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Statement by the Delegation of CANADA

By Yves Beaulieu, Deputy Head of Delegation

ENGLISH only

Review Conference on the Implementation of OSCE Commitments
Human Dimension
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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE MEDIA

Thank you.

Canada takes this opportunity to thank the OSCE Representative of Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, for her continued efforts in carrying out her mandate effectively.

The Office of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media is crucial in assisting OSCE participating States to implement our shared principles and commitments to uphold and foster media freedom.

Canada is unwavering in its commitment to safeguard media freedom. The right to freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental human right with far-reaching consequences for the enjoyment of all other rights. This right is at the core of human individuality and dignity and of a vibrant media.

In recent years, we have been particularly preoccupied by the disturbing number of journalists and media professional who are being killed, arbitrarily imprisoned, harassed, victims of abusive legal processes, threatened and made to disappear in the OSCE region. It is gravely concerning that perpetrators of these attacks often enjoy a high rate of impunity. Participating States must pro-actively investigate threats and acts of violence against those seeking to exercise their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and ensure that there is an effective remedy for infringements of these rights.

On too many occasions, these attacks are being used as a means of silencing those who were trying to shed light on independent, critical voices or situations of serious concern, who investigate crimes and corruption, or who impart the perspective of the political opposition. In other words, journalists pay the price for the lack of transparency, accountability and justice in a society through their courageous commitment to their work.

Canada applauds journalists in the OSCE region whose work exposes injustice and holds 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.

As we raised at our last meeting in Warsaw, Canada applauds the Office of the Representative on the Freedom of the Media for the importance it attaches to safeguarding freedom of expression on the Internet. New information and communication technologies provide unparalleled opportunities for the free flow of ideas and widespread access to information. Importantly, they hold promise for promoting human rights and democracy.

Canada is, therefore, very concerned by restrictions on the right to freedom of expression resulting from measures taken by some governments to censor or control the Internet. Canada is also deeply disturbed by the growing phenomenon of attacks against citizen journalists, human rights defenders

and democracy advocates who use the Internet to express their views and hold governments to account.

Participating States must be reminded of the applicability of existing global human rights standards to the Internet. The right to freedom of opinion and of expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is guaranteed, regardless of the medium. All States are obligated to safeguard this right, along with other fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada calls on all OSCE participating States to honour their OSCE commitments and to take more effective action to ensure media freedom. Canada is hopeful that we can find common ground on some of the challenging issues that I have highlighted in order to advance the rights and fundamental freedoms which we all hold dear. We are hopeful that the upcoming OSCE Summit will be the opportunity to reaffirm and enhance to role of the Special Representative of the Media.

Thank you.