

WORKING SESSION 2:

Fundamental Freedoms I:

Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of expression and address by the OSCE
Representative on Freedom of the Media

Statement by Austria

Madam Chair,

Austria fully aligns herself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I wish to add a few remarks from a national perspective.

Promoting the right to freedom of opinion and expression and, specifically, the safety of journalists are priorities of Austria's work in the field of human rights. We are alarmed by the rise in attacks against journalists in recent years, as reported by the Representative on the Freedom of the Media. Cases of killings and abductions of journalists during conflict, including in OSCE States, are of particular concern. We are alarmed at the shrinking space for independent discourse and information, including in digital media, in some countries of the OSCE area. And, maybe most worryingly, widespread impunity for crimes committed against journalists and a lack of prosecution as well as of prevention of these attacks are one of the main causes of the precarious work environment faced by many journalists. This situation all too often mirrors that of civil society at large, as mentioned by our moderator – people being targeted simply because they are doing their professional work.

We commend the invaluable work of the OSCE representative on the freedom of the media and her efforts to improve the situation of journalists working in conflict situations, as well as of those using new media for their reporting.

We appreciate that the safety of journalists is increasingly also addressed by other organisations. For example, upon an Austrian initiative, the OHCHR presented a compilation of good practises for the safety of journalists in September 2013, which can serve as a practical tool for States. Moreover, at the ongoing 27th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council, an Austria resolution initiative on the safety of journalists focusses on measures to combat impunity for crimes against journalists, promoting awareness and concrete action.

It is the primary responsibility of States to ensure the safety of journalists and facilitate the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion, expression and media freedom. In today's digital age, the rights that people have offline must also be protected online. In a number of OSCE Participating States intimidation, harassment, and vague laws that allow for the prosecution of journalists and media organisations on dubious charges prevent a vibrant, diverse and independent media landscape. They thereby violate the rights to free expression and media and inhibit the democratic participation of citizens.

We would, in conclusion, like to offer the following recommendations:

- Participating States must step up efforts to bring the perpetrators of crimes against journalists to justice,
- PS shall step up preventive measures, among others through the exchange of good practises and cooperation with the OSCE representative on the freedom of the media.

- Participating States shall facilitate a vibrant and diverse media landscape, online as well as offline, by creating a transparent and clear legal situation, and overall climate, allowing independent media organisations and journalists to operate freely.
- Participating States should make fuller use of - voluntary - reporting to the HD Committee on these issues.

Thank you.