



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Chairmanship Conference on Safety of Journalists in the OSCE
Region**

Opening Remarks

Secretary General of the OSCE, H.E. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut

Vilnius, 7 June 2011

Madame President,
Mr. Chairperson,
Minister Gryshchenko,
President Efthymiou,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you today and wish to wholeheartedly congratulate both the Lithuanian Chairmanship, in particular Minister Ažubalis, and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms. Dunja Mijatović, for initiating this event.

This conference brings together a comprehensive mix of government officials, NGO and media representatives, and law enforcement personnel from across the OSCE region. Over the next two days, participants will review current challenges related to the safety of journalists. They will share

information and exchange best practices. Contacts will be established, and recommendations on how to improve the security of journalists will be discussed.

We will have the opportunity not only to consider the magnitude of the problem, but also debate and discuss what the participating States of the OSCE can do to address this formidable challenge. We will also have the opportunity to listen to journalists themselves, and take their experience into consideration. In most cases, it is these journalists who take primary responsibility for their own safety, notably by sharing information among themselves in self-selecting groups.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are aware, physical harm to journalists is the most extreme form of interference with the profession. Violence against journalists takes an enormous toll on the victims and their loved ones.

However, the impact of this scourge goes much deeper. By eliminating the voices of those seeking to inform the public, and by intimidating others who might be so inclined, incidents of violence also endanger the very functioning of the media. They can silence those people whose job is to put a mirror up to society, to ensure that citizens are aware of issues of vital public importance.

The participating States of the OSCE have adopted many commitments relating to free expression and free media, beginning with the Helsinki Final

Act of 1975. In 1997, with the establishment of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, they chose to create within this Organization, an institution unique in the international community, dedicated to the independent and objective monitoring of the development of media freedom in the 56 participating States, and to the provision of early warning in case of problems with implementing relevant commitments.

Just six months ago, at the Astana Summit, OSCE participating States agreed unanimously to implement fully their commitments taken in all three dimensions. They stressed in particular *“the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law”*.

To date, however, the participating States have undertaken only one commitment aimed specifically at ensuring the safety of journalists. At the 1994 Budapest CSCE Summit, participating States reaffirmed that, and I quote, *“freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a basic component of a democratic society. In this respect, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. They take as their guiding principle that they will safeguard this right. They condemn all attacks on and harassment of journalists and will endeavour to hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable.”*

Perhaps the time has come to consider what more might be done to make these laudable words a reality throughout the OSCE area, and to consider whether further commitments in this area are needed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that this conference will provide several ideas for how safety of journalists might be further strengthened in the OSCE area. By making it a priority for their Chairmanship, Lithuania has called on the entire OSCE community to make the work of media professionals safer. We stand ready to continue to support the Chairmanship in carrying this effort forward.

In this endeavour, the work of the OSCE's field operations deserves special mention. We should recall the broad spectrum of work they carry out in promoting the safety of media workers. In particular, those field operations active in the area of media development have been instrumental in fostering a safer working environment for journalists by building capacity, helping design media-friendly legal frameworks, and raising awareness of the importance of free media in free societies. Many existing good practices on enhancing the safety of journalists were developed in close co-operation between field offices and the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In conclusion,

I wish all participants a lively debate, and a useful discussion that can take us closer to our goal of protecting journalists working throughout the OSCE area.

Thank you for your attention.