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2008 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Working Session 2 Freedom of Expression, free media and information

30 September, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role of the free media in a democratic society cannot be understated. Suffice it to say, there cannot be a truly functioning democracy without free media. Freedom House commends the OSCE Representative for the Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti, for his clear voice on the issue of media freedom. In speaking up whenever media freedom is threatened and focusing on those participating States where media freedom and independent journalists are most at risk, the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media sets an example to other parts of the organization on how scarce resources can be effectively used for the promotion of the OSCE values.

In its annual study of 28 OSCE participating States, *Nations in Transit*, Freedom House tracks the developments in the media freedom field. Regrettably, our research suggests that media freedom is on the decline in the OSCE region. In 2007, the study found that over the last 5 years media freedom has suffered setback in 15 OSCE participating States. Among these are the new EU members: Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia. In

South Eastern Europe, Serbia and Montenegro have shown declines. In the non-Baltic former Soviet states Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Russia have suffered the steepest declines in media freedom while Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan showed somewhat smaller declines. We call on all of these countries to work closely with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on improving conditions for the free media. Freedom House is pleased to note that Ukraine showed the most positive trajectory in terms of media freedom during the last 5-year period period. Freedom House urges Ukraine to consolidate this progress in the coming years.

In addition to the *Nations in Transit*, Freedom House conducts an annual Freedom of the Press study. This study shows that the OSCE region the media freedom is sharply divided along the East-West lines after Italy's rating in the media freedom field has been upgraded in 2007 from "partly free" to "free".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year that passed since the last Human Dimension Implementation meeting has again seen violence against journalists. Not only those working for the electronic or printed media are at risk, but are those who use the internet to express their views and to convey information that may not be always to the liking of the authorities, in other words, for doing their jobs. We call on the authorities of the Kyrgyz Republic and of those participating States that are in the position to provide relevant information to bring to justice those who took the life of the *ferghana.ru* journalist Alisher Saipov. And we call on the Russian authorities to bring to justice those who perpetrated and carried out a recent murder of Magomed Evloev, the owner of the *ingushetiya.ru* website.

Thank you for your attention.