

National Statement of Sweden

Session 4 Freedom of the Media

Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

While aligning fully with the statements made by the European Union, as well as the Freedom Online Coalition, I would like to make some additional comments in national capacity on this increasingly pressing issue.

Let me start by commending the indispensable and tireless work carried out by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Ms Dunja Mijatović, and her small but dedicated team. We would like to reiterate our full support for this institution and its mandate to work freely and operate in all participating states, with online as well as offline issues. It is important that the RFoM is given adequate resources in order to fulfill her mandate. We join others in

thankning the RFoM for organizing the timely and topical conference on internet freedom earlier this year.

The rapid advancement of technology, and its global spread, has increased the possibilities for individuals to express themselves, to communicate and to seek and share information. To this end, the Internet has become not only a driver for global innovation, but a new frontline in the fight for freedom across the world.

This development highlights the need for protecting human rights within new technologies, not least as we regrettably observe how many Governments are making use of modern technology in order to control, monitor or even harass individuals who express their opinions through new media.

In order to strengthen the enjoyment of human rights online, however, there is no need for new human rights standards. The international standards that are already in place are sufficient in this regard. The prerequisite for creating the best possible conditions to keep the

Internet open and free, must rather be that the same human rights be valid online as those we have offline.

Let me refer in this regard to the adoption by consensus of the resolution in the Human Rights Council in July of last year - a landmark decision - which demonstrated that maintaining the free flow of information on the Internet is a global call and not something pushed by a few western states. The resolution affirms that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, and it recognizes the global and open nature of the Internet as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development and calls upon all states to promote and facilitate access to the Internet. There are no valid arguments why this resolution and that on safety of journalists, also adopted by consensus at the UN Human Rights Council, should not be incorporated in the OSCE acquis.

Freedom of expression on the Internet doesn't imply that limitations may not be imposed. Restrictions to fundamental freedoms online may

indeed apply, for example with regard to hate speech or incitement to violence. Such restrictions must nevertheless be considered the exception, and when restrictions are allowed, they must strictly follow the requirements set out in established international human rights law.

Media freedom and the freedom of expression constitute basic components of a democratic society. These fundamental freedoms remain a priority for Sweden and they are at the core of the OSCE commitments.

Sweden also supports the OSCE cross-dimensional working group on cyber security. Discussions on cyber security should not be held in isolation. If our goal is to keep the Internet open and free from restrictions and censorship, we must bring this perspective with us also in the security-related discussions on the Internet, since the purpose of a secure Internet is an open Internet. Therefore, the message is quite simple and clear: we need a secure Internet and cyber environment but with the full respect for human rights. Sweden will continue to emphasize that freedom and human rights, security and

development are intimately linked. Freedom and security are not contradicting values, but are mutually reinforcing.

Enjoyment of human rights on the Internet will continue to be a priority to the Swedish Government. The OSCE has an important role to play here and we will continue to support efforts that aim to strengthen freedom of expression online as well as offline in the OSCE member states.