed at Radio Echo Moscow, Nadezhda Prusenkova from Novaya Gazetta the newspaper of Anna Politovskaia, Paolo Berizi of La Repubblica, and Riss the Director of Charlie Hebdo because we know what they have endured and their courage in continuing to pursue their mission and the truth.

While you may work in very different contexts and face different challenges you have all faced the same ultimate risks because of your journalistic work.

We have been working with each of you separately in the past. But we wanted to gather you all here, at a time of increasing risks and challenges to the press and press freedom: to build with you a network of awareness and of solidarity at the international level. And, above all, to enhance our joint efforts in promoting a safe environment for journalists; one that is safe from intimidation, safe from harassment, and safe from violence.

Last December in Milan, the 57 OSCE participating States adopted a landmark Ministerial Decision on Safety of Journalists, in which they recognized the gravity of the situation and claimed that they are:

*“concerned by all human rights violations and abuses committed in relation to the safety of journalists, including those involving killing, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, arbitrary detention and arbitrary expulsion, intimidation, harassment and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological or economic, intended to suppress their work”.*

The Ministerial Decision recognized that female journalists face the brunt of online violence, harassment and intimidation, as women and as journalists.

And the 57 participating States, urge, I quote: “political leaders, public officials and /or authorities to refrain from intimidating, threatening or condoning - and unequivocally condemn- violence against journalists, in order to reduce the risks or threats that journalists may face and avoid undermining trust in the credibility of journalists as well as respect for the importance of independent journalism”.

By adopting this Ministerial Council decision all 57 participating States confirmed that we need to urgently act to improve the safety of journalists.

Now the time has come to implement this Decision.

First it is unacceptable that most of the threats and attacks against journalists and media outlets are not fully investigated or thoroughly and effectively addressed.

The research conducted by my Office in 2017, of the more than 400 killed journalists in the OSCE region over the last 25 years, showed that, in 85% of cases, perpetrators or masterminds were not brought to justice and impunity prevailed.

We cannot allow this trend to continue. It is among the key obstacles to ensuring journalists' safety; it results in self-censorship and a chilling effect on freedom of the media.

This impunity is not inevitable and it would be a terrible setback for States to admit otherwise. With political will and determination, we can end impunity for crimes committed against journalists. We need, above all, to bring an end to any form of indulgence or protection for the killers of journalists. It is necessary and it is possible.

Earlier this year, the alleged mastermind and perpetrators of the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in Slovakia were arrested. One of them is very prominent and well-connected. And last week, after 20 years, the murderers of the journalist Slavko Curuvija were sentenced in Serbia. These were no ordinary individuals but former state officials.

This sends a clear signal that no killer or perpetrator is untouchable, irrespective of their position in society, and irrespective of how much time has elapsed. We have to build now on this momentum so that no case is left unaddressed, and that all perpetrators of journalist killings are held to account and brought to justice.

Governments have a key role to play in bringing about this much-needed change.

While political commitments to protect media freedom are important, their effective and timely implementation, as well as enhanced compliance with existing monitoring mechanisms and initiatives, is crucial to safeguard media freedom.

The commitments and obligations of states to respect free media and free expression must therefore be constantly nurtured and effectively fulfilled at all levels and by all branches of government.

We would like to discuss in particular today the commitment in the OSCE Ministerial Council decision to “establish ... national data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists.

We are ready to support, and we propose, the establishment in every participating State of a national committee for safety of journalists which would gather representatives of the prosecutor's office, the police and journalist associations to verify that all attacks and threats are properly investigated, improve procedures if needed; propose protection measures when necessary and implement preventive action to reinforce the security of journalists.

We will discuss this proposal later today in light of the mechanisms that exist already in some countries and which can be used as a framework to build on.

I am grateful to the many non-governmental organizations present today for their dedication in protecting journalists and fighting impunity for crimes against them. We could not accomplish our goal without you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also want to express my profound gratitude to the governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom for their contributions that made this conference possible. And to the Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists among the participating States for the side event that they have organized.

Today, at this conference, with all of you, we would like to provide a forum for journalists, NGOs and government representatives to speak up on how the OSCE participating States can improve journalists' safety and freedom of the media. It is our common duty and we can only achieve it together.

I wish all of you an inspiring conference and I am very much looking forward to the sessions ahead of us.

Thank you for your attention.