



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018

Working Session 2 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE Tuesday, September 11, 2018

Moderator,

As a cornerstone of democratic societies, two critical aspects of freedom of the media are, first, the freedom from state censorship, influence, or intimidation, and second, the freedom to practice their work without fear for their safety. Both of these key elements are under increasing pressure in the OSCE region.

Media in many OSCE countries have been significantly compromised by state control and censorship. Governments concerned have not hesitated to censor, intimidate, persecute, or imprison journalists or bloggers seeking to exercise their rights, including through direct state interventions via government legislation or acts of security forces, as well as through judicial decisions. Indirect media censorship is also undertaken via the actions of government-aligned media owners, online trolls and bots, or other entities that attack journalists online or offline.

Regarding safety, 2017 represented the most dangerous year on record for journalists globally, with record numbers of killed and imprisoned journalists. There is a need for concerted efforts to address this disturbing trend and ensure that measures are taken to protect journalists and other media workers, and that all incidents are fully investigated and prosecuted, so as to fight impunity and bring perpetrators to justice.

Indeed, Canada is deeply concerned about such challenges to freedom of the media, including threats to the safety of journalists, in a number of OSCE countries including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Belarus, Tajikistan, Russia, and elsewhere.

Mr. Harlem Désir, Representative on Freedom of the Media, has been unflagging in identifying threats to freedom of the media, and in publicly calling on participating States to respect their OSCE commitments. But he cannot defend freedom of the media alone. For this reason, Canada has recently joined other concerned OSCE participating States in a Group of Friends for Safety of Journalists. We are seeking ways in which delegations like our own can help protect journalists, and we look forward to continuing to work with civil society representatives and journalists to discuss how we can best do this.

Given the serious threats to freedom of the media in the OSCE region, Canada offers the following three recommendations:

- 1) OSCE participating States should respect their commitments and international obligations regarding freedom of the media, both online and offline, and should ensure that any restrictions on the freedom of expression are prescribed by law, transparent, and demonstrably justified as not undermining a free and democratic society.
- 2) The Representative on Freedom of the Media should continue to draw attention to the safety of journalists, and to work with OSCE participating States, who should ensure that crimes, violence, and threats against journalists and media workers are taken seriously, journalists are protected, and perpetrators are brought to justice.
- 3) OSCE participating States should address the changes in the media environment and the threats that journalists now face, and should take steps to ensure that OSCE commitments are strengthened to meet these new challenges.