

**Opening Remarks by**

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**at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on:  
Freedom of the Media  
Protection of Journalists and Access to Information**

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Dear Ambassadors, dear Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of the Media: Protection of Journalists and Access to Information. I am pleased that you are all here today, as the role played by the governments and the NGO community in media democratization is of utmost importance.

This meeting will have three working sessions, each one of them focused on one of the three outstanding dangers currently faced by the media in the OSCE region.

Access to Information is both a classic and modern challenge. It is a classic challenge because pluralistic access to information in society to and from all participants of public life, including to and from government, is the actual purpose of media democratization. It is a modern challenge, too, due to the new possibilities that lie in e-governance and digital information storing. Although it is absolutely legitimate for a state to have certain limits to access to information when national security interests are at stake, we have recently seen growing use of these restrictions. At stake are the accustomed investigative rights of the media. These challenges will be discussed during the first working session.

The second danger to freedom of expression is intercultural misunderstanding, as we have witnessed in the recent controversies caused by secular artistic depictions of religious subjects. Some governments reacted to these events by planning to pass new speech restriction rules, or by applying laws that were not originally designed to handle these types of problems. However, punitive measures enforced by states can not lead to a formation of a self-regulating ethics, the only device that can be conducive to a growth of intercultural understanding and to a mutual rapprochement of only seemingly opposing cultures. It must be implemented by the media itself.

Freedom of expression is a pre-requisite if we want to get to a higher level of cultural understanding. Only a completely free media can be a responsible media. Artistic freedom, cultural understanding, self-regulation and other issues related to these topics will be discussed by our special panel in the second session.

Administrative discrimination faced by the media in the OSCE region will be the focus of the last session. While some administration is necessary to allow for the well-functioning of the media, a worrying development is happening in quite a few of the OSCE participating States. Administrative measures, seemingly based on the rule of law, at a closer glance can be seen as differently applied for different media outlets. The media can only be free if private and government media are treated equally. Regulation, re-regulation, accreditation, taxation and distribution restrictions are only some of the methods used to discriminate. In order to ensure freedom of the media, the revision of these tools need to be carried out by the governments themselves.

I will now pass the floor to Ambassador Strohal, Director of ODIHR.