Media Freedom: A Global Responsibility

Wednesday 25 September, 8:00-9:30, UN Conference Room 5

In response to the UN Secretary-General’s appeal to all Governments to defend a free media, the UK and Canada have initiated a global campaign to champion media freedom and increase the costs to those that are attempting to restrict it. To advance these objectives, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State, The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, will host a Ministerial event to launch the Media Freedom Coalition with UK Special Envoy on Media Freedom Amal Clooney, and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. The panel event will include participation from Ministers, journalists, media professionals and civil society representatives.

Maintaining a spotlight on media freedom

The world is becoming an increasingly hostile place for journalists and media workers. 2018 was one of the deadliest years with at least 99 journalists worldwide killed¹, almost 350 detained and 60 held hostage². UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has commented that: “A free press is essential for peace, justice, sustainable development and human rights. No democracy is complete without access to transparent and reliable information. It is the cornerstone for building fair and impartial institutions, holding leaders accountable and speaking truth to power.”

As the UN Security Council has recognised, including in UNSCRs 1738 (2013) and 2222 (2015), governments have a critical role to play in supporting the functioning of an independent media and in preventing impunity for those who perpetrate attacks on journalists. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity aims to support Member State governments by assisting the development of legislation and mechanisms favourable to freer and safer media environments. Civil society organisations also play a vital role in supporting journalists to manage and mitigate the risks of reporting, and advocating for respect for media freedom.

The first Global Conference for Media Freedom was held in London in July, with over 100 countries represented by governments, civil society and the media. Canada will host the next annual conference in late 2020.

Five campaign initiatives were launched at the July Conference:

1. **The Pledge**: developed jointly by the UK and Canada, signing commits governments to championing media freedom and to joining the Global Coalition. During the Conference 26 countries signed the Pledge, and more continue to do so.

2. **Media Freedom Coalition**: the newly formed Coalition aims to promote media freedom by lobbying on individual cases, making collective statements in international fora and supporting members of the Coalition and other countries to improve protections for the media.

3. **Independent High Level Panel of Legal Experts**: convened by Amal Clooney, who acts as deputy chair, with Lord Neuberger as chair, the panel are providing advice for governments on legal mechanisms to protect the media.

4. **Global Media Defence Fund**: administered by UNESCO, the fund will support, train and provide legal advice for journalists, as well as helping countries develop their national frameworks on the safety of journalists and tackling impunity. The UK has contributed $3.7 million.

5. **International Task Force on National Action Plans**: encouraging governments to implement legislation and policies conducive to the protection and safety of journalists. Since the Conference an international taskforce, led by UNESCO, has been established to support countries in identifying and replicating best practice.

**Focus of the Event**

This event will bring together high-level representatives from a range of Member States, journalists, media professionals and civil society partners to discuss how to translate political commitments into practical action to address the challenges around media freedom. It will:

- Launch the **Media Freedom Coalition**, announcing its membership and how it will operate to reinforce global commitments, international initiatives and regional fora;
- highlight the opportunity for funding contributions and bids to the **Global Media Defence Fund**, administered by UNESCO;
- Share experiences in the development of **National Action Plans** on the safety of journalists.

Participants will be invited to pose questions to the panel. There will not be an opportunity to make national statements, but governments may wish to highlight any commitments they are making as part of the Q&A. The event will be in English without interpretation.

This event will be on the record, with media present, and webcast on UN Web TV. A summary will be circulated to participants.