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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

**Statement**

**in response to the address of Ms. Teresa Ribeiro,  
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media  
as delivered by the Delegation of Armenia  
at the 1397<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

*03 November 2022*

Mr Chairman,

The Delegation of Armenia warmly welcomes Ms. Teresa Ribeiro back to the Permanent Council and thanks her for updating on her activities and the overall situation of media freedom in the OSCE area.

Madame Representative,

Armenia strongly supports the mandate and activities of the RFOM to monitor, advocate and promote full implementation by the participating States of their commitments and agreed principles regarding freedom of expression, free media and freedom of information.

This year, the quarter-century anniversary of the mandate of the RFOM is marred by the deteriorating security environment and the degradation of the principles of democracy and human rights.

On top of this, as you rightly put it “Autocratic powers have not stopped their attacks on those they fear most: the people that freely speak their minds, the people that seek the truth, the people that hold those in power to account”. In our region the crackdown of popular discontent and dissent is also accompanied with war mongering and expansionism which is used by autocratic authorities of a country to divert the attention of their public from the pervasive social griefs and endemic corruption. This regime is using the tactics of intimidation and harassment, which they have deployed for years to intimidate their domestic opponents, including journalists and civil society activists.

It has imposed a total control and censorship on all media outlets, continue to suppress any free and independent journalism, persecute journalists, bloggers, including by way of physically attacking them beyond the borders of its country.

Therefore, while acknowledging that no country is perfect in terms of ensuring the freedom of the media and expression, clear distinction should be made between shortfalls of these commitments and persistent pattern of violations. Abysmal situation of the media freedom and freedom of expression could not be compensated with anything else.

Madame Representative,

We also witnessed flagrant violations of obligations regarding the safety of journalists during the recent aggression by Azerbaijan against the sovereign territories of Armenia, when a group of local and foreign media journalists carrying out their professional activities in the village of Sotk in Armenia were targeted. Targeting journalist during the performance of their professional duties is a well-known line of action by Azerbaijan and a distinctive pattern of behavior aimed at silencing the objective coverage by foreign media representatives of the results of aggression.

This was also the case during the 44-day war of aggression against Nagorno Karabakh when 7 international journalists from the international TV channel *France 24* and *Le Monde* were severely wounded, and one local journalist accompanying them was killed as a result of deliberate shelling by the armed forces of Azerbaijan. Journalist Yuri Kotenok was wounded while reporting about the first strike on the Holy Savior of Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi only a few hours ago, caught by the second shelling.

It should be also noted that in addition to this, the overall media environment was further disturbed during the 44-day war of aggression waged by Azerbaijan against Artsakh /Nagorno Karabakh/ back in 2020. During that period, over 800 foreign media affiliated, and independent journalists arrived in Artsakh to cover the war and the evolving developments. The flow of journalists to Artsakh increased significantly after the decision of the Azerbaijani authorities to limit the ability of foreign journalists to cover the war from the Azerbaijani side. Those who were still allowed to go there, were reporting that the Azerbaijani government at all times monitored their movements and violated their right to cover the developments on the ground freely and in a professional manner. The Azerbaijani authorities also filed criminal cases against some journalists, for their reports about the war crimes of Azerbaijan.

While heavily censoring the information, coming especially from the conflict zone, and in the absence of the international media and free reporting locally, Azerbaijan disseminates overzealous, rally-round-the-flag propaganda, misinformation and groundless accusations. During the 44-day war of aggression *France 24* has reported

from Baku that it does not have freedom of reporting and that all their moves are controlled and monitored by the government.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend once again the courage and dedication of journalists and media professionals who work in difficult environments and hotspots such as Artsakh /Nagorno Karabakh/ and the bordering regions of Armenia which were subjected to aggression, and where they are documenting and reporting on crimes against humanity and war crimes for.

Therefore, ensuring and safeguarding the conditions for journalists to freely perform their professional duties without any limitation, restrictions, fear of reprisal, including in the conflict zones, is essential for genuine media freedom and freedom of expression.

Madame Representative,

Media freedom and freedom of expression are also vital for bringing peace to our region as those who raise their voice for peace and criticizes the aggressive posturing and hatred can be heard. Therefore, proper reaction to silencing those voices and criticising all those violations and crimes against journalists are important also from the perspective of regional peace and security.

In closing, Madame Ribeiro, allow me to once again express our satisfaction with the high level of dialogue and effective co-operation between your Office and relevant Armenian institutions and assure you of Armenia`s continued support for your mandated activities.

I thank you.