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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

I am Ahmad Shahidov, represent the Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

Media freedom is an essential part of fundamental freedoms. Because a society where the media is not free can not develop. I want to stand on another important issue. Because at today's meeting there were some critical views on media freedom. But I would like to express my own attitude to some of the views expressed here about Azerbaijan. Sometimes I wonder if those who criticize Azerbaijan have been ever in Azerbaijan or not? Have they been able to closely monitor the activities of the media in my country?

If you dont know, I can give you some basic information. Everyone, regardless of their identity in Azerbaijan, can open a news portal. You can do this within 1 day. Everyone in Azerbaijan can open a newspaper, regardless of his identity or specialty. It is enough just to send a written notice to the Ministry of Justice. Now I would like to ask representatives of 57 countries sitting here. Are there any similar possibilities in any OSCE member state?

Freedom of media in Azerbaijan is in extreme form. And we see the negative consequences of it. I can explain the details. Because there are no restrictions on a news website or a newspaper in Azerbaijan today, anyone can engage in a news website and in my journalistic activities. As a result, about 3000 news websites are operating in the country today. Imagine a moment. In a small country like Azerbaijan with a population of 10 million, there are 3,000 news web sites. Many of these sites have only one employee, and he or she is an editor-in-chief.

There are 3 thousands editors-in-chief in Azerbaijan. And 2000 of them are not specialized journalists. For example, you go to dental clinic and a taxi driver is the person who treats your teeth.

And this situation leads to some incomprehensible situations. For

example, those people who are not related to any journalism have an editorial card in their pocket, and one day, when they commit illegal acts and legally accountable, international organizations make statements that some journalist was arrested in Azerbaijan. I want to draw concrete examples. They often talk about Afgan Mukhtarli and say that in Azerbaijan, the journalist was arrested. I have known Afgan for many years. I can not understand how much he is related to journalism. If one of the people sitting here can show me only 5 articles of Afgan, I can accept him as a journalist. But there are no such articles. Because Afgan is not a journalist. I am fully responsible for these words.

At the same time, I would like to apply to Azerbaijani representatives here. Today there are conditions in Azerbaijan that people who are not related to journalism can also work in the press. First of all, the media should be reformed and certain arrangements should be made in this field.