

## **Working session 1: Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of expression, free media and information**

### **Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Lithuania**

Lithuania fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Journalists are world's eyes and ears, with conflict zones in particular. Unfortunately, information comes to us at a price – as was already mentioned by Mr. H. Désir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, journalists are still being persecuted, detained or even killed as a result of their professional activities, not only in situations of armed conflict, but also in peacetime.

In some countries, working conditions for journalists are in disturbing decline, particularly in the aftermath of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Prevailing impunity for crimes against journalists, political pressure, arbitrary arrests, disinformation wars seem to have become a new normal.

We are gravely concerned about the ongoing information wars, where media is used by States to instigate propaganda for war or deliberately spread disinformation. Journalists themselves often become victims of these campaigns. The OSCE should therefore pay more attention to this important issue, which has a negative effect on our democracies.

We are also concerned about the continuous challenges to freedom of speech in the digital media. It is unacceptable that journalists, especially women, are constantly being harassed on the internet.

As evidenced by the UN SC Resolution 2222, initiated by Lithuania, we strongly condemn any repressions not only against media professionals, but also bloggers and those voluntarily involved in the journalistic activities.

In July Lithuania together with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has held an international conference on safety of journalists, where recent developments were reviewed, with particular focus on new challenges relating to the safety of journalists in the OSCE region. We are delighted that the outcome of this conference will be reflected in the new edition of the *OSCE Handbook on Safety of Journalists*, which aims to assist the OSCE countries in ensuring safe working conditions for journalists.

Safety of journalists is also among our priorities in the Executive Board of UNESCO and is part of our campaign for a seat in the UN Human Rights Council.

We urge all the OSCE participating States not only to respect the freedom of expression, but also to better cooperate in creating a coherent framework that would allow for sufficient remedies and prevention of violence against them, notably in light of the new challenges, such as widespread disinformation campaigns, restrictions for online media, obstacles faced by the investigative journalists, safety of female journalists, etc.

I can only reassure you that Lithuania is strongly committed to this cause, and stands ready to play its part in promoting the freedom of expression and enhancing international standards for the safety of journalists.

Thank you.