

## Report by OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media: UK response, November 2022

Thank you Mr Chair and thank you Ms Ribeiro for your report and for yesterday's event marking 25 years of your important institution.

Media freedom is an essential part of a healthy information ecosystem. The free flow of independently generated and evidence based information is the scaffolding for building democracy. We agree with you that media literacy is essential. People must be able to understand the role media plays in supporting democracy and security and be able to critically assess and use information. Disinformation leads to the polarisation of society and makes societies more insecure.

Your report, rightly focused on the impact of Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine – your second report this year delivered against the backdrop of this war. In Ukraine, in those areas under temporary Russian control, journalists continue to be targeted, with at least eight killed and 18 kidnapped for reporting the facts of the continuing invasion.

We will never recognise Russia's illegal attempted annexation of Ukrainian territory, nor the imposition of Russian legislation that seeks to deny the rights to freedom of opinion and expression. The rights of the people living and working in those regions under temporary Russian control remain protected under international human rights law. Independent journalists in those regions now face even greater challenges, yet their work remains as vital as ever, including efforts to ensure accountability.

Mr Chair, the report by the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) today also highlights in the Russian Federation the most severe deterioration of media freedom in the OSCE region in the past 25 years. An internal war of repression accompanying, and enabling, the external war of aggression in Ukraine. The [Moscow Mechanism report on Russia](#) outlines censorship, closure of independent media and websites, banning of foreign media, treason and extremism charges against Russian journalists for doing their legitimate work.

The actions of the Russian Government are not compatible with their obligations under international law and their OSCE commitments. They are not compatible with a proper functioning democracy. We support your call on Russia to fulfil its OSCE principles and commitments and ensure an enabling environment for media to freely report on matters of public interest without undue interference, threats and intimidation.

Belarus too remains in a downward spiral. The report found a clear pattern of systematic repression against independent journalism: judicial reprisals, arrests, convictions behind closed doors on trumped up charges, and lengthy

imprisonments. Ms Ribeiro, we echo your [call on Belarus](#) “to stop prosecuting media workers as a deliberate way of sowing fear and silencing free voices.”

We greatly value your important work across the whole OSCE region, including in the Western Balkans and Central Asia, and on key topics such as the safety of journalists, on restrictive measures at the national level that limit media freedom, and on the dangers of misinformation and disinformation.

Yesterday we marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, yet, Ms Ribeiro; you describe the situation in our region as bleak. We cannot afford to be indifferent when journalists and media workers are killed, attacked, threatened or harassed. We must be relentless and determined to stamp this out.

We point to the [2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists](#). This Decision has authority. Adopted by consensus. It is a road map for us all to provide a safe and enabling environment for journalists, and to ensure our laws, policy and practice fully comply with international human rights law and OSCE Commitments.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the success of this year’s Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw. We heard from journalists and civil society actors fighting for improved media freedom across the OSCE region. The UK remains committed to continuing this dialogue and working with your office to implement some of the recommendations from the conference to ensure media freedom is protected and journalists are able to operate safely across the OSCE region.

Ms Ribeiro – we thank you for all the many activities that you are carrying out to fulfil your mandate. We all share the responsibility to respond and end impunity for crimes against journalists. The UK is committed to this.

Thank you Mr Chair.