

Statement on the safety of journalists on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day

Issued by the undersigned members of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO and Member States of UNESCO as listed in the annex

As we mark World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, brave journalists and media workers are risking their lives to keep us informed.

We deplore in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter and express our deepest concern about the situation of all journalists and media workers - national and international - in Ukraine in view of the devastating escalation of violence.

We unequivocally condemn the deliberate targeting of journalists and media infrastructure as well as the killings of among others Brent Renaud, Yevhenii Sakun, Pierre Zakrzewski, Oleksandra Kuvshynova, Oksana Baulina, Maksim Levin and Mantas Kvedaravicius in Ukraine.

Journalists and media workers have a critical role in providing information during a conflict, and should never be targeted. They have to be protected in full respect of international human rights law as well as international humanitarian law. We recall unanimously adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 2222(2015) that condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists and media workers in situations of armed conflict as they are civilians and shall be protected as such. We therefore strongly urge the Russian Federation to immediately stop such attacks and practices. These heinous attacks on journalists, including targeted killings and abductions, add up to the list of what may amount to war crimes perpetrated by the Russian Federation's army.

We strongly affirm that the work of a free, independent and impartial media online and offline constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, and thereby contributes to the protection of civilians.

We strongly condemn all efforts to silence and constrain independent media coverage of the Russian invasion and the ensuing hostilities within the Russian Federation itself. Journalists in the Russian Federation covering anti-war demonstrations are facing increased harassment, arrest and arbitrary detention. We are also deeply concerned about the exploitation of the media for harmful disinformation and the use of media restrictions, including the intimidation of independent media, the blocking of internet sites and new laws that curtail freedom of speech to report on the armed conflict, all of which deprive citizens of access to free media and information. We call on the Russian Federation to immediately stop such practices.

We also condemn the widespread crackdown of independent media in Belarus, the country that permitted the military attack by the Russian Federation on Ukraine from its territory. Thirty-two journalists and media workers remain imprisoned in Belarus, according to the Belarusian

Association of Journalists (BAJ). We fully welcome the decision to award BAJ with the 2022 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

Free, independent and pluralistic media play an indispensable role in informing the public in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation as well as in all countries of the world.

At an unprecedented moment in history, when people around the world are turning to the internet to connect, learn and consume their news, the Russian Federation’s coordinated disinformation campaign has conjured false and misleading narratives intended to corrupt the information environment. This campaign aims to sow confusion, seed division, and erode trust in democracy. It ultimately puts lives at risk.

On World Press Freedom Day, we call on the Director-General and UNESCO as the UN Agency with communication and information in its mandate to do everything possible to assist journalists and media workers in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world and to take urgent action to counter disinformation.

We also express our sincere thanks to Uruguay for hosting together with UNESCO the annual World Press Freedom Day Global Conference 2022 under the theme “Journalism under Digital Siege” in Punta Del Este, Uruguay.

Journalists and media workers around the world keep exposing injustice and contribute to building a better future. Many of them do so despite daily harassment and intimidation.

All attacks against journalists and media workers must stop immediately. We express our solidarity and admiration with and for all journalists and media workers worldwide doing their hard work, risking their lives, to inform all of us.

Paris, 3 May 2022

Annex - Co-signing Member States

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| Albania | France | Norway |
| Australia | Germany | the Netherlands |
| Austria | Greece | Poland |
| Belgium | Hungary | Portugal |
| Bulgaria | Iceland | Republic of Moldova |
| Canada | Ireland | Romania |
| Chile | Italy | Slovak Republic |
| Colombia | Japan | Slovenia |
| Costa Rica | Latvia | Spain |
| Croatia | Lithuania | Sweden |
| Cyprus | Luxembourg | Switzerland |
| Czech Republic | Malta | Ukraine |
| Denmark | Mexico | the United Kingdom of Great Britain |
| Estonia | Montenegro | and Northern Ireland |
| Finland | North Macedonia | Uruguay |