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Joint Statement
On behalf of members of the informal OSCE Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists

32 OSCE Ministerial Council
Vienna, 4-5 December 2025

Mr./Ms Chair, dear Ministers, Ambassadors and delegates,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following participating States that are members of the Informal Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and my own country, France.

The following countries aligned themselves with the statement: Albania, Andorra, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Switzerland.

Media freedom constitutes an essential element of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. A free, independent, and pluralistic media environment strengthens democratic governance, promotes transparency and accountability, and contributes to war prevention, societal resilience and the enjoyment of all human rights. The ability of journalists and media actors to operate without undue interference, censorship, intimidation, or violence is fundamental to safeguarding the public's right to seek, receive, and impart information, as enshrined in OSCE participating States' commitments.

Participating States have repeatedly affirmed these obligations through key OSCE documents, including the Helsinki Final Act, the Copenhagen Document, and Ministerial Council Decision 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists, which underscore the vital role of free and independent media in fostering open societies and upholding the rule of law. These commitments require States to ensure legal and practical conditions that protect freedom of expression, promote media pluralism, improve the safety of journalists, end impunity for crimes against journalists, and prevent the misuse of legislation or the judicial system to silence dissenting voices or restrict independent reporting.

With deep regret, we observe a grave contrast between certain participating States' commitment to end impunity for crimes against journalists and actual practice. Rather than investigating and prosecuting those who assault, threaten, or kill journalists, we are witnessing an increasing number of cases in various participating States where the judicial and penal systems are turned against journalists themselves, while attacks on them remain unpunished. Journalism has turned into a high-risk profession, and we must not allow this situation to be normalised and deteriorate even further. Even in the face of legitimate national security concerns, legal instruments should under no circumstances be misused to suppress independent media and to persecute journalists and other media actors.

Among the serious consequences of Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine is the deterioration of the situation of the media in the context of the war. Since the beginning of the war, a significant number of journalists have been killed or subjected to arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance by the Russian aggressor. Credible reports indicate that media infrastructure and media workers have become direct targets. Intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects, as well as indiscriminate attacks, may amount to gross violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes. Under international humanitarian law, journalists must be protected (as civilians). We call on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally release all media professionals imprisoned because of their professional activities, including in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

In Russia itself and in Belarus, the situation is also alarming. Media actors face a repressive environment where media freedom no longer exists. Numerous journalists have been harassed, attacked and imprisoned for their professional activities on politically motivated charges. Russian and Belarusian authorities have expanded and misused so-called "anti-extremism" and "anti-terrorism" laws to punish the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. State-sponsored disinformation, censorship and foreign information manipulation and interference deeply affect media freedom. The systematic and continuous repression of independent media in Russia and Belarus has severely repressed all forms of independent journalism.

Journalists have been arrested, prosecuted, and convicted in a number of countries, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan. In Turkmenistan the room for independent journalism is very limited.

In Georgia, once a regional leader in media freedom, the authorities turned towards further undermining independent journalism through harassment, intimidation, legislation and judicial actions, as well as arbitrary detentions of media actors.

We remain deeply concerned by the erosion of media freedom in other parts of the OSCE region. We observe increasing violence and hostility towards the media in the public space, a lack of adequate response by security officials, an unwillingness of police forces to protect journalists and media actors. In some instances, it seems that media professionals were even attacked by law enforcement officials, with reports of deliberate physical attacks, harassment, seizure and destruction of professional equipment, and even arbitrary detention.

In this context, the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media is crucial: to exercise an early warning function, provide rapid response to serious non-compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments, and to assist States in improving media laws and practices.

We commend the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in promoting the safety of women journalists. Last week we commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) project. We welcome this project as an important activity of RFOM's office. By addressing the threat of gender-specific online violence faced by women in media, it has contributed to a safer and more inclusive online environment for women journalists through the SOFJO Resource Guide, through the Guidelines for Monitoring Online Violence Against Female Journalists, and through specific capacity-building program tailored to address the needs of the different stakeholders.

Mr./Ms Chair, dear Ministers, Ambassadors and delegates,

Freedom of the media, including the safety of journalists, is not just central to States upholding their human rights obligations but a cornerstone of sustainable security and stability across the OSCE region. We urge participating States to fully implement their commitments, strengthen institutional safeguards for independent journalism, and support the efforts of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in this regard.

May I ask this statement to be registered and attached to the journal of the day.