

UK STATEMENT – WORKING SESSION 2

I fully subscribe to the statement made by Sweden on behalf of the European Union which I would like to reinforce with some national remarks.

The United Kingdom supports freedom of expression and freedom of the media as fundamental human rights which lie at the heart of our priorities as a government. A free media and freedom of opinion and expression are integral to ensuring that citizens can exercise their full democratic rights. The free flow of information – an essential part of good government – gives people the ability to have a meaningful say in their own lives and in the affairs of their society.

It is therefore disturbing to hear the negative trends described by Representative Mijatovic here today and throughout the year by her office's timely interventions to highlight violations of OSCE commitments. We are concerned about harassment, intimidation and assassination of journalists and strongly condemn such attacks.

There have been many inconclusive debates amongst OSCE participating States in recent years over precisely who should be protected when we speak of tackling the prevailing climate of attacks against journalists. Our own position on this is clear and simple. In a world of open journalism where social media and the internet provide the opportunity for all of us to contribute to media discussions and comment on the news, **anyone** exercising their freedom of expression should be protected from the sickening violence and intimidation that we are increasingly seeing across the OSCE space. These protections should apply to journalists working for newspapers, tv, radio or any other media outlet; to bloggers and social media activists whether they be regular contributors to media commercial productions or ordinary people like you and me expressing a view about a news item through Facebook or twitter. The context should not matter and we should not seek to differentiate between those expressing views nor the means which they are using to communicate them. Whether it be those bravely reporting from conflict zones, online bloggers commenting on corruption

allegations or opposition activists criticising their government through social media, all deserve the protection provided for by international law. We again

call on all OSCE participating States to acknowledge that human rights including the freedom of expression apply with equal force online as they do in the off-line world.

I would like to conclude by again placing on record that my government holds the work of Representative Mijatovic and her team in the very highest professional regard. They are an outstanding example of international advocacy, not least in their diligence in holding all participating States to account including the UK. It is proper, fair and indeed an essential requirement of her mandate that she should continue to do so.

A brief mention on the role of independent civil society if I may. We welcome your active participation at HDIM. Your input enriches the meeting and contributes to efforts to make the work of the OSCE more relevant to our societies and citizens whose interests we should ultimately serve.