

UN Human Rights Council – 38th Regular Session

Item 3, General Debate

Statement by the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists

Thank you Mr. President,

I'm delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, namely Argentina, Austria, Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco, Netherlands, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Sweden and Tunisia.

We are greatly concerned that the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media - both online and offline - are increasingly under threat around the world. Journalists and media workers are subject to many types of repression - while women journalists face specific risks for conducting their mission to inform the public. Journalists and media workers are being jailed or even killed for reporting facts and exposing wrongdoings, including human rights violations; they or their outlets are being censored, attacked, threatened, shuttered or harassed.

Restricting the public's access to oppositional or dissenting views, by shutting down independent media, harassing or imprisoning journalists and media workers, shutting down the Internet or blocking websites, is unacceptable.

We are also deeply alarmed that in too many instances, public authorities, including political leaders, not only fail to speak out and condemn attacks on journalists, media workers and media outlets, but actively seek to undermine them. Statements from public authorities that seek to denigrate the media, accusing them of spreading propaganda, disinformation or so-called "fake-news", undermine public trust in journalism as a public watchdog.

Press freedom is a fundamental pillar of the universal, inalienable right to freedom of expression. Each State needs to build the conditions for a safe environment, online and offline, which enables journalists to perform their work independently and without any interference. [The ability of the State to protect journalists and media workers depends on the extent to which there is general societal appreciation of the importance of freedom of expression, enabling legislation is in place, the rule of law prevails, and the political will to protect journalists and to fight impunity exists.]

We welcome the establishment by the Secretary General of a network of focal points in the UN system to enhance the safety of journalists. We encourage the Secretary General to continue his efforts in this regard and to operationalize this mechanism and its work, including on the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, in cooperation with Member States and the dedicated Groups of Friends.

Our States remain fully committed to continue promoting and protecting the safety of journalists, media freedom, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression worldwide.

I thank you.