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Remarks to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

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Thank you for having me here today. It is an honour to represent the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and I applaud the selection of freedom of the media as a key topic for this meeting – this is both appropriate and necessary.

Challenges to freedom of the media come in many forms. Journalists endure violence and sometimes face prison time simply for doing their jobs.

But censorship and intimidation are only the most visible of the many challenges faced by journalists. In reality, there are numerous pressures that inhibit true freedom of the media – including financial and political pressures, self-censorship and a dilution of traditional standards in the journalism profession.

We have recently witnessed an unprecedented wave of rhetorical attacks on the media, with the press denounced as “fake news” or even “enemies of the people.” Beyond that, governments have also waged crackdowns on whistleblowers, which have severely hampered the ability of reporters to conduct serious investigative journalism.

In some cases, it may be necessary for a government to protect official secrets. But in a free society, we should recognize that everyone benefits from an informed electorate.

While this requires that governments refrain from all forms of censorship or intimidation, it also means that journalists should endeavor to get the story right and resist the herd mentality that too often prevents honest and balanced reporting.

In our Berlin Declaration adopted two months ago, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly called on OSCE participating States to promote quality journalism and ensure that efforts to address disinformation and propaganda comply with international legal guarantees of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

The OSCE and civil society must work together toward these ends and to defend journalists from persecution. In this regard, I would like to thank, in particular, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir and his team for doing such an excellent job in keeping the spotlight on the most egregious violations of media freedom in the OSCE area.

And of course, I would like to thank the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Chairmanship for organizing this important event.

Thank you.