

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019
Working Session 2 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Counsellor Daniel
Barbarie, Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Representative Désir,

Thank you for your address this morning. We very much share your concerns about increasing threats to media freedom, including the safety of journalists. Given that tomorrow's session will focus on the Safety of Journalists, I will use this intervention to comment on the other critical aspects of media freedom.

As you have pointed out, media freedom consists of defending and advancing truth, but unfortunately, this essential role is challenged and subverted in many participating States in myriad ways, and we are particularly concerned about declining media freedom in Turkey and the Russian Federation. Independent media organizations are being put under government control in many states, ensuring control of the message and removing criticism, and in some cases, are simply tools of state propaganda. Some states are also increasingly attempting to censor free media online, limiting citizen access to independent media sources. Journalists are harassed and intimidated to deter or prevent their work. Malicious online actors attempt to silence journalists, especially female journalists, through a number of antagonistic measures, not only in their own countries, but also those abroad. All these actions intend to make the media less free, and to prevent citizens' access to information.

Given these developments, Canada joined the United Kingdom to co-host the inaugural Global Conference for Media Freedom in July to take a meaningful step forward in mobilising the efforts of civil society and governments to collectively address the challenges to media freedom, and Canada looks forward to hosting the second ministerial conference next year in Toronto. In our view, it is critical that we build on the inaugural conference by identifying practical action that states can take to strengthen media freedom, and to follow through by implementing or assisting to implement those actions. In this regard, we believe the Representative on Freedom of the Media has an important role to play in supporting such efforts to improve the media climate in their countries.

Mr. Desir does not have any easy role, as was made clear by his address this morning. But it is an essential, and unique, role that requires an unflagging commitment to identifying threats to freedom of the media and publicly calling on participating States to respect their OSCE commitments. Participating States need to work with the RFOM, and redouble support for the work of on this unique autonomous institution of the OSCE. The defence of media freedom must be a collective effort.

Canada proposes the following two recommendations:

- 1) That the RFOM and OSCE participating States redouble efforts to address new challenges to media freedom stemming from the evolving online media environment, and ensure good internet governance that finds the balance between security, dignity, and the free exchange of information.
- 2) That the RFOM examine ways to support participating States' resilience in combatting the effects of disinformation, and hostile disinformation campaigns, and to explore ways that disinformation can be effectively neutralized by the OSCE and participating States.

Thank you.