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UK STATEMENT – OPENING PLENARY SESSION, OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION SEMINAR, MAY 2013

I subscribe to the remarks made on behalf of the European Union.

We are pleased to have the opportunity of this seminar to discuss the important topic of media freedom. The Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and ODIHR both deserve praise for managing to organise this event and attract an impressive range of speakers despite the lack of necessary planning certainty, time or guidance. The Institutions deserve better support as they strive to assist us in complying with important commitments. Our thanks also go to the Ukrainian Chairmanship for identifying this important topic and for their persistence in seeking an agenda that would allow for a broad discussion of such important issues.

We now have the opportunity to focus on substance rather than process. The issue of media freedom is of great importance to the UK government. We are strong supporters of freedom of expression and believe that the same rights that apply offline should apply online.

Freedom of expression including on the internet is fundamental to building democracy and the gateway to the realisation of many other human rights. We believe that people must be allowed to freely discuss and debate issues, challenge their governments and make informed decisions in accordance with international human rights law.

In discussing the legal framework relating to media freedom, we hope that this seminar will allow for a discussion on impunity and the safety of journalists. We are deeply concerned at continuing violence against and harassment of journalists, social media activists and bloggers. We should not seek to distinguish between these different categories. All are exercising their right to freedom of expression and should be able to do this free from violence.

It is frankly difficult to comprehend why any government would object to and disagree with this assertion or question the importance of clearly stating its abhorrence at such acts, unreservedly condemning them and of taking robust and urgent steps to tackle them. In this context, we would encourage our fellow participating States to reflect upon the need to assert unequivocally that the use of violence and intimidation against those bringing us news, expressing their opinions or encouraging debate offends our common principles and should be condemned and prevented.

We also hope to have the opportunity to discuss international and national legal frameworks for the protection and promotion of free expression for all. In doing this we should be guided by the provisions of Article 19 of the ICCPR, and General Comment 34 and its recognition that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression through any medium.

Mr/Madame Chairperson, this is also an opportune moment for us to again place on record my government's admiration and regard for the work of Dunja Mijatovic and her team. They provide us with expert advice, monitor our compliance with OSCE commitments and international law and draw our attention to potential violations of media freedom standards whenever and wherever they observe them. The wherever is worth repeating. The institution of the RFOM and the person of the Representative are fiercely independent and non-biased in expressing concerns north, east, south or west of Vienna. My country is not excluded from such observations indeed we have been the recipient of a number of concerns and observations in recent years. That is the way it should be; none of us are perfect and all of us can benefit from the advice of the RFOM and learn lessons from others' experience. We hope that this week's seminar will allow us to do just that.

Thank you

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