

**Statement by Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the OSCE,
Mr. Ron van Dartel, on behalf of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC),
“Internet 2013” Conference, Plenary Session, 15 February 2013**

This statement is on behalf of Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Latvia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, Mongolia and The Netherlands; all of them members of the Freedom Online Coalition.

As introduced during the Permanent Council of April 19th 2012, the Freedom Online Coalition is a global group of countries dedicated to co-operate for the advancement of Internet freedom and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms online, inter alia by furthering and protecting the free flow of information on the Internet and through connection technologies around the world. In addition to the mentioned OSCE participating states, the coalition currently consists of OSCE mediterranean partner country Tunisia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ghana and Kenya. The Freedom Online Coalition underlines the need for cross-regional co-operation between governments and other stakeholders to protect Internet freedom, as protecting human rights online is a global issue that requires global efforts.

The coalition continues to dedicate itself to sharing information on violations of fundamental human rights on the Internet and other connection technologies, to co-operate in finding means to protect human rights online and to support -both politically and through project support- the ability of individuals to exercise their human rights online, including in the OSCE area.

After the Coalition's constituent multistakeholder conference in The Hague in December of 2011, Coalition member Kenya organized a successful event on Internet freedom in Africa in September 2012 in Nairobi, which highlighted opportunities for economic development presented by increased connectivity. Tunisia will host a 3rd Freedom Online conference in Tunis from 16-18 June 2013 to provide a multistakeholder platform to discuss issues of Internet freedom in the Middle East and North Africa. We engage with other governments, regional organisations, international institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, such as businesses and academics, to reinforce our efforts in this regard.

The Freedom Online Coalition wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, and her team for having organized an OSCE conference which deals with the important topic of Internet freedom. This event has provided an open platform for all relevant stakeholders to engage in meaningful debate about human rights and digital media in the OSCE region.

At the same time the Freedom Online Coalition notes with concern the continued harassment, intimidation and killings of journalists, civil society members and other professionals working online, as well as illicit monitoring, filtering and hacking, and urges all participating States to fully implement our common commitments on freedom of expression and freedom of the media. We are no less concerned by the attempts to arbitrarily block or control Internet content.

Limiting access to information as well as the free flow of information beyond the few exceptional circumstances in which restrictions are acceptable in accordance with international human rights legal obligation, is unacceptable.

The members of the FOC deeply regret that, for the second consecutive year, the OSCE was unable to adopt any decisions at the 2012 Dublin Ministerial Council meeting on human dimension priorities, including strengthening media freedom.

We also see the need for participating States to recognize the applicability of fundamental human rights on the Internet. To that end, the Freedom Online Coalition members reiterate their support for the draft Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age.

Within our OSCE context we will continue to develop, promote and support new initiatives in the field of Freedom Online, and we will continue supporting already existing efforts that can fortunately count on the support of many more participating states in this room.

Thank you for your attention.