

Global Pledge on Media Freedom

Media freedom faces growing threats around the world.

Journalists and media organizations are increasingly confronted in their vital work by restrictive laws, punitive legal measures, and physical violence. Too often, whether they work with traditional media or on digital platforms, they pay for their commitment with their liberty or their lives.

Media freedom is an integral element of global security and prosperity. People need free media to provide them with accurate information and informed analysis if governments are to be held to account.

Where journalists and media organizations are free to do their work safely, societies are more prosperous and more resilient. The free exchange of views and information that results allows communities to identify and pursue emerging opportunities and to recognise problems that must be addressed.

Attacks on media freedom are attacks on human rights. They entail attacks on the human rights of journalists and those working in media organisations. These rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights instruments and are upheld in the Sustainable Development Goals – rights such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to life, liberty, and security of person. Violations and abuses of the rights of journalists and those working in media organizations have a cascading effect on the rights of others, as scrutiny falls away.

Too often, it is governments who are the source of threats to media freedom. Governments – which are responsible for protecting human rights – instead are the ones to violate them. Sometimes, governments target individual journalists or media outlets, often violating the right to a fair trial and public hearing and ensuring impunity for perpetrators. Sometimes they put in place unreasonably restrictive legal and regulatory frameworks that make it impossible for journalists to do their work. Sometimes, they distort the information environment intentionally.

Where governments are not the source of the problem, they often fail to provide the solutions needed to counter the actions of those who attack media freedom – from terrorist groups to criminal organizations.

To counter the threats to media freedom, action is needed both globally and locally.

As governments, it is our responsibility to ensure that people in our countries can enjoy all of their human rights and the benefits these bring to society.

To focus on solving problems at home is not enough. Restrictive regulatory models can spread from one jurisdiction to the next. Techniques of intimidation that originate in one community soon spread to another. Global digital media platforms are increasingly prevalent and bring with them not only promise of free discourse but also the threat of unlawful surveillance and manipulation.

Our governments need to work to ensure that those who violate or abuse the human rights that underpin media freedom – be they government officials or private entities – are held to account. We need to offer solidarity to governments that take steps to strengthen the protection of those rights.

In the face of threats to media freedom that are new in scale and in nature, we must adopt new forms of collaboration that adapt to new realities.

Our approach must be responsive, acting on acute threats as they emerge. It must be strategic, addressing long-term trends and entrenched challenges.

We must seek accountability, working with each other and with governments who have not signed this pledge to ensure that governments respect their international human rights obligations. We must take into account all areas that affect media freedom, from encouraging enabling regulatory environments to promoting transparency in judicial processes. We must reach out beyond governments to journalists, media organizations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders, to make this a collaborative effort across society. We must build on the work of other media freedom initiatives and we will advance that work wherever we can.

We must fulfill our obligations under international human rights law and build a safer and more prosperous world.

Our countries are committed to working together to protect media freedom.

*We commit to speak out and take action together, through a **Media Freedom Coalition** that will:*

- Make the case for the fundamental importance of media freedom for the security, prosperity and wellbeing of all societies.
- Combine forces to share information, as appropriate, and take action on cases where journalists and media organizations are at risk.
- Shine a light on violations and abuses of media freedom, bringing them to the attention of the global public and working towards accountability.
- Stand together to intervene at the highest level with the governments of countries where media freedom is at risk and to show solidarity with countries that work to build media freedom.
- Consider all available measures to address violations and abuses of international human rights, including rights related to media freedom.

*We commit to harnessing the power of our diplomatic networks, through a new **Media Freedom Contact Group** so that our officials are instructed to:*

- Work directly with those at risk, to ensure we do no harm.
- Reach out to local journalists and civil society organizations, to stay connected with those on the front lines.
- Connect with local governments, to look for solutions.

Through this Media Freedom Contact Group, our officials will extend our reach, including through existing networks already active in the multilateral system.

*We commit to reinforcing **international initiatives** to champion media freedom.*

We commit to supporting and enhancing efforts by multilateral institutions, journalists' associations, and civil society organisations that provide support for media workers and media entities at risk, including mechanisms to raise and respond to individual cases of violations and abuse.

We commit to encouraging and supporting governments to take action to strengthen media freedom, bringing together civil society, media organisations, lawyers, journalists and communication experts to help establish sustainable, cross-government structures to take plans forward. This will include showing solidarity with governments that create national frameworks and action plans to implement the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. We will encourage efforts by the UN and other organisations to establish a Task Force dedicated to this purpose.

We commit to supporting the work of the UN, and other organisations, to tackle a range of challenges affecting journalists. We will welcome the creation of a Global Media Defence Fund to support journalists in distress, cover legal expenses and initiatives, create peer support networks and support governments to develop national action plans.

We commit to supporting the development of diverse, independent, public interest media.

We welcome the establishment of the independent High Level Panel of Legal Experts, which will, *inter alia*, provide advice to governments who want to strengthen legal mechanisms to improve media freedom.

We commit to maintaining these principles and being vigilant.

We commit to meeting annually to renew our commitments and to address emerging threats and opportunities.

*Signed at the Global Conference for Media Freedom
London, United Kingdom
11 July 2019*