

# World Press Freedom Day: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU



At a time when independent and free media reporting is more essential than ever, press freedom continues to be under threat. Journalists continue to experience harsh working conditions with increasing financial and political pressure, surveillance, arbitrary prison sentences or violence for doing their work. According to the UNESCO Observatory, 76 journalists were killed since 2020, while many more were arrested, harassed or threatened worldwide. Of particular concern is gender-based violence targeting women journalists.

Press freedom is a fundamental value for the European Union underpinned by many recent initiatives. Media freedom and the safety of journalists are key priorities of the new Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan and of the European Democracy Action Plan. In 2020, more than 400 journalists benefited from the EU mechanism for protection of Human Rights Defenders, while the EU took important actions to support journalists, independent media and the fight against disinformation in the context of the pandemic in many regions.

In the past year the EU condemned on several occasions the intimidation and harassment that independent journalists suffer in countries around the world. The EU, including through its Special Representative for Human Rights, has continued to engage with persecuted independent journalists and intervened in support of detained journalists and bloggers.

EU Delegations are the voice of the EU on the ground. They have closely monitored court proceedings against journalists, spoken out against the repression of human rights defenders and media workers and raised concerns with national authorities over the proposed communication, media, information and broadcasting legislation.

The EU is **determined to do more**, in Europe and abroad. The EU will continue coordinating with international organisations and mechanisms and pioneer new approaches. One example is the European Commission's proposal for a Digital Services Act aimed at holding the major platforms accountable to make their systems fairer, safer and more transparent. We will also continue our action to counter disinformation and seek with all partners effective means to support sustainable business models for independent media.

Freedom of information and free speech must be promoted and protected everywhere. This is in everyone's interest. The EU will continue speaking up against any restriction on freedom of expression and censorship, both online and offline, in violation of international human rights law. 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.

Press freedom means security for all.