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**UK STATEMENT – INTERNET 2013 CONFERENCE – FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY, 11.30- 1300**

I align myself with the remarks made by the European Union Ambassador as well as those made by the Netherlands on behalf of the Freedom Online Coalition of which we are an enthusiastic member. But I would also like to make some national remarks.

I would first of all like to thank the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic and her outstanding staff for organising this conference. The protection and promotion of freedom of expression including on the internet is a human rights priority for my government. It is for that reason that we are one of the co-sponsors of this conference. We are very proud that we have in a modest way been able to contribute to an event that has provided such a valuable platform for the exchange of best practice, the sharing of ideas, a discussion of the opportunities and challenges provided by the internet and social media and a conference that has attracted such diverse and multi-stakeholder participation.

Many of the questions addressed during this conference have been a common feature of discussion at the OSCE in recent years. Questions such as; should freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms and human rights apply online in the same way as offline? When we speak of freedom of expression in the online world, should we look beyond so-called traditional media outlets and include groups such as social bloggers and citizen journalists? Is the blocking of the internet acceptable as a means of responding to hate speech or speech offensive to others' values? Where are the limits to freedom of expression and how does one tackle hate speech whilst ensuring that freedom of expression is defended?

These and many other issues raised during this conference are of course difficult and let us be frank have sometimes been divisive as we seek to strengthen our common OSCE commitments in the field of freedom of expression. My government does not claim to have all of the answers but our general approach to freedom of expression on the internet and in social media is rooted in the following principles:

- i. The promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of UK foreign policy.

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- ii. We believe that human rights should apply with equal force online as they do offline. The Internet is simply a different medium from newspapers, magazines and books.
- iii. We should guard against any attempts to use the internet as a means of political repression and should resist calls to censor content just because some may find it objectionable or offensive.
- iv. The internet is a powerful tool that is transforming our world and changing our lives. It has been an unprecedented engine for growth and social progress, including by offering people a different way of exercising their human rights.
- v. The networked world has produced challenges and threats for all countries.
- vi. In addressing these challenges, governments should be proportionate and always err on the side of freedom.
- vii. Our networked world belongs to no one person or group but transcends the geography, politics, and the special interest of individual countries. Governments, civil society and business should work together to discuss issues pertaining to the internet including when addressing issues of internet governance.
- viii. And finally but particularly relevant in an OSCE context, an open but safe internet is key to supporting security and prosperity for all.

The United Kingdom does not expect that all participating States will necessarily agree with all of these principles. But the very fact that we have had the discussions over the last few days speaks to a reality that some partners have at times seemed to question over recent months, namely that the internet plays a role in our everyday lives, including in the media, whether we like it or not. It is undeniably a means of expressing opinion as well as other rights and freedoms. It is also a means of economic development.

We are fortunate enough in the OSCE to have, in the guise of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, a professional and dedicated institution with the skills, experience and knowledge to help us adapt our freedom of expression commitments and practices to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We should support, cooperate with and strengthen its ability to assist us all in achieving our common commitments. And to those who may question whether the RFOM's mandate extends to the online world, I say this; as someone who falls within the category of those who acknowledge their limitations when it comes to understanding and utilising the full benefits of

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new technologies; freedom of expression whether it be through the so called traditional media or online should of course be addressed by the RFOM and the OSCE.

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