



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY  
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE  
REPRESENTATIVE ON THE FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 21 November 2019

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Mr. Chair,

I join others in welcoming the Representative on the Freedom of the Media (RFoM), Mr Harlem Désir, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his report.

The freedom of expression and the freedom of the media are cornerstones of democracy. They are also crucial for the realization of other human rights. Attacks on journalists or other media actors, as well as infringement upon their independent work, are attacks on these freedoms. As such, they are attacks on democracy itself.

Restrictions on the freedom of expression can only be justified in exceptional cases. Still, some participating states routinely hinder this freedom through the misuse of legislation to counter terrorism, or against blasphemy and defamation. The RFoM has addressed this issue several times. Sadly, the RFoM's report shows many examples of obstruction of the freedom of expression. This continues to be a reliable indicator of increasingly undemocratic tendencies.

Norway is concerned by the flaccid responses of several governments in response to serious, sometimes deadly, attacks on journalists. For every journalist that is killed, many others are pressured into silence. We condemn all such attacks, and urge the participating states to bring the perpetrators to justice in accordance with the rule of law. Every act of violence that goes unpunished encourages further violence. In the end, only states can stop this vicious cycle.

The interventions of the RFoM are very important for keeping the international community informed of the situation for the media in the OSCE region. They are also important to holding states accountable for their responses, or lack thereof, to ensure a

safe and enabling working environment for the media. In this regard, the independence of the RFoM's office, as guaranteed by the mandate of the Representative, is essential to effective monitoring and interventions.

Another alarming development is online state censorship. Online publications and social media have become key elements in the democratic dialogue. The freedoms of expression, and of the media, on these platforms are no less important than in a newspaper, on TV, or in any other context of traditional media. A free and open internet is vital for the freedom of expression. In this regard, we must also pay close attention to the use of artificial intelligence in online content moderation.

The freedom of expression, the freedom of the media and the safety of journalists and other media actors are key priorities for Norway. We support the development of laws and institutions that safeguard the independence of the media, combat censorship and promote public access to information. The RFoM's legal reviews are in each instance a concrete example of support to states that bring us closer to these objectives, one review at a time. We strongly support the work of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and thank him for his efforts.

Thank you