

Statement by the Delegation of CANADA

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### **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE MEDIA**

Thank you.

Canada strongly believes that freedom of media and expression remains a cornerstone of democratic societies and essential to the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

The right to freedom of opinion and expression is at the core of human individuality and dignity and Canada has reflected this by enshrining these freedoms within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, it is an important indicator of the level of protection of other human rights and freedoms. Several OSCE commitments have been made to ensure the individual's freedom of expression, freedom of information, and the freedom of the media. This right is inter-linked and interdependent with the exercise of all human rights and is one of the essential foundations of a free and democratic society. It is enabled by a democratic environment which offers guarantees for its protection.

Moreover, restrictions on the freedom of expression, especially on journalists and publishers reporting on government activities, limit the work of the media in exposing injustice and holding to account those responsible. Canada will continue to call regimes to account for failures to respect the right to freedom of expression, including free speech and a free media, as one of the pillars of democracy and rule of law.

Canada would like to congratulate the Representative of Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic on her appointment in this important position last March. Since the creation of this position, the Representatives of Freedom of the Media have delivered substantive reports which have included disturbing information on suppression of media freedoms and censorship by certain OSCE participating States. We support the Representative of Freedom of the Media's work in promoting concrete solutions to violations of commitments of OSCE press freedoms in a number of OSCE countries.

Canada welcomes the attention of the OSCE to current state practices related to the free flow of information and freedom of expression on the Internet. Existing and emerging information and communication technologies hold promise for promoting human rights and wider democratic participation. Effectively protecting and advancing individual rights with regards to these technologies pose policy challenges for us all.

Regrettably, violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression continue to occur, often with impunity, including attacks or acts of intimidation on journalists. These violations conceal and can support the abrogation of other human rights. Therefore it is important to have in place the mechanisms to allow citizens to bring their concerns to the attention of their government, and to seek justice when their rights have been violated.

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada calls on all participating States who fail to honour their commitments on the right to freedom of expression, information and media, in the name of concerns over “state security”, or through allegations of slander and libel of government officials, to uphold their commitments and to encourage open and constructive dialogue on concerns expressed by civil society.

The Office of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media is crucial in assisting OSCE participating States implement our shared principles and commitments. At the same time, given the rapid developments in the media landscape in recent years, the Office also has to address new challenges and opportunities presented by new information and communication technologies, including the Internet and the digital switchover, both of which require additional efforts and specific expertise. In view of this, and given the currently modest capacity of the Office in terms of finances and staff, the Office should be adequately reinforced with additional expert staff and budgetary resources.

My delegation sincerely hopes that with the assistance of the OSCE, all participating States will come to the realization that a truly free society has nothing to fear, and everything to gain, from hearing voices from free press and media.

Thank you.