

Declaration by the High Representative Josep Borrell, on behalf of the European Union, on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2020



Thank you for your essential work! #WorldPressFreedomDay

On World Press Freedom Day, we pay tribute to the essential role of journalism in upholding online and offline freedom of expression in democratic societies and fostering transparency and accountability.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought the importance of the work of the press into sharp relief. In times of uncertainty, more than ever, access to reliable fact-checked information, that is free from undue interference and influence, is crucial and contributes to a more resilient society. It is a matter of concern that the COVID-19 pandemic is being used in some countries as a pretext for imposing undue restrictions on freedom of the press.

Despite the additional risks and challenges arising from COVID-19 pandemic, journalists and media workers all over the world are continuing their essential work, sometimes in difficult circumstances. They are giving a voice to the most vulnerable, making sure their stories are heard. They are bringing testimonies from less accessible areas, including conflict zones. They are providing essential information about the often devastating impact of the pandemic in different parts of the world as well as uplifting stories of solidarity and courage.

Journalists are pivotal in facilitating the debate on how societies can prepare better for challenges as those we are facing and ultimately how they can become safer, more prosperous and more sustainable. Journalists must be able to work freely. Today, perhaps more than ever, freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democratic societies, which can thrive only if citizens have access to reliable information and can make informed choices. Journalism helps to detect and counter disinformation.

In too many countries journalists have to contend with restrictive legislation, sometimes ascribed to the COVID-19 emergency, that curbs freedom of expression and the freedom of the press. Internet shutdowns and website closures are proliferating. Reporters, especially women, are subject to smear campaigns, financial pressure and attacks by government or partisan media outlets, often forcing them to self-censor. Too many face harassment, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Too many have lost their lives for doing their work.

The European Union is working at home and abroad to counter the health, human rights and socio-economic implications of the pandemic, including on media

houses. While uncompromising on the need to uphold freedom of expression, the EU's response also focuses on fighting disinformation about COVID-19. This involves promoting trustworthy sources, demoting false or misleading content, and taking down content that is illegal. These actions can only succeed if they can build on the conscientious work of committed and courageous journalists, whose daily efforts make societies safer, fairer and more democratic.

Today, the EU strongly reaffirms its continued support for the key role of independent and reliable media all around the world. Press freedom is a right, not just of media professionals, but of each and every one of us.