

Statement on the Conclusion of the Ministerial Meeting on Media Freedom: A Global Responsibility

- [Statement]
{<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-on-the-conclusion-of-the-ministerial-meeting-on-media-freedom-a-global-responsibility>}
delivered by Minister Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon at the ministerial meeting on Media Freedom at the UN General Assembly 2019
- [Press release]
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lord-ahmad-there-is-a-moral-imperative-to-stop-threat-to-media-freedom>) issued at the ministerial meeting on Media Freedom at the UN General Assembly 2019

The meeting brought together representatives of governments, international organisations, civil society and the media in the cause of promoting and defending media freedom. The panel discussion was chaired by UK Special Envoy on Media Freedom, Ms Amal Clooney, with contributions from the Prime Minister of Sudan, HE Mr Abdalla Hamdok, UNESCO Director-General, Mme Audrey Azoulay, representing HE the UN Secretary General, and prominent Washington Post journalist Mr Jason Rezaian.

Building on the Global Conference for Media Freedom co-hosted by the UK and Canada in London on 10-11 July 2019, participants discussed how to turn political statements into practical action. Speakers noted that media freedom is crucial for a well-functioning democracy, for economic prosperity and for security. Attacks on the media are attacks on human rights. Media freedom is a global issue that requires global action.

2018 was one of the deadliest years for media freedom, with at least 99 journalists and media workers killed worldwide, almost 350 detained and 60 held hostage. Yet despite the risk of death and the pressure from physical threats, restrictive laws, punitive legal measures and other forms of intimidation, participants applauded journalists' continuing courage in the face of adversity. Their reporting is critical in holding the powerful to account.

The meeting marked the formal launch of the Media Freedom Coalition, with 32 governments announcing that they will be members. They have each signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom that the UK and Canada opened for signature at the Global Conference. Signatories take on a commitment to take action to improve media freedom and the safety of journalists at home and abroad.

Coalition members have committed to speak out and to lobby on individual cases and to take collective action on abuses against the media. Members of the coalition have pledged to "work to ensure that those who violate or abuse the human rights that underpin media freedom – be they governments or private entities – are held to account". They will publicly highlight cases where

action needs to be taken immediately, use diplomacy to push for systemic change, and show solidarity with countries that work to build media freedom.

HE the Prime Minister of Sudan set us all an example with his firm commitment to media freedom under Sudan's new leadership. Members of the Coalition were clear that where there is political will to change, they will provide support and encouragement.

Ms Clooney highlighted how the work of the independent High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom will support governments with specialist advice and recommendations for legal and other mechanisms that protect and encourage the functioning of a free media and prevent and reverse abuses or violations of media freedom.

Ms Azoulay set out how UNESCO will continue to champion implementation of the UN Plan of Action and how the Global Media Defence Fund will provide assistance to journalists and to governments seeking to improve their domestic legislation.

In May this year, after spending more than 500 days behind bars, and following concerted international pressure, Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were freed from a Yangon prison in Myanmar. However, many more journalists remain behind bars not just in Burma, but around the globe including in Turkey, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Eritrea. The meeting heard a moving account from Jason Rezaian of his detention in Iran for 544 days.

Death is the ultimate price that journalists can pay for simply doing their job. For exposing the truth. In August, two years have passed since the death of freelance journalist Christopher Allen in South Sudan. In the coming weeks, we will mark the anniversaries, amongst others, of the tragic murders of prominent journalists Martin O'Hagan, Jamal Khashoggi, Daphne Caruana Galizia, and the disappearance of Azory Gwanda. A reminder of the risks journalists face.

The Media Freedom coalition will work to find ways to take more effective action on cases where journalists are persecuted and killed and on wider abuses of the media.

Lord Ahmad confirmed that the UK was developing legislation that would allow it to introduce human rights ('Magnitsky') sanctions when the UK leaves the EU. This will allow the UK, like the US and Canada, to impose sanctions against those who commit the most egregious human rights violations and abuses, including against those working in the media.

The Coalition will next meet at official level in November 2019 and then annually at both Ministerial and senior official level.

Countries who have so far signed the Global Pledge:

- UK

- Canada
- Switzerland
- Germany
- Ghana
- North Macedonia
- Latvia
- Greece
- Luxembourg
- Lithuania
- Iceland
- Argentina
- Seychelles
- Uruguay
- Kosovo
- Lebanon
- France
- Montenegro
- Finland
- Czech Republic

- Serbia
- Maldives
- Costa Rica
- USA
- Ukraine
- Honduras
- Bulgaria
- Slovenia
- Netherlands
- Estonia
- Austria
- Sudan