



REGERINGSKANSLIET

21 September 2015

**Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Sweden**

Statement by Sweden at HDIM 2015 – WS1: Freedom of Expression

EU alignment, Thank you Ms. Mijatović,

Over the last year, it has become ever more evident that the right of every individual to freedom of expression lies at the very heart of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. There can be no security, neither for individual human beings, nor for states, without full respect for this fundamental right. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are intrinsically interlinked with our common security, and that is why OSCE participating States have repeatedly, including at the OSCE summit in Astana in 2010, reiterated that the implementation of our human dimension commitments is a matter of immediate and legitimate concern to all participating States. We have collectively made clear that we are all accountable to our citizens, and responsible to each other for the full implementation of these commitments. This is the very essence of the concept of comprehensive security and the unique added value of the OSCE.

That is why we must, as an obligation, speak out when commitments are violated, and be ready to address both our own shortcomings, and those of others. The HDIM is a unique tool for addressing shortcomings and ensuring accountability in regards to the implementation of our commitments, and we urge all participating States to engage in this process with frankness, openness and in good faith.

Regrettably, over the last year, we have seen how these rights and principles continue to be violated, and in some places, increasingly so, all to the detriment not only of individual citizens, but to our common security. That is why we are concerned about the shrinking space for public debate in the Russian Federation, the imprisonment of journalists in Azerbaijan and in other participating states, and why we continue to encourage partners in various parts of our region to reverse negative developments and ensure that our freedom of expression commitments are met in full.

Among other worrying trends is that freedom of expression is increasingly violated online. The decreasing freedom strikes primarily against already vulnerable groups, civil society and women's rights organizations. Of particular concern is the fact that female journalists are being specifically targeted by threats online. Online related threats and crimes directed at female journalists are unacceptable, not only because of the personal consequences they may lead to for those targeted, but also because they have a chilling effect on freedom of expression, on the public watchdog

role of journalists and on public debate in general. We need more female journalists online, not less.

In the long run, it is only through a free and pluralistic media and a free exchange of information and ideas that we can build democratic, prosperous and peaceful societies. Freedom of expression is a vital precondition to unveil propaganda, uncover corruption, challenge stereotypes and build public momentum for positive change. Sadly, there is, in some parts of the OSCE region, a growing misuse of security concerns as a pretext to clamp down on the freedom of expression that run contrary to our OSCE commitments.

The current crisis in and around Russia is a case in point, and we note with concern the link between external aggression and internal repression. Lies and disinformation are being fed to people with ever shrinking access to alternative sources of information, as a consequence of explicit or implicit government control. We call on the Russian Government to reverse this practice and reestablish respect for our joint commitments in order to enter a new stage of more positive development.

Nationally, Sweden attaches the utmost importance to freedom of expression and free media. Next year, it will be 250 years ago that Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt a Freedom of the Press Act. While much has changed since 1766, the Swedish commitment to ensuring that citizens can voice their concerns openly, access information, engage in

public debate and hold their government accountable has remained. This does not mean that Sweden is perfect, or that there are no challenges along the way. Ensuring freedom of expression is a process, and requires sustained efforts. A multi-year parliamentary committee has explored in depth the implications of new technologies for the upholding of our constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression. Another parliamentary committee of inquiry is currently reviewing our existing systems to uphold personal integrity and privacy. Furthermore, the government's initiative "No Hate Speech Movement", that uses education in the prevention of violent extremism, racism, sexism and other forms of intolerance and internet abuse by strengthening young people's media literacy and capacity to apply freedom of expression, has recently been prolonged and expanded. These are just a few examples.

Ensuring freedom of expression remains a top priority for Sweden also within the OSCE. We express our strongest support for the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and commend the Representative and her staff for their tireless efforts to advocate and promote full compliance with the Organization's principles and commitments in respect of freedom of expression and free media. Sweden fully supports the manner in which the mandate is being executed and we thank the Representative and her team for their excellent work, which, even under increasingly challenging circumstances, is characterized by professionalism and integrity. We greatly appreciate and value the contribution of the office of the Representative to our common security,

based on shared values. Freedom of expression is a fundamental and internationally recognized human right and a basic component of a democratic society. As such it is also an essential component of security.

Thank you.