



1266th Permanent Council of the OSCE, 7 May 2020

World Press Freedom Day

Statement by Switzerland

Mr. Chairman,

This statement is delivered on behalf of Andorra, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, San Marino and Switzerland.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated very clearly how vital access to accurate and reliable information is. Journalists and independent media play a key role in providing fact-based information about the coronavirus, its spread and impact, as well as in reporting about government measures to address the global pandemic. It is under these unique circumstances that we celebrate World Press Freedom Day 2020 and are reminded of the importance of free and independent journalism for resilient and free societies.

We are witnessing an immense spread of disinformation and misinformation around the pandemic. Independent media have a key role to play in countering disinformation and misinformation by providing access to reliable and independent information. It is therefore of greatest importance that they can operate freely and without undue interference or restrictions.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic several participating States across the OSCE region have adopted or proposed broad new measures targetting disinformation and misinformation, but which could, in their implementation, negatively affect the work of journalists and media workers. Declarations of state of emergency due to the Covid-

19 pandemic should not be used as a basis to limit freedom of expression and constrain the working environment of journalists and media workers. Such trends are deeply worrying and have been swiftly addressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. In the last weeks, he expressed concerns about such developments in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia and Serbia. We took note that, in some cases, the restrictive measures or proposed restrictive measures addressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media were reversed or lifted. It is critical that the fight against misinformation respects the role of free, independent and pluralistic media and guarantees access to information.

Mr. Chairman,

There is also a dangerous trend of denigration and de-legitimization of the media. Indiscriminate attacks, including by politicians, on the media are a threat to freedom of expression and must cease immediately. We are also concerned that women journalists face increasing dangers, highlighting the need for a gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists, as well as media freedom as a whole.

World Press Freedom Day is an opportunity to stand up for the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of information, and freedom of the press. Press freedom is also a strong indicator of well-functioning democracies, in particular during times of crisis. Journalism serves a crucial function at a moment of public health emergency, particularly when it aims to inform the public of critical information and monitors government actions.

We join the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir in calling on all OSCE participating States to fully respect the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information, and to let journalists and media workers do their work unhindered and unrestricted, without fear or favor, as reflected in this year's theme of the World Press Freedom Day. With the adoption of the OSCE Milan Ministerial Council decision on the safety of journalists in December 2018, the OSCE participating States have reaffirmed their commitment to respect, promote, and protect freedom of expression and media freedom, and to refrain from adopting policies and practices that

limit the ability of journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference. Under the current circumstances, this is more important than ever.

Before concluding, let me express our appreciation and full support to the Representative on Freedom of the Media and his team for their important and valuable work during the current pandemic and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.