

Joint statement on safety of journalists and access to information during the COVID-19 crisis

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned chairs and members of the Group of Friends on the Safety/Protection of Journalists are calling on all states to protect journalists' and media workers' safety, safeguard a free and independent media and ensure unhindered access to information, both online and offline.

Free, independent and pluralistic media play an indispensable role in informing the public during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Everyone has the right to comprehensible, accessible, timely and reliable information concerning the nature and level of the threat COVID-19 poses to their health, allowing them to follow evidence-based guidance on how to stay safe.

Public health needs public trust. Trust is crucial to achieving adequate support for and compliance by the general public with efforts by governments to help curb the spread of the virus.

Trust cannot be achieved without transparency and accountability provided and guaranteed by a free media. Conversely, free and independent media has an important role in pushing back against disinformation by providing access to accurate, fact-based and verified information. In this context, it is essential that governments and private entities address disinformation, foremost, by providing reliable information themselves.

We see with great concern an increase in restricting measures taken by States that disproportionately limit the right to freedom of expression and impede journalists and media workers from reporting on the COVID-19 crisis. Arrests, persecution and harassment against journalists and media workers, especially women, as well as smear campaigns to discredit their work and the expulsion of foreign journalists due to their COVID-19 coverage or the criminalisation of alleged misinformation, online and offline, may constitute human rights violations. There should be no place for impunity in democratic societies.

Internet access is essential to ensuring that information reaches those affected by the virus. Governments should end any internet shutdowns, ensure the broadest possible access to internet services, and take steps to bridge digital divides, including the gender gap.

Furthermore, journalists and media workers are subjected to significant physical and psychological risk by being at the frontline reporting on the COVID-19 crisis. They are working under extremely challenging conditions, partly because of lack of sanitary precautions and training, but also because of psychological stress linked to the rapidly evolving situation. 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. It is crucial for societies and the international community as a whole that governments preserve a free, safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers and ensure that they can report on COVID-19 and inform about responses and consequences without undue interference.

We welcome a range of initiatives aimed at supporting journalists' and media workers' safety in the light of COVID-19 undertaken by international organisations, such as UNESCO and civil society, media associations as well as social media companies. Projects to strengthen media in developing countries in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, such as those undertaken by the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication, are particularly welcome.

We also welcome the joint statement of 19 March published by David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; and Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights as well as the press release and statements made by Moez Chakchouk, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, published on 27 March.

We agree with their call that governments must be making exceptional efforts to protect the work of journalists at a moment of public health emergency and we remain fully committed to protecting media freedom and safety of journalists at this critical time.

Signed by Austria, France, Greece, Lithuania and Sweden as the chairs and co-chairs, respectively, of the Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists in New York, Geneva, Vienna (OSCE) and Paris.

Annex

List of co-signatories, members in any of the four Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO in Paris, the United Nations in New York and Geneva and the OSCE in Vienna, in alphabetical order:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Morocco, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay

[Treasury Direction made under Sections](#)

[71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act 2020](#)

The Directions set out that HMRC are responsible for the payment and management of amounts to be paid under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

The Directions set out the legal framework for the Scheme.

Further guidance for employers and employees about the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#).

On 15 April 2020, the Chancellor made a Treasury Direction under Section 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act.

On 22 May 2020 the Chancellor made a further Treasury Direction under Sections 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, reflecting the extension to the Scheme to 30 June 2020 announced by the Chancellor on 17 April and clarifying some provisions within the original Direction.

On 25 June 2020, the Chancellor made a further Treasury Direction under Sections 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, reflecting the extension to the Scheme to 31 October 2020, and the changes to the terms of the scheme from 1 July 2020 onwards, announced by the Chancellor on 12 May 2020.

On 2 October 2020, the Chancellor made a Treasury Direction under Section 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act to set out the legal framework for the Job Retention Bonus. The Direction sets out that HMRC are responsible for the payment and management of amounts to be paid under the Coronavirus Job Retention Bonus, as set out in the Schedule to the Direction.

On 13 November 2020, the Chancellor made a Treasury Direction under Section 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act to extend and modify the effect of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The schedule to this direction sets out the scheme applying for the period beginning on 1 November 2020, and ending on 31 January 2021. This schedule also withdraws the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Job Retention) Bonus established by part 2 of the Schedule to the direction made on 1 October 2020 by the Treasury in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 because the purpose of the Job Retention Bonus has been superseded by the provision made by part 1 of this schedule.

On 25 January 2021, the Chancellor made a Treasury Direction under Section 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act to extend the effect of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The schedule to this direction sets out the scheme applying for the period beginning on 1 February 2021, and ending on 30 April 2021. Due to the overlap with the CJRS that was introduced in March 2020, this Direction modifies the rules to calculate the reference salary and usual hours.

On 15 April 2021, the Lords Commissioners made a Treasury Direction under Section 76 of the Coronavirus Act to extend and modify the effect of the

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The schedule to this direction sets out the scheme applying for the period beginning on 1 May 2021, and ending on 30 September 2021, providing for tapering of the support in July, August and September 2021, and extends the RTI cut-off date to 2 March 2021.

Action against oak tree pest underway by Forestry Commission

Forestry Commission are acting to tackle the oak tree pest, oak processionary moth in parts of London and South East England.

Oak processionary moth was first identified in London in 2006 and has since spread to some surrounding counties.

The caterpillars and their nests contain hairs which can cause itchy rashes, eye and throat irritations, so a Government programme is in place to limit their spread. They can also occasionally cause breathing difficulties in people and pets, so should not be touched under any circumstances.

People with infested trees in the control zone have been advised that work needs to take place over the next two months to help stop the spread of this pest. Contractors spraying affected trees on behalf of the Forestry Commission will carry out work safely, adhering to social distancing guidelines.

Craig Harrison, the Forestry Commission's South-East England Director, said:

Green spaces with trees are proving particularly valuable for visitors of woodlands, who are exercising whilst practicing social distancing this spring.

Controlling OPM will help protect oak tree health and ensure continued enjoyment of parks and woodland by reducing the impact of OPM caterpillars to human health.

Everyone is reminded, particularly those in London and surrounding counties, to report sightings of OPM caterpillars, which could be damaging oak trees in their area.

Any sightings should be reported to the Forestry Commission via [TreeAlert](#). Alternatively, people can email opm@forestrycommission.gov.uk or call 0300 067 4442.

The Forestry Commission, councils and land managers have an annual programme in place to tackle the pest, which affects certain part of the country in the

spring.

How to identify OPM

Nests are typically dome or teardrop-shaped, averaging the size of a tennis ball. They are white when fresh, but soon become discoloured and brown. The caterpillars have black heads and bodies covered in long white hairs which contain proteins which can cause irritations and occasionally, breathing difficulties.

The greatest risk period is May to July, when the caterpillars' emerge and feed before pupating into adult moths, but caterpillars and nests should not be touched at any time. The caterpillars feed on oak leaves, which can leave the trees vulnerable to other pests and diseases and drought.

Anyone pruning or felling oak trees in the affected areas should contact Forestry Commission England's Plant Health Forestry Team beforehand on opm@forestrycommission.gov.uk or 0300 067 4442 for advice about safe removal of the material.

Further information is available from the [Forestry Commission](#) and advice about stings and bites is available on the [NHS Choices website](#).

Further information

- Sighting reports should include a precise description of the location. An Ordnance Survey grid reference is ideal, otherwise a postal address and/or a clear description of the tree's exact position, is helpful, as are clear photographs.
- Forestry Commission's latest operational update in relation to Covid-19 can be read [here](#)
- For further information, contact the Defra Press Office on 020 8225 7318. Out-of-hours, please call 034 5051 8486.

[Lord-Lieutenant of Herefordshire: 15 April 2020](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Government to offer testing for “everyone who needs one” in social care settings

- All symptomatic care residents will be tested for COVID-19 as testing capacity continues to increase
- All patients discharged from hospital to be tested before going into care homes as a matter of course
- All social care staff who need a test will now have access to one with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to contact all 30,000 care providers in the coming days to offer tests

Currently the first 5 symptomatic residents in a care home setting are tested to provide confirmation of whether if there is an outbreak.

However, as lab capacity increases every day the government is expanding testing to include all care home residents who develop symptoms.

The safety of residents and staff is a priority and as such, testing will now also be provided to all potential care home residents before they are discharged from hospital. This will provide reassurance and peace of mind to residents and family members, and will help care providers to take appropriate action to ensure that social care workers and other residents are safe – including implementing isolation procedures for those who test positive.

The measures confirmed today are expected to be outlined further in the government’s COVID-19 social care action plan tomorrow, and will help give residents, their families and those that they care for peace of mind.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock said:

I am deeply conscious that people in residential care are among the most vulnerable to coronavirus. We are doing everything we can to keep workers, residents and their families safe, and I am determined to ensure that everyone who needs a coronavirus test should be able to have access to one.

We have already begun testing social care workers and will roll this out nationwide over the coming days. And as we continue to

ramp up our testing programme, we will test all current care home residents with coronavirus symptoms and all new care home residents who are discharged from hospital into care.

Testing is key in our battle against coronavirus, and as part of our plan to prevent the spread and save lives we will ensure that everyone in social care who needs a test can have a test.

As the rollout continues, the Health Secretary has confirmed that every social care worker who needs a test can now get one.

Dedicated testing has already begun for frontline staff, including social care workers and in addition to over 20,000 tests for NHS workers and their families.

As capacity grows further through the government's new mega labs, it will prioritise the testing of symptomatic social care workers and anyone in their household who have COVID-19 symptoms.

CQC are leading co-ordination of testing for the care sector, and have already offered 6,000 care facilities the opportunity to test their staff. By the end of the week they will have contacted all 30,000 care providers.

Care providers will identify workers eligible for testing and refer them to their local testing centre.

Tests for social care staff and residents will support the government to achieve its ambition of 100,000 COVID-19 tests a day by end of April.

- All of the tests are PCR tests.
- A small number of people may be discharged from the NHS within the 14-day period from the onset of COVID-19 symptoms who need ongoing social care. They will have been COVID-19 tested and have confirmed COVID-positive status. Some care providers will be able to accommodate these individuals through effective isolation strategies or cohorting policies.
- If appropriate isolation/cohorted care is not available with a local care provider, the individual's local authority will be asked to secure alternative appropriate accommodation and care for the remainder of the required isolation period.
- The government has made £1.3 billion available to support enhanced discharge from the NHS, and this funding can be drawn on for this alternative provision. The NHS discharge requirements will continue to apply.
- For people discharged asymptomatic into a care home – these individuals will have been tested prior to admission. Where these tests are negative, we still recommend isolation for 14 days. This will normally be in a care home that is able to meet that requirement, or it could be under alternative local authority made arrangements assisted by appropriate NHS primary and community based care.
- For individuals coming from the community we will move to these

residents being tested prior to admission. The majority will have come from isolation in their own homes given social distancing and shielding policies. After discussion with the new resident and family, the care home may wish to isolate for a 14-day period following admission.