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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. MAXIM BUYAKEVICH,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1288th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

6 November 2020

**In connection with the
International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

Mr. Chairperson,

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists was observed on 2 November – an important date bearing in mind that issues with freedom of the press, the safety of media workers and also with ensuring free access to information are to be encountered in all OSCE participating States. They unfortunately occur in Russia too. However, we are trying not to close our eyes to these shortcomings, but to tackle them using all possible legal techniques, also in line with our country's international commitments.

Countering such phenomena is our common priority. Our Organization has made a significant contribution to this endeavour by adopting, at the Ministerial Council meeting in Milan, a decision on the safety of journalists. We support the initiative taken by the Albanian Chairmanship, which has proposed a draft decision on access to information for the Ministerial Council meeting in Tirana. The main focus of that document should, in our view, be on the problems faced above all by reporters themselves.

The reasons for taking such an approach stem directly from existing realities. Let us begin with the United States of America. According to the US Press Freedom Tracker website, the number of incidents involving journalists in that country continues to grow. Thus, from 1 January to 29 October of this year, 886 such incidents have been recorded, including over 120 arrests, 222 physical attacks (of which 160 were carried out by the police), 202 cases of firing of rubber bullets and 102 instances of tear gas spraying and the like. And these are only the recorded incidents.

The impunity enjoyed by law enforcement officers is also disturbing. We are outraged by the passivity shown by personnel of the US law enforcement agencies with regard to the attack on members of a camera crew from Russia's Channel One that took place in Philadelphia on 28 October. While filming news footage almost in the very centre of that city, our journalists found themselves surrounded by a mob of looters and had to defend themselves on their own. They sustained injuries as a result and lost some of their technical equipment. Not only were there no police officers nearby at the moment of the attack: the police even refused to make their way to the scene of the incident. The Russian journalists encountered exactly the same attitude at the police station to which they went for assistance.

We should point out that the Russian authorities have still not received any response to the official complaints filed with the US Department of State in connection with similar attacks against media workers in July of this year. We once again urge the US Government to fulfil its international obligations with regard to ensuring the safety of journalists, and we demand that all attacks on reporters be investigated.

The situation regarding freedom of speech, too, is far from ideal in the United States. For example, in contrast to the preceding incident, US law enforcement officials found plenty of spare time to subject the Russian journalist Konstantin Rozhkov from the Russia Today channel to detailed interrogation at a New York airport, both when he landed there and upon his departure. It is particularly egregious that the reason why this reporter was targeted was his Russian nationality. We are concerned about the fact that the discrimination of journalists – but not only them – on grounds of nationality is becoming the norm in the United States.

The situation in Ukraine remains critical: journalists there are subjected to all forms of discrimination, even to physical violence and threats to their lives. As reported by the executive director of the Institute of Mass Information, Oksana Romanyuk, 184 violations of freedom of speech have been recorded in the country since the start of the year, of which 80 per cent involved “physical aggression”. Similarly, the head of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, Serhiy Tomilenko, pointed out that, on average, reporters in the country are subjected to physical aggression every five days.

It has still not proved possible to establish all the circumstances surrounding the murders of Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrey Stenin, Oles Buzina, Sergey Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet and Vadim Komarov. The despicable Mirotvorets website continues to operate from US servers. By divulging the personal details of media workers, that site puts their lives and health at immediate risk.

There are all too obvious problems with respect for journalists’ rights in the European Union, where censorship is being assiduously instituted under the pretext of combating disinformation, where there are a growing number of instances of pressure being exerted on media workers in connection with their profession. For example, the situation of correspondents from Russia Today and the Sputnik news agency in France remains dismal: they are prevented from going about their work properly there.

The information space in the Baltic countries continues to be “purged” of Russian-language media. Among the latest disgraceful examples of bullying of the press in that region one may cite the recently adopted decision by Latvia’s National Electronic Mass Media Council to fine the Baltkom radio station 8,000 euros. The reason for this was an interview with the Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy that had taken place in July of this year. The Council does not provide any direct quotations, but alleges that his words had endangered the security of Latvia, distorted historical facts and served to promote the idea of creating a “Great Russia”. That interview was broadcast live, and it is difficult to describe the national regulator’s decision as anything other than direct pressure on a media source and an attempt to dictate its information content.

Alarming trends of growing hostility towards the press on the part of the authorities, especially in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, may be observed in the United Kingdom. Nor has Canada managed to escape the general tendency, for journalists there reporting on the problems faced by the country’s indigenous peoples (the First Nations) are being increasingly attacked. Unfortunately, this list could be continued.

We exhort the aforementioned OSCE participating States to abandon their policy of double standards towards media workers and to treat with the utmost seriousness their international commitments on freedom of the media. It is essential to take effective measures to avert crimes against journalists – especially since in the context of the coronavirus pandemic their profession has acquired particular relevance: human lives depend on the public being provided with timely and accurate information.

Thank you for your attention.