

**Statement of the Czech Republic at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session Fundamental Freedoms I, Wednesday, September 25, 2013**

The Czech Republic aligns herself with the statement of the European Union.

All topics of this session - freedom of expression, independent media as well as protection of journalists belong to long term priorities of the Czech Republic's foreign policy and we appreciate an opportunity to discuss them at this meeting in presence of many relevant stakeholders.

Based on her own experience from the totalitarian regime and following period of transition and democratization, the Czech Republic has always been a strong advocate of respect for human rights and democracy at all places, where basic human rights, including the freedom of expression, are violated or under threat. We strongly believe that sustaining free and sincere public discussion about all problems, including political, cultural, religious or other sensitive issues must be granted. Freedom of expression, in that context, is essential in creating an environment conducive to critical discussion, which consequently contributes to finding better and more effective solutions to challenges of any kind.

Nowadays, the Internet has become an important medium for expressing views and sharing ideas, as well as an increasingly important tool for democracy and human rights activists to mobilize and advocate for political and social change. The Czech Republic believes that the same rules must be applied with regard to the freedom of expression both off-line as well as on-line. Therefore we are seriously alarmed by intensified attempts of some states to unduly restrict access to the Internet or its content, and the increasing trend to criminalize the activities on the Internet.

As an active supporter of the Internet freedom, the Czech Republic has joined and ever since been an active member of the Freedom Online Coalition, a forum of like-minded governments, committed to collaborating to further advancement of Internet freedom. We believe that it is of vital importance to build a wider consensus about the importance of the Internet freedom and to oppose the increasing trend of the use of the Internet as a means of political repression. The Czech Republic aligns herself with the statement prepared by our distinguished colleagues from Estonia on behalf of the Freedom Online Coalition.

Furthermore the Czech Republic considers free media as a key precondition for a stabilized democracy and a public control over political power. As a part of our human-rights-promotion activities, we support the work of free and independent media in our focus countries through a unique democracy assistance financial instrument. Since 2005, the Transition Promotion Program of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been financing projects of civil society organizations working for development of democracy, rule of law, freedom of information and respect to human rights through empowerment of civil society.

Journalists and other media workers play an essential role in informing public and international community. The Czech Republic is therefore deeply worried about continuing restrictions towards independent journalism in some countries, as well as by the escalating trend of harassment, arrests, torture and prosecution of journalists worldwide. We have recently witnessed numerous cases of violence and attacks against journalists in some OSCE participating states as highlighted also in the EU statement. Violent attacks against journalists indicate a serious deterioration of the freedom of expression in these countries. We therefore highly value and fully support recent efforts of the UN Human Rights Council as well as the Council of Europe in this regard.

In conclusion, the Czech Republic would like to appreciate the engagement of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović and her staff and to express our full support to her mandate. Furthermore, we encourage all participating states to strengthen their commitments in the area of media freedom and safety of journalists, and to guarantee that their commitments in this regard are fully respected.

Thank you.