



REPRESENTATION PERMANENTE DE LA FRANCE
AUPRES DE L'O.S.C.E

**Statement on behalf of France by Mr Jean-François Blarel,
Deputy Secretary General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Mr Chairman,

I fully support the statement of the European Union as well as the statement made on behalf of the Freedom on line coalition.

I would first like to thank for the organization of this multistakeholder conference the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, whose action, alongside that of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, is decisive in protecting and promoting freedom of expression and of the media.

The Internet is a powerful tool for disseminating ideas and hence for the exercise of a free and open democracy. By giving individuals broad access to information and communication, the Internet helps public opinion and civil society assert themselves in many countries. While a third of humanity, including almost 820 million people in OSCE participating States, is now connected to the Internet, we are witnessing, with the development of the Internet, a worrying increase in restrictions to freedom of expression over and via the internet when it is diverted from its purpose to serve as a tool of repression. Alleging reasons of national security and even prohibition to blaspheme or indulge in defamation, the more restrictive regimes make sure that the voices of dissidence are silenced and calls for reform stifled. Bloggers, NetCitizens, defenders of human rights as well as journalists are now targeted. Arbitrary censorship measures, general restrictions to Internet access and attempted excessive criminalization of certain forms of expression on the Internet contravene the international commitments of States. France strongly condemns all censorship and arbitrary and general access restrictions, and in this respect supports action by the Representative on Freedom of the Media who exercises a key warning role in terms of these violations in OSCE countries.

Mr Chairman,

Certain threats stemming from the possibilities offered by the Internet are real and may justify State measures in accordance with human rights international law and our OSCE commitments. Yet freedom of expression and information, irrespective of borders, is the primary requirement at the core of all other freedoms in any democratic society. We are therefore striving to promote freedom of opinion, expression, information, assembly and association on the Internet, with due regard for other fundamental rights. The aim is to pursue our efforts in a multi-actor framework in support of an open Internet, to ensure that these

fundamental rights enjoy the same protections and guarantees in cyberspace as in the real world.

Mr Chairman,

We are convinced that freedom of expression and security, exchange of information and respect for confidentiality of personal data, and the exercise of individual rights and collective responsibility can be achieved simultaneously. This is a tricky, evolving balance that needs to be clearly defined at times and we are here to reflect on this together. We highly appreciate the choice of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the media to include all stakeholders during these two days– representatives of governments, media, civil society, academia- whose role are crucial to find this right balance. Our reflection shall remain based on human rights as our primary commitment and future line of action.

Thank you Mr Chairman.