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As delivered by Minister Counsellor Knut-Are Okstad at the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 23 November 2023.

Mr. Chair,

We thank the Representative for her highly valuable report to this Council, and for her clear messages to the participating States. The RFoM's mandate has not only proven its significance, but has also become increasingly important over recent years. While its foundation is rooted in the third dimension, the role of media freedom is undeniably crucial for the advancement and fortification of both the first and second dimensions of security as well.

Mr. Chair,

The right to freedom of expression, including free access to information, is fundamental to the realization of other human rights. Freedom of expression is essential to enabling people to acquire knowledge and form their own opinions. Freedom of expression is also a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy where all members of society can take part in a free exchange of views and ideas and influence the development of our societies.

An independent, critical press is one of the most important institutions in any democratic society. It is the role of the media to report on matters of public interest, expose issues of concern and abuses of power, and to facilitate an open and informed debate in which differing views and ideas can be aired. A wide range of independent media channels are crucial to ensuring that all groups in society have the possibility to gain insight into and influence matters that affect them. This is nothing to be afraid of. In most cases, it contributes to the long-term legitimacy of political institutions and decisions.

At the Warsaw Human Dimension conference in October this year, Norway renewed its commitments to media freedom and the safety of journalists. Norway has pledged to contribute to coordinated and effective efforts by governments, the media, and civil society organizations in supporting media development and the safety of journalists. We are committed to ensure that all Norwegian support to media development and safety of journalists involves women's meaningful participation and protects their safety online and offline.

In this vein, Norway remains steadfast in its support for the fundamental principles of media freedom and the safety of journalists, recognizing these as pillars of a thriving, democratic society. This commitment aligns with the Milan Decision on the Safety of Journalists from 2018. This decision marked a significant step, being the first to be adopted by states in the Human Dimension since 2014. In an era increasingly tarnished by war rhetoric and misinformation, the interplay between security and media freedom becomes critical. Free and independent media serve as a stronghold against disinformation, ensuring that the public remains informed and resilient in the face of manipulative narratives.

Mr. Chair,

Norway is dedicated to advancing policies and strategies that not only address current issues but also anticipate future challenges. Our approach encompasses, support for legislative reforms, capacity-building programs, and advocacy efforts that champion the rights of journalists and media organizations. By doing so, Norway aims to contribute significantly to the creation of a safer, more transparent, and more accountable media environment worldwide.

Protecting human rights in the digital sphere is a priority for Norway, and an area where targeted measures are needed. We therefore want to particularly commend the Representative's work with the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) project. As

the report says, the attacks on female journalists are twofold, they are attacked both as journalists and as woman, facing threats such as physical and psychological violence. These attacks may lead to self-censorship or even compel woman to retreat from the public sphere, ultimately making it an attack on democracy itself. We believe this project will be a great contribution to counter such tendencies.

Mr. Chair,

Norway strongly supports the mandate of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media. It is imperative that the autonomy of the office is preserved and respected, for the Representative and her staff to be able to fulfill the mandate which – and I would like to stress this - has been decided by all participating States.

The institution can only fulfill its mandate if there is a Representative in place, and we, the participating States, have an obligation to find consensus on this.

To ensure the institution's continued function, we also have a duty to provide a sufficient budget. I will once again call on us all to join forces in deciding on a robust unified budget.

Let me reiterate Norway's strong support for the work of the Representative in the past year and ensure her of our continued cooperation. Teresa Ribeiro has done an excellent job in fulfilling the mandate of her position and institution.

Thank you.