

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation meeting 2014**  
**Statement by the Delegation of Canada**  
**Working Session 2: Freedom of Expression**  
**23 September, 2014**

Mr. Moderator,

Freedom of expression and media freedom are the cornerstones of a democratic society. They are essential to the protection of human rights and other fundamental freedoms. The internet and new communication technologies have only created a new forum to empower people to express and share their views, while also spurring development, innovation and economic growth.

While we should be celebrating this accomplishment, instead we face a growing trend of increased efforts to restrict free expression and freedom of assembly online in an all-too-familiar pattern of intimidation and violence against media workers and civil society. Instead of harnessing the internet to empower their citizens, some governments in the OSCE region are using the latest cyber technologies to suppress free speech, quash dissent and silence criticisms. Tools of freedom are being turned into tools of repression.

While the OSCE region is focused on Russia's overt aggression against Ukraine, we must not ignore the dangerous acceleration of restrictions on the Internet and the crackdown on independent media and opposition voices in Russia itself. These actions are in contravention of OSCE commitments and must concern us all. As we witness an intense campaign of disinformation against Ukraine by Russian state-controlled media, let's not forget that the seemingly anonymous "green men" we've seen in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have their online equivalents.

Mr. Moderator,

Despite progress in many participating States, the OSCE region is still home to great discrepancies when it comes to media freedom. The 2014 ranking by Reporters Without Borders shows that while the top 20 is occupied by 18 OSCE participating States, the bottom 20 still has 4 OSCE participating States. Freedom House's Press Freedom Ranking, for its part, identifies 31 OSCE participating States as "free", 14 "partially free" and 11 as "not free".

Surely it is no coincidence that those participating States ranking at the bottom of these lists are often the ones most eager to slow down or block the OSCE's work on the safety of journalists or on the recognition of online freedoms. These participating States should, with the support of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and OSCE field operations, make rapid progress towards more democratic and prosperous societies that embrace freedom of expression and media freedom. A democratic society is a reflection of the will of its people. Therefore, in order for a democratic society to exist, the voice of its people must be heard.

Canada's recommendations for this session are:

-For participating States to fully respect their OSCE commitments and international obligations with regards to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, both online and offline.

-For the Representative on Freedom of the Media to continue her efforts to stimulate the reflection and actions of participating States on how freedom of expression and media freedom can be advanced through the internet.

-For the Representative on Freedom of the Media to continue to bring implementation issues to the attention of participating States, with a focus on egregious and systematic violations of freedom of expression.