



Media Freedom Coalition 2023 Annual Report

Prepared by the MFC Secretariat
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Overview

The Media Freedom Coalition is a cross-regional partnership of countries working together to advocate for media freedom at home and abroad. The MFC was established in July 2019 at the Global Conference for Media Freedom and now comprises 50 member states from six continents.

The MFC works collaboratively with legal experts (through the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom), civil society (through the MFC's Consultative Network), and many others to promote media freedom and the safety of journalists.

It does through:

- [Advocacy](#), including case interventions, in which MFC states take action in public or in private in support of journalists under threat.
- [Embassy Networks](#), which leverage the MFC's wide network of embassies to promote media freedom.
- [Legal Reforms](#), to promote policies and laws supporting media freedom.
- [Events](#), which may include the MFC's own events, or taking part in other events such as World Press Freedom Day, including by organising side events and workshops.
- The [Global Media Defence Fund](#), administered by UNESCO, which supports projects that enhance journalists' legal protection and/or media freedom.

This report documents actions taken by Media Freedom Coalition member states during 2023. This includes actions which are taken jointly by multiple member states, under the auspices of the MFC, as well as actions taken by individual member states on media freedom, such as domestic reforms. This report has been prepared by the MFC Secretariat, a dedicated team of staff that supports the Coalition through coordination, administration, communications, facilitating decision-making, and monitoring the activities of the MFC.

Due to certain sensitivities, not all activities of the Media Freedom Coalition are shared publicly. Where this is the case, the MFC Secretariat has aggregated the numbers of activities that have taken place in specific categories.

MFC actions: the big picture

During 2023, MFC member states have taken part in a range of actions, through central government and embassies, all over the world – from events and coordinated funding to trial monitoring and speaking out in support of journalists at risk.

The MFC Secretariat is responsible for monitoring the actions of MFC member states. Comparing 2023 with 2022, the MFC Secretariat has documented an increase in the number of actions in some key areas (listed below).

2022		2023
Cases of concern acted on by the MFC		
14	→	20
Actions by embassies as part of the Embassy Networks Initiative, including events, public advocacy and capacity building for journalists		
40 in 11 countries	→	102 in 18 countries
Events or conference sessions hosted or co-hosted by the MFC through central government		
3	→	4

When considering these numbers, particularly the actions by embassies, it is important to note that the MFC Secretariat was established part-way through 2022 and it was able to apply more comprehensive monitoring to 2023.

Details of the actions described above – as well as feedback, lessons learned, and information on how such cases are raised and handled within the MFC – are summarised in the subsequent sections of this report.

“

When governments speak out in support of journalists under threat it demonstrates that the world is watching. I think [those who persecute journalists] would act much worse if they didn't feel they were being observed.”

José Carlos Zamora, son of journalist José Rubén Zamora, who is imprisoned in Guatemala



Credit: José Carlos Zamora

Membership and stakeholders

2023 saw some changes in the leadership of the Media Freedom Coalition. At the beginning of the year **the Netherlands** and **Canada** were the MFC co-chairs. In July Canada completed its term as a co-chair and handed its role over to **Estonia**.

Canada co-chaired the MFC since its establishment in 2019 and has been active across all areas of MFC activity, including mobilising its embassies to take action on media freedom, advocating on behalf of journalists at risk, hosting MFC events, contributing to the Global Media Defence Fund, and launching a dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders including journalists.

Estonia has been a highly engaged member of the Coalition and has a strong track record on media freedom, including providing emergency visas and residency permits for journalists at risk, and since 2021, has ranked in the top 10 of Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index.

In 2023 there were also some changes concerning the membership of the MFC. Sudan was removed as a member of the MFC. Estonia and the Netherlands, as MFC co-chairs, explained this decision in a [joint statement](#):

“It is clear to the MFC that the situation of media freedom in Sudan is, unfortunately, no longer in line with the Global Pledge. The vast majority of the media in Sudan has stopped working, as journalists and media workers face increasing violence, threats and targeted attacks on a daily basis. Furthermore, Internet and telecommunication services have regularly been disrupted, curtailing freedom of opinion and expression and the free flow of information.”

The MFC will continue to monitor the media freedom situation in Sudan.

In 2023 members of the MFC continued to work closely with the Coalition's key stakeholders, including the **High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom**, the **Consultative Network** and **UNESCO** – all of which have contributed to this report. In May 2023, alongside UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day conference in New York, the MFC organised a strategic workshop bringing together representatives from all of the above-mentioned stakeholders to discuss some key strategic challenges facing the Coalition. The workshop resulted in a series of recommendations that have since been taken forward by the MFC Secretariat.

During 2023 the MFC also began its cooperation with the European Union – specifically with the EU's diplomatic service, the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**. Through an exchange of letters the MFC and the EEAS agreed to work together on information sharing, coordination of activities at the local level through MFC member embassies and EU delegations, and participation in relevant meetings, working groups, and events.

MFC Annual Survey

To gather feedback on the MFC's progress to date, and ideas on what to focus on, the MFC Secretariat ran its first annual survey in 2023. The survey was completed by 43 respondents including government representatives from MFC member states and non-governmental stakeholders. Results included:

93% agreed the MFC is making a valuable contribution to promoting media freedom around the world

98% felt well-informed about the MFC and its work

79% of Executive Group participants thought the MFC's systems and processes were robust and appropriate

The survey also received a range of other inputs, including on the importance of involving stakeholders from outside government in decision-making, the value of face-to-face interaction, and how to better use the knowledge that is generated by organisations and individuals within the MFC's network. Read more about the survey results [here](#).

Advocacy

Cases of concern

The Media Freedom Coalition takes action on media freedom cases, based on recommendations by civil society experts in the Consultative Network as well as member states. These can be cases of concern, in which one or more journalists or news organisations are under threat, or situations of concern, where the media freedom environment of a particular country is seriously deteriorating. MFC states can then take action in a variety of ways, including public statements and private diplomacy.

Key numbers for 2023 (these numbers indicate actions taken by central governments and do not include cases in which embassies led the response):

20 cases acted on by MFC member states

12 resulted in public action

8 primarily involved private diplomacy and/or trial monitoring

There were some notable developments in how the MFC handled cases of concern during 2023.

Firstly, **the time taken to bring about public actions once cases were submitted was reduced overall**. For example, during 2023 two public statements were published within two weeks of a public statement being requested from the MFC (these concerned the [detainment of Evan Gershkovich](#), and the [attack on Elena Milashina and Alexander Nemov](#)). In 2022, no statements were produced as quickly as this, and the feedback from the Consultative Network suggested that public actions should be more rapid. It is important to note that a number of different processes need to be included when a statement is produced, including circulating multiple drafts among member countries and coordinating multiple approvals within each member state.

While the time taken to publish joint statements was improved, some cases required a public response in an even shorter time period. This led to the second notable development, which was that **a wider variety of approaches were used to speak out about cases of concern**. For example, in the case of José Rubén Zamora, a high-profile journalist in prison in Guatemala, the

MFC co-chairs at the time (Canada and the Netherlands) were able to [speak out rapidly](#) in response to a court order to investigate Zamora’s publication, El Periodico. MFC governments also used this approach to speak out in support of multiple journalists in Belarus, including TUT.BY chief editor Maryna Zolatava and director-general Liudmila Chekina, as well as former journalist Larysa Shchyrakova.

A third notable development was that in certain cases, **embassies of MFC member states, and civil society experts from the Consultative Network, worked more closely together to formulate a response.** It showed that in cases where both MFC member states’ embassies and civil society organisations are advocating for specific journalists at risk, there is much to gain from information sharing. In 2022, this exchange was more likely to happen via central government, which tends to be more time consuming.

“

The solidarity and support to the Belarusian mass media, human rights defenders, and civil society by democratic governments and international organizations are badly needed nowadays.”

Andrei Bastunets, Chair of the Belarusian Association of Journalists



Credit: Belarusian Association of Journalists

Joint statements

During 2023 the MFC published:

10 joint statements, which included:

5 case-specific statements

4 thematic statements

1 co-chairs’ statement

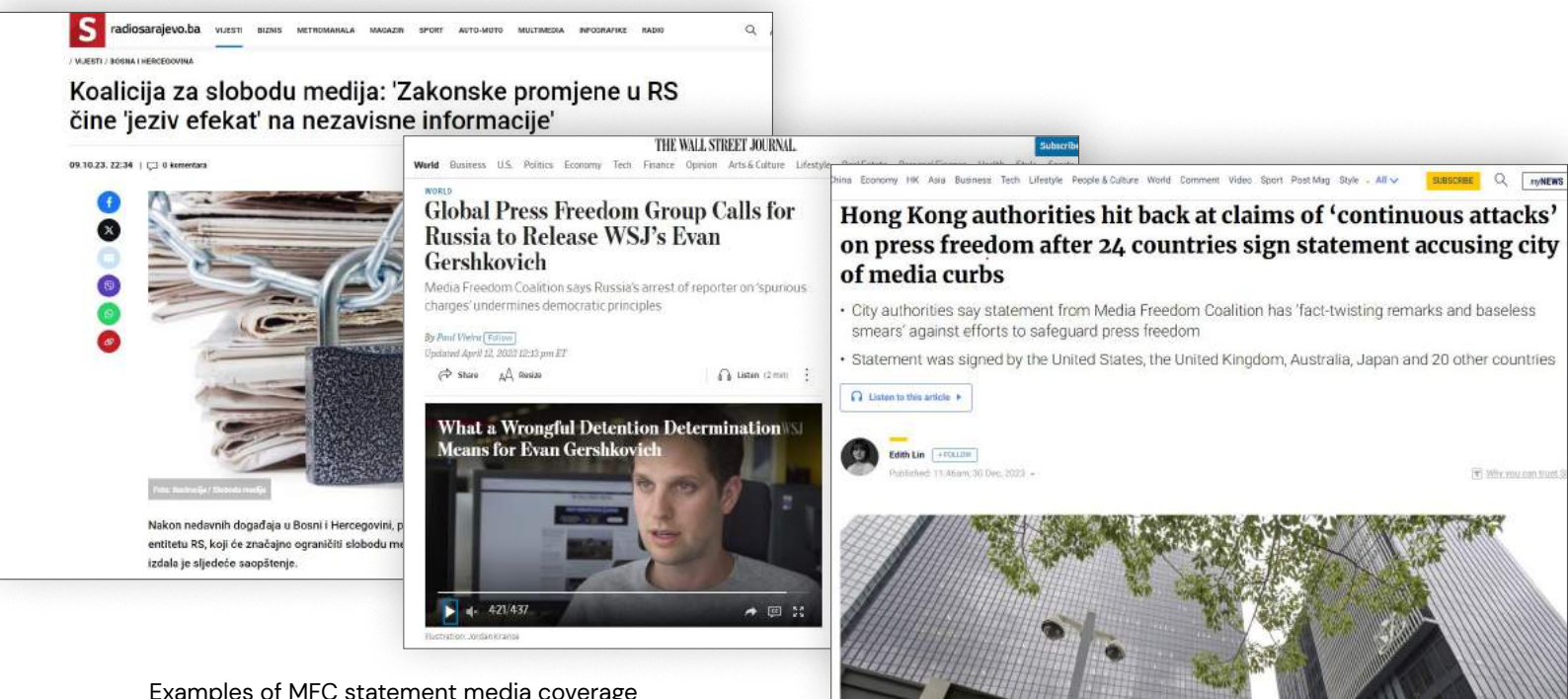
Case specific statements were signed by **58%** of eligible members on average, although this includes the statement on the detainment of Evan Gershkovich, which was signed only by Executive Group members. Excluding that statement, the figure was **51%**.

Thematic statements were signed by **99%** of members on average.

Media coverage and other responses

This report is not able to share responses and outcomes for some cases due to their sensitive nature. Following its do no harm approach, the MFC does not share details of a case of concern unless the journalists concerned have given consent for this, and some cases need to be acted on privately. However some media coverage and responses can be shared, as follows:

- The [MFC's joint statement on media freedom in Hong Kong](#) resulted in significant national and regional media coverage, with at least 31 news stories and opinion pieces picking up on the statement. There were also official responses from the [Chinese Foreign Ministry](#) and the government of the [Hong Kong Special Administrative Region](#). The campaign to support Jimmy Lai, the jailed 76-year-old founder of pro-democracy media outlet Apple Daily, [thanked the MFC](#), saying it was "an important statement at a key time for Hong Kong and Jimmy Lai".
- The [MFC's Executive Group statement on the detainment of Evan Gershkovich](#) was [covered](#) by Gershkovich's media outlet, the Wall Street Journal. It also led to Russia's Foreign Minister [mentioning the MFC](#) in a speech to the UN Security Council.
- The [joint statement on declining media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) was covered by several news outlets in the country as well as [Voice of America](#).
- The [MFC's statement on transnational repression](#) was highlighted by Freedom House in their [2023 report on Exiled Journalism and Transnational Repression](#). According to the report, "Endorsement of the Media Freedom Coalition's statement on transnational repression of journalists is a good foundation for further efforts to combat the phenomenon." The statement was also [endorsed by the Freedom Online Coalition](#).
- The MFC co-chairs' communications on the **case of El Periodico in Guatemala** elicited a [response](#) from Guatemala's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Examples of MFC statement media coverage



The MFC reaction encourages us to know that, in a time of a severe attack on media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and particularly in the Republika Srpska, we are not alone. The international support is an incentive to continue with our journalistic work regardless of pressures, threats and physical attacks which are recently becoming more common.”

Siniša Vukelić, *President of Journalists’ Club and Editor-in-Chief of CAPITAL.ba*

2023 in perspective: the view from the Consultative Network



Consultative Network members at the CN’s annual review meeting in New York, April 2023.
Credit: MFC Consultative Network

The MFC’s Consultative Network is a group of national, regional and international organisations that in collaboration with a much broader set of civil society groups, voluntarily provides advice to the MFC on the Coalition’s work and facilitates selection of cases that it believes require state intervention.

“The Consultative Network’s inputs to the MFC continued to expand alongside the growth in reputation and activities of the Coalition. During 2023 the CN’s 22 member CSOs focussed their MFC work via a number of sectoral Working Groups: Case Management; Embassy Networks (formerly Diplomatic Networks); Media Development; and the High Level Panel. A CN Funding Working Group is also proposed as a response to the continued lack of sufficient funding for CN operations. CN members are drawn from a broader CSO list of 83 organisations worldwide, with plans to further expand this list.

As an MFC stakeholder, the CN network continues to provide rapid access to the extensive expertise and knowledge network of global and local civil society organisations. Three CN Co Chairs are elected by members for a term of two years, serving for a maximum of four years. In May 2023 Sally-Ann Wilson (Public Media Alliance) replaced Rachael Kay (IFEX), while Amy Brouillette (International Press Institute) replaced Silvia Chocarro (Article 19) in February 2024. A CN Coordinator, Bojana Kostic, was appointed in 2023, a reflection of the increasing workload of the CN.

The majority of cases considered by the MFC are submitted via the CN (11 cases in 2023). A review and analysis of cases is underway to enable the CN to be more strategic in case selection. CN members also attend MFC co-chair meetings when relevant to enable them to input directly according to their specific expertise.

Responses to issues and cases at the level of MFC embassies, either via formal Embassy Networks or informally with MFC state missions working together on specific cases, is seen as an effective way of working for the MFC.

Another particularly successful area of CN engagement with the MFC has been requests for briefings by MFC states and groups. Most recently Amy Brouillette, who drafted a case about the proposed UN Cybercrime Treaty, ran a briefing on request to six states regarding the final stage of negotiations for the proposed UN Cybercrime Treaty. In September 2023, the CN also ran a briefing for MFC states on the situation for journalists in Sudan, with contributions from three CN members – Free Press Unlimited, Article 19 and Internews – as well as several other experts.

In May 2023, 16 members of the CN attended MFC events including a successful multi-stakeholder workshop in conjunction with UNESCO World Press Freedom Day events in New York.

During 2024, an election year in many countries, the CN is planning a closer collaboration with MFC stakeholders such as the High Level Panel and looks forward to seeing a deepening of engagement from MFC states alongside further clear actions in support of media freedom worldwide. It will be a year where countries must stand up for their principles in practice in order to safeguard democratic elections.”

The [Consultative Network](#) co-chairs, on behalf of the Consultative Network

Action through embassies

The embassies of MFC member states are able to closely monitor the media freedom situation in the countries where they are based and take a range of actions to protect and advance media freedom. The MFC's **Embassy Networks Initiative** seeks to coordinate this work, bring embassies together so they can act collectively when needed, and stimulate actions that relate to the core activities of the Coalition, including advocacy, trial monitoring, and highlighting important issues through events and other communications.

MFC member embassies coordinate with journalists, civil society and other stakeholders in the countries where they are based and may engage with other international representations, such as EU delegations and UNESCO offices.

The actions outlined in this section do not constitute all actions on media freedom carried out by embassies of MFC member countries during 2023 around the world. This would be beyond the scope of this report and beyond the MFC Secretariat's capacity to monitor. Rather, this section captures actions that can be linked to the MFC (for example, they were carried out by a formalised MFC embassy network, or the embassies involved engaged with the MFC or received support from the Secretariat).

Within the Embassy Networks Initiative in 2023, the MFC Secretariat recorded:

102 actions on media freedom by MFC member embassies, which included:

Speaking out on **20** media freedom cases via joint statements or other communications channels

Organising or supporting **35** events

Producing **7** media outputs including videos, op-eds and interviews

18 countries in which those actions took place

28 MFC member countries from **4** continents were involved in these actions

In addition to these activities, MFC member embassies also played an important role in responding to cases of concern raised centrally to the MFC (see the section on Advocacy). Much of the work done by embassies on media freedom is sensitive and cannot be shared publicly. The same goes for the countries in which this work takes place. However, there are some locations in which the actions of MFC member embassies have a more public profile.

Actions by MFC member embassies during 2023 included:

- **Joint embassy statements on cases of concern and thematic issues**, including a statement [condemning the killing of journalist Juan Jumalon](#) in the **Philippines**, issued just one day after the killing, and another [expressing concern about the closure of news outlet Dainik Dinkal](#) in **Bangladesh**. These statements were also picked up in national media, for example by the [Philippine Inquirer](#) and Bangladesh's [Daily Star](#) respectively.

Embassies in **the Philippines** have spoken out about the killings of several journalists in the country. Speaking about this, the Dutch Ambassador to the Philippines, Marielle Geraedts, explained that in these circumstances, they “urge the government to really take the investigation seriously”, adding that in one of the cases, they noticed that “the government then really quickly formed a task force to investigate the crime.”



Example of a joint embassy statement and media coverage

- **Highlighting cases of concern via social media**, for example in the **Philippines** where the Canadian Ambassador [marked the first anniversary of the assassination of journalist Percival Mabasa](#), and in **Mexico** where embassies issued [tweets](#) in response to the murder of journalist Luis Martín Sánchez Íñiguez, asking the authorities to provide adequate protection measures to indirect victims. In **Bangladesh**, the U.S. Embassy also [endorsed and shared](#) a letter from Reporters Without Borders to the Minister of Foreign Affairs concerning the case of journalist Rozina Islam.

- **Private diplomacy with host governments** on media freedom issues and cases of concern. Where possible, diplomatic approaches were informed by meetings with experts from media and/or civil society.

“

It means a lot ... Sometimes it can be frustrating – you wonder if the rest of the world understands or not. So, on one level, the network’s outreach is reassuring. On another level it’s a matter of security: that the diplomatic circle knows about what’s happening and when they are vocal perhaps those perpetrating intimidation will think twice before they act against us.”

Ayesha Kabir, Head of Prothom Alo, a leading daily newspaper in Bangladesh

- **Events to highlight media freedom issues and the work of media professionals**, for example in **Mexico** where the Canadian, Dutch and U.S. Embassies organised [an event](#) on World Press Freedom Day with journalists, civil society and students about the challenges faced by media workers, and in **Ethiopia** where the U.S. Embassy hosted a [panel discussion](#) on investigative and independent journalism led by veteran Ethiopian journalists. On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, the Dutch and Estonian Embassies **in France**, in partnership with Reporters without borders (RSF), organised [a debate](#) on media freedom and the situation of journalists in Afghanistan, with testimonies from Afghan journalists Sadaf Rahimi and Mortaza Behboudi. And in **the Philippines**, the Dutch Embassy supported a [stakeholder gathering](#) to discuss global challenges and opportunities in the battle for facts, led by Nobel laureate Maria Ressa. This was attended by a member of the Philippines’ Senate and several other MFC member embassies and was part of a wider multistakeholder anti-disinformation campaign supported by the Embassy.



L: Debate on media freedom and the situation of journalists in Afghanistan, organised by the Dutch and Estonian Embassies in France, alongside RSF, December 2023. Credit: Embassy of Estonia in France | R: Event organised by the Dutch, Canadian and U.S. Embassies to mark World Press Freedom Day, May 2023. Credit: Embassy of the Netherlands in Mexico.

- **Meetings with journalists and civil society** to discuss their work and the challenges they face, and to show support. For example in **Bangladesh**, MFC member embassies met with senior editors from Bangladeshi news outlets, as covered by national news outlet [the Daily Star](#), and in Cameroon, embassies [met with media professionals](#) and [visited media organisations](#) to discuss press freedom and the challenges faced by journalists in the country.



Media professionals and MFC member embassies together in Cameroon, June 2023.
Credit: British High Commission in Cameroon

- **Trial monitoring**, to display support to journalists facing criminal charges and to observe the conduct of criminal proceedings.



We really appreciate [when embassy staff attend trials of journalists], because even as observers, I think their presence is a silent support to our fight for press freedom.”

Len Olea, Journalist and Secretary of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

- **Providing support to journalists at risk**, including referring journalists to support programmes such as the [Shelter City](#) scheme, sending letters to imprisoned journalists, and meeting with the relatives of detained journalists.
- **Communications activities on media freedom**, including joint embassy op-eds and video messages in [Bangladesh](#) and [Mexico](#) to mark World Press Freedom Day and a [national TV talk show](#) on the occasion of International Women’s Day in **Bangladesh**,

which the Dutch and Swedish Embassies helped initiate. The TV show featured three prominent women journalists and involved a discussion on women in journalism and gender equity in the media



National TV talk show on gender equity in the media in Bangladesh, March 2023
Credit: Embassy of the Netherlands in Bangladesh

“

[Support from embassies] is really important because otherwise there is no platform for women ... there is someone with me if I have any problems or challenges, someone who will talk on behalf of me. That is great for all journalists.”

Angur Nahar Monty, *Special Correspondent at the Daily Kalbela and founder of the Women Journalists Network, Bangladesh*



Credit: WJNB and Angur Nahar Monty

- **Capacity building programmes for journalists**, including a [training project](#) organised by the U.S. Embassy in **Ethiopia** on “strengthening independent media through empowering female journalists”, and [a training](#) with the **Cameroon** Association of Media Professionals on safety and security in crisis reporting, supported by the Canadian High Commission.
- **Providing financial support** to media and civil society organisations working on media freedom initiatives.

Embassy actions: World Press Freedom Day 2023

On World Press Freedom Day 2023, MFC member embassies around the world took a range of actions on media freedom including organising events, facilitating dialogue, and making public statements. Embassies also amplified the MFC's global statement marking the day. Specific actions included:

- A [joint statement](#) by 16 embassies in **Vietnam**, as well as an [organised visit to Vietnam Press Museum](#), attended by the Ambassadors of Australia, Canada, Czechia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ukraine and several embassy staff, and shared on social media
- A [joint video](#) by Heads of Mission in **Bangladesh**, as well as an [event](#) hosted by the U.S. Embassy with journalists and MFC member embassies
- A [panel discussion](#) on the risks facing women journalists convened by the Canadian and Dutch Embassies in **Jordan**
- A [meeting](#) of 16 MFC member embassies represented in **Iran**
- A [panel forum](#) at the University of **the Philippines'** Journalism Department supported by the Canadian Embassy
- A [joint op-ed](#) in a national newspaper by 5 embassies in **Mexico**



Event hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh, May 2023. Credit: U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh



X (Twitter) post highlighting a meeting of MFC member embassies in Iran, May 2023



Joint statement published by MFC member embassies in Vietnam



Panel forum supported by the Canadian Embassy in the Philippines, May 2023. Credit: Canadian Embassy in the Philippines

Legal reforms and other domestic actions

The MFC promotes the adoption and reform of policies and legislation that promote and protect media freedom and support journalists under threat due to their work. As part of their membership, MFC member states are actively encouraged and supported to review their own legislation and look for ways to improve their domestic media freedom environment.

On pursuing legal reforms, MFC member states are guided by **the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom** (“High Level Panel”), the independent advisory body that provides legal advice and recommendations to MFC member states and their partners, for the purposes of promoting and protecting a vibrant, free, and independent media.

The High Level Panel has published four Advisory Enforcement Reports that recommend a series of actions MFC member states and other states can, and should, take to protect journalists’ safety and to promote media freedom. These reports examined: (i) [‘Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk’](#), (ii) [‘The Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists’](#), (iii) [‘Advice on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses against Journalists’](#), and (iv) [‘A Pressing Concern: Protecting and Promoting Press Freedom by Strengthening Consular Support to Journalists at Risk’](#).

The High Level Panel also provides individual states with legal advice, including through legal opinions on draft legislation or legislation already in force, where media freedoms are engaged, as well as amicus curiae opinions at the request of a constitutional court or an international court in a case of general public importance.

In 2023, the High Level Panel received a number of requests for advice from States, including advice on legislation with potential impacts on media freedom. In total, the High Level Panel engaged on a bilateral basis with **nineteen MFC member states**, throughout 2023, to provide targeted legal and policy advice.

19 MFC member states engaged by the High Level Panel on a bilateral basis to provide targeted legal and policy advice

The High Level Panel has provided detailed advice and recommendations to one MFC member state, on a new media bill concerning the provision of safe refuge to journalists, the investigation of crimes against journalists, and the use of cyber-targeting and spyware against

journalists. It is also in the process of considering and opining on draft legislation to a non-MFC member state. Further, the High Level Panel launched one of six International Standards reports in May 2023, with the remaining five launched in early January 2024. These reports will inform the High Level Panel's work with states and serve as an important repository of learning for the Panel as it continues to consider legislation engaging media freedoms.

The High Level Panel has continued to engage with MFC member states on further state pledges and commitments in the areas addressed by the High Level Panel's four Advisory Enforcement Reports, with measurable success, as outlined below. In addition, the High Level Panel has issued a set of new recommendations in relation to the cyber-targeting and surveillance of journalists, and suggested pledges for MFC member states in this important area. Throughout 2024, the High Level Panel will work with the Consultative Network and engage bilaterally with individual MFC member states on the uptake of these commitments.

In 2023, the High Level Panel also provided its legal expertise on other priority issues concerning media freedom. This includes contributing to the OHCHR Expert Roundtable on Legal and Economic Threats to journalists focusing on SLAPPs, and hosting roundtable discussions on systemic threats to journalists during World Press Freedom Day 2023. Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu also contributed to the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFFR) report on the ['Relocation of Journalists in Distress in the European Union'](#), published in October 2023. The MFFR includes several Consultative Network organisations, including Free Press Unlimited, ARTICLE 19, and the International Press Institute.

The High Level Panel will continue to identify priority areas for further analysis, engagement, and – where appropriate – recommendations to MFC member states.

Implementation of High Level Panel recommendations

In 2023, the below actions were implemented by MFC member states in line with the High Level Panel's recommendations from its four Advisory Enforcement Reports.



Event on "Embedding Safe Refuge for Journalists at Risk" at the United Nations in New York, May 2023. From right to left, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic, the Estonian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Märt Volmer, High Level Panel Deputy Chairs Catherine Amirfar and Professor Can Yeginsu, and President of the Committee to Protect Journalists Jodie Ginsberg. Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

Safe Refuge

Estonia has committed to providing **emergency humanitarian visas and 35 residency permits** annually for journalists at risk. This commitment was formally announced at a joint event hosted by the High Level Panel and Estonia at the United Nations on 1st May 2023, in the week of UNESCO World Press Freedom Day. It comes after a year of close work between Estonia and the High Level Panel, in consultation with members of the Consultative Network.

Canada launched a dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders (HRDs), including journalists, as well as their family members, in 2021, through its Government-Assisted Refugees Program. The launch of the stream followed in-depth consultations with the High Level Panel. Initially, Canada pledged to resettle up to 250 people per year through this program. In 2022, Canada went beyond this commitment, having settled **270 people** until August 2022. In July 2023, the government announced the expansion of this scheme to **500 HRDs and their family members per year**.

The Federal Republic of Germany, at the Summit for Democracy in March 2023, committed to increase its support for the protection of journalists within the framework of the Hannah Arendt Initiative, a protection programme to support and protect journalists, media professionals, and defenders of freedom of expression in crisis and conflict zones abroad, as well as those in exile in Germany. The High Level Panel is in the process of consultations with Germany on how to give further effect to the Panel's recommendations on safe refuge.

Investigations into abuses against journalists

The Kingdom of the Netherlands: as a result of a motion of the Dutch parliament on December 8th 2022, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to carry out a feasibility study into a possible Independent Investigative Task Force on the murder of journalists. This is one of the key recommendations of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, featured in their report on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses Against Journalists. The motion explicitly referenced the work of the High Level Panel. The Feasibility Study was formally announced by the Netherlands during the Summit for Democracy in March 2023.

The High Level Panel has, further, provided confidential input to the terms of reference drafted by the Netherlands on the feasibility study, and produced a preliminary outline mapping out how the International Investigative Task Force could operate on a practical level, and delivered this to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Feasibility Study will be published in the summer of 2024, following work undertaken by a consortium appointed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Asser Institute and the Center for International Criminal Justice.

Targeted sanctions

During the Summit for Democracy in March 2023, **Czechia** announced their intention to utilise its newly passed National Sanctions Mechanism, which allows for targeted sanctions on perpetrators of human rights violations. Czechia stated, at the Summit, that the National Sanctions Mechanism will be used to “contribute to the freedom of expression and safety of journalists and accountability of the perpetrators of crimes against them”, as per the

recommendations of the High Level Panel in its report on ‘The Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists’.

Consular Assistance

The High Level Panel has been working closely with [Canada](#) on its Initiative against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations. This includes engaging in several closed consultations on the development of the Initiative, and its impact on media freedom.

2023 in perspective: the view from the High Level Panel



Throughout 2023, the High Level Panel has focused on building on the momentum created by the 2022 implementation by MFC states of the Panel’s recommendations as set out in the Panel’s four Advisory Enforcement Reports. Since then, the High Level Panel has seen more states establish an emergency visa scheme, and continued deployment of emergency visas by other MFC states to journalists at risk. In addition, the High Level Panel has provided advice to member states on a bilateral basis to further develop and enhance these schemes.

The High Level Panel was pleased to co-host Estonia’s announcement at the UN of the State’s emergency visa scheme and the 35 residency permits it has demarcated for journalists at risk annually. The Panel also commends Canada on the steps it has taken to bolster its human rights defenders international protection stream, doubling the number of places available annually. In addition, the High Level Panel welcomed the Netherlands’ commitment to fund a feasibility study for the uptake of its recommendation to establish an International Investigative Task Force to strengthen investigations into crimes against journalists.

Beyond this, the High Level Panel has continued to consider draft legislation impacting media freedom – with the fulfilment of an official request from an MFC member state, and a legal opinion being undertaken in relation to a non-MFC member state. The High Level Panel has also finalised six reports on International Standards, with the first launched in May 2023, concerning blasphemy laws and media freedom. The remaining five were launched in January 2024. These reports will inform the High Level Panel’s work with states and serve as an important repository of learning for the Panel as it continues to consider legislation engaging media freedoms.

2024 will be a key year. It is the fifth year of the Media Freedom Coalition, a group of states that were brought together on an agenda of action and concrete commitments. The fifth year provides a valuable opportunity for member states to continue to push media freedom up the foreign and domestic policy agenda, by working within the unique structure of the Coalition to counter threats to press freedom and to secure the safety of journalists globally. In this regard, the Panel looks forward to working with the MFC member states to secure commitments around its recommendations, including the state pledges to counter the cyber-targeting of journalists. MFC member states are invited to contact the High Level Panel on a bilateral basis, to receive advice on how to give effect to the Global Pledge on Media Freedom, to progress legal and policy reform in the area of media freedom, and to comply with their international obligations relating to media freedom and the safety of journalists.

The Deputy Chairs of the [High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom](#)

Other policy reforms and domestic actions by MFC members

Beyond the implementation of High Level Panel recommendations, MFC member states also work on other reforms and measures to advance media freedom domestically. Such actions “at home” are an important aspect of MFC membership.

We are not able to capture the entirety of relevant reforms and domestic actions across all 50 MFC member states, as this would be beyond the scope of this report. We can however provide some examples, below. More detail on these examples, together with other domestic reforms by these countries, can be found in the Annex of this report.

- **Australia** has introduced a new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia, which will support regulation of the media sector; and has begun consultation on the News Media Assistance Program — a principle and evidence-based policy framework to help guide the implementation of measures supporting public interest journalism and media diversity in Australia.
- **Chile** is progressing its Journalists and Communications Workers Protection Bill, which is based on the UNESCO Model Law for the Protection of Journalists.

- **Czechia** has made changes to the laws on Czech Radio and Czech Television, to contribute to greater stability in public media and strengthen their independence.
- **Italy** contributed to the extra-budgetary project on the safety of journalists launched in 2022 by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro.
- **Latvia** hosted an international conference in Riga titled “The Pen is Mightier than the Sword? Meeting today’s challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists”; during the conference, the new Council of Europe’s Campaign on Safety of Journalists was launched, to which Latvia made the first voluntary financial contribution. This was linked to Latvia’s second Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.
- **Lithuania’s** Ministry of Culture approved an inter-institutional 2023–2025 action plan for the protection, safety, and empowerment of journalists. Public institutions together with the media community made specific commitments in order to increase the safety of journalists.
- **Luxembourg’s** Criminal Code, modified in 2023, now includes new rules in cases of attacks against journalists during demonstrations. The coalition agreement 2023–2028 of the Luxembourg Government also explicitly mentions the importance of the protection of journalists.
- **Norway’s** Director of Public Prosecution published his annual letter to the Norwegian Prosecuting Authority, instructing it to specifically prioritize cases of threats and violence against journalists and other media workers, with regards to adequate investigation, as well as sufficiently severe sentencing submissions.
- **Switzerland** published its National Action Plan for the safety of media professionals on 3 May 2023. It aims to put the safety of journalists on the public agenda and to raise awareness in society and among politicians of the challenges facing journalists and of the fundamental importance of the media as part of an effective democracy in Switzerland.
- **The United Kingdom’s** Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act received Royal Assent in October 2023, which includes measures aiming to tackle economic crime related SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation), which represent up to 70% of all SLAPPs in the UK.

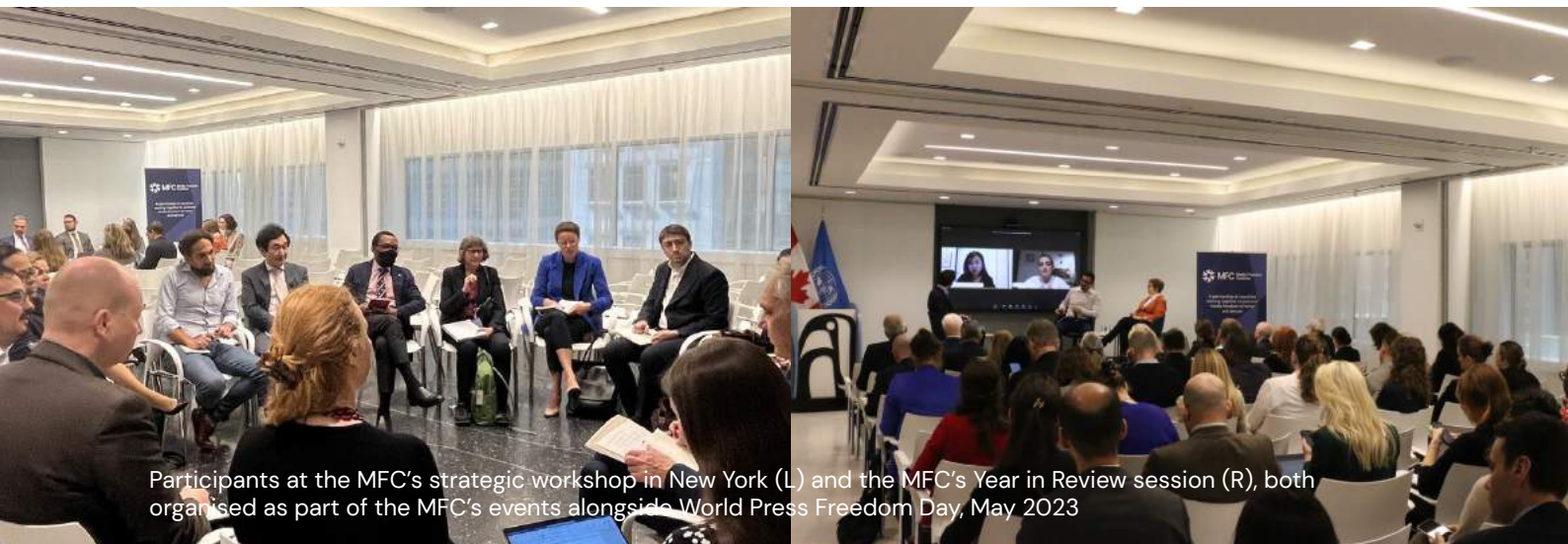
Events

The MFC organises and takes part in media freedom events at the national, regional and global level and uses these to put important issues on the international agenda and encourage further action from states. For events organised through **central government**, the key numbers for 2023 were:

4 events or conference sessions hosted or co-hosted by the MFC

3 further events in which the MFC was represented in a speaking capacity

World Press Freedom Day – New York



In May 2023, the MFC organised events in New York alongside UNESCO's official conference for World Press Freedom Day.

The MFC's **Year in Review** session, hosted at Canada's Permanent Representation to the United Nations, was an opportunity to look back and reflect on lessons learnt from the various MFC activities in the prior 12 months – with a focus on actions by embassies. An expert panel featured: Lina Attalah, Editor-in-Chief of Mada Masr in Egypt; Jaymie Reyes from the Embassy of the Netherlands in the Philippines; Sally-Ann Wilson of the Public Media Alliance, and the

Consultative Network; and Leopoldo Maldonado of Article 19. The event was attended by diplomats, government officials, civil society figures, journalists, members of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, and UNESCO.

At the end of the session, Mada Masr – Egypt’s leading independent online news outlet – was given the **2023 Canada-UK Media Freedom Award**, in recognition of their work to champion freedom of speech and democracy.

On the same day the MFC hosted a **strategic workshop** with over 50 participants from government, civil society, the High Level Panel and UNESCO. In the workshop, four breakout groups discussed critical strategic questions facing the Coalition, developing ideas and recommendations which were then collected and brought together by the MFC Secretariat.

Topics included the MFC’s approach to cases of concern, how to incorporate diverse themes and issues in the MFC’s decision-making, approaches to government commitments, and inclusion of all member countries within the MFC.

Read more about the MFC’s engagement in World Press Freedom Day [here](#).



I think the worst fear we have is the fear of being isolated, of having to face these challenges in isolation. It makes a whole difference when we are being witnessed and acknowledged.”

***Lina Attalah**, Editor-in-Chief of Mada Masr in Egypt, speaking at the MFC’s World Press Freedom Day event, May 2023*

OGP Summit – Tallinn



Panelists at the event “Media Freedom as a Catalyst of Open Government, Dialogue, and Accountability” at the Open Government Partnership Summit in Estonia, September 2023. Credit: Open Government Partnership

In September 2023, the MFC organised a [high-level session](#) at the Open Government Partnership Summit in Tallinn, Estonia titled “Media Freedom as a Catalyst of Open Government, Dialogue, and Accountability”. The session featured Margus Tsahkna, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia; Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO; Allison Peters, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State; Ricardo Avelar, Journalist and producer at Factum (El Salvador); and Sarah Wesonga of Article 19 Eastern Africa. Catherine Gicheru, a veteran journalist and Founder/Director of the Africa Women Journalism Project moderated the discussion.

In addition to highlighting the importance of media freedom as a vital pillar of democracy, participants also discussed the importance of independent media in ensuring governments make sound decisions. Making reference to the media coverage of the massacre in the Ukrainian city of Bucha, Minister Tsahkna of Estonia said, “Only stories touching us personally reach our minds. That’s why media freedom is crucial. So the leaders of countries can make their opinion. This kind of information and news is changing the governments’ attitudes.”

Tackling Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists – Paris



Event on “Tackling Impunity for Crimes against Journalists: A Dialogue with the Media Freedom Coalition” at the Netherlands’ Ambassadorial Residence in Paris, November 2023.
Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2nd, the Media Freedom Coalition together with the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom and the MFC’s Consultative Network organised an event in Paris focused on “Tackling Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists”.

Moderated by High Level Panel Member Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, the event featured three other members of the High Level Panel: Lord David Neuberger, the Panel’s chair; Deputy Chair Can Yeginsu; and Nadim Houry, author of the Panel’s report Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses against Journalists.

Other speakers were Jan Versteeg, Ambassador of the Netherlands to France; Katrin Kivi, Ambassador for Human Rights, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Lizzy Bans Nobre, Deputy

Director, Directorate of Multilateral Institutions and Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands; and Antoine Bernard, Director of Advocacy and Assistance at Reporters Without Borders and a Consultative Network member.

At the event, the Netherlands [announced](#) that a feasibility study on the establishment of an international investigative task force focused on crimes against journalists had been commissioned and would soon be underway. The study is due to be completed during 2024. Establishing such a task force is a key [recommendation](#) of the High Level Panel. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

Slovakia Media Freedom Conference – Bratislava



In February 2023 the Media Freedom Coalition co-hosted a [media freedom conference](#) in Slovakia, alongside the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. The event focused on the media freedom environment in Slovakia and the steps that needed to be taken to bolster the safety of journalists.

Speakers at the conference included ministers, senior officials, the President of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic, civil society representatives and journalists. The MFC was represented by Gabriella Sancisi, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Slovakia, and Cheryl Cruz, Chargé d’Affaires, Office of the Embassy of Canada in Slovakia.

The conference explored topics such as the safety and protection of journalists, the editorial independence of journalists, and initiatives regarding SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation). It also featured new research conducted by the Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre – named in memory of journalist Ján Kuciak who was murdered together with his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in 2018.

Other events featuring the MFC



Panel discussion on "The future of the media and safety of journalists" at UNESCO's commemoration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists at the Organization of American States in Washington D.C., November 2023

- The second **Summit for Democracy** in March 2023 took place in a range of locations around the world. The Netherlands hosted one of these events in the Hague and focussed it on media freedom. A range of stakeholders from across the Media Freedom Coalition were in attendance, and as part of a live globally streamed talk show featuring ministers from across the world alongside nongovernmental experts and journalists, Wopke Hoekstra, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, highlighted the work of the MFC. A recording of the online broadcast is available [here](#). **Read more about the MFC's engagement in the 2023 Summit for Democracy in the box below.**
- At UNESCO's commemoration of the **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists** on November 2nd, the MFC was represented by Birgitta Tazelaar, the Netherlands' Ambassador to the United States, who gave a keynote address. Various other figures from the MFC spoke on panels, including Jeff Marder, Executive Director, Human Rights and Indigenous Policy, Global Affairs Canada and Laxman Datt Pant, Chairperson, Media Action Nepal, and Co-Chair of the MFC's Consultative Network, who spoke on a panel on "The future of the media and safety of journalists". On 3rd November, Justice Manuel Cepeda Espinosa, Member of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, spoke on a panel examining "Strategic lawsuits against public participation: a mechanism for silencing the press under the guise of legality".
- Also on the **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights organised a panel discussion on legal threats to the safety of journalists in Geneva. The MFC was represented by Riia Salsa-Audiffren, Estonia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative, and Lars Tummens, the Netherlands' Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, who both gave opening remarks.

MFC engagement in the Second Summit for Democracy

In 2023 the United States co-hosted the second Summit for Democracy with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Republic of Korea, and Republic of Zambia. In the year preceding the second summit, a range of Democracy Cohorts were established – official committees, co-led by governments and civil society, to take concerted action toward the implementation of democracy commitments in areas of common interest. One of these, the Media Freedom Cohort, was led by the governments of then MFC co-chairs, Canada and the Netherlands, alongside the civil society organisation and Consultative Network member Internews.

The Media Freedom Cohort worked to measure achieved progress on the commitments made at the first summit, to bridge gaps on the commitments where progress had been slower to attain, and to spark new, innovative commitments to measurably advance media freedom around the world. It did this through three working groups, each with its own thematic focus and leadership:

- **Protecting Journalists’ Safety and Security:** Advancing digital, physical, and psycho-social safety measures, as well as insurance and legal assistance, designed to protect journalists and other media workers. (Led by the government of Germany, ACOS Alliance, IFEX)
- **Advancing Freedom of Expression:** Strengthening legal and regulatory reforms that protect freedom of expression, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (Led by the government of Liberia, IBAHRI, High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom)
- **Bolstering Independent and Diverse Media:** Building funding models, industry standards and public policies that support the resilience and professional capacities of media outlets to survive and thrive in the coming decades. (Led by the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, Global Forum for Media Development)

Through this process, more than 100 governments, businesses, and media support organizations made commitments to protect media freedom worldwide. They can be read in the cohort’s [Findings Report](#). The work of the Media Freedom Cohort now continues through the Media Freedom Coalition.

High Level Panel Events

The MFC also collaborates on events with the High Level Panel of Experts on Media Freedom. In addition to the events above, the High Level Panel organised or was represented at the following events in particular:

United Nations: Online Safety and Digital Empowerment of Female Journalists: Combatting Online Threats and Harassment

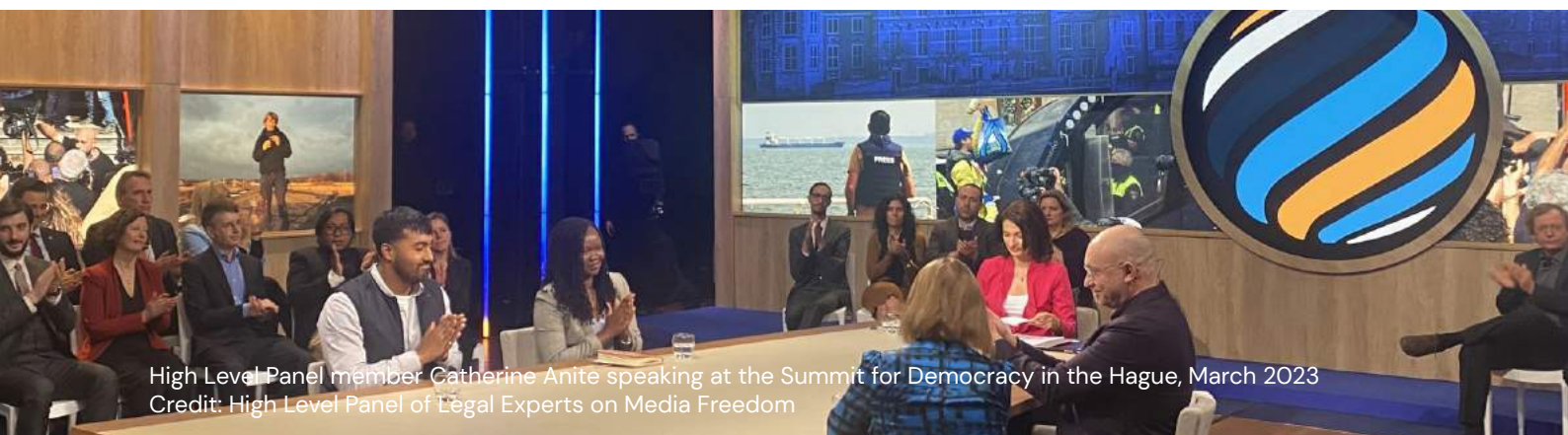


High Level Panel Deputy Chair Catherine Amirfar speaking at the side event “Online Safety and Digital Empowerment of Female Journalists: Combatting Online Threats and Harassment” at the United Nations in New York, March 2023
Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

On 9th March 2023, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Austria, and Czechia co-hosted a side event to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, concerning the online harassment of female journalists. The event was also co-sponsored by the International Press Institute and UNESCO.

Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel, Catherine Amirfar, spoke to the ever-increasing issue of female journalists being targeted for their work with misogyny. Drawing on her position on the High Level Panel, Catherine Amirfar called for States to take concrete action to address the issue and discussed the disproportionate impact of surveillance on female journalists, referencing the intersection between this issue and the High Level Panel’s work. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

The Summit for Democracy



High Level Panel member Catherine Anite speaking at the Summit for Democracy in the Hague, March 2023
Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

The High Level Panel participated in activities around the world for the second Summit for Democracy, held on 28th – 30th March 2023, following the Panel's co-leadership of Working Group Two of the Democracy Cohort on Media Freedom, which focused on advancing freedom of expression worldwide.

The Deputy Chairs of the High Level Panel, Professor Can Yeginsu and Catherine Amirfar, led a side event to the Summit held in Washington D.C., entitled "Tech for Democracy and Media Freedom: Protecting the Truth Tellers in the 21st Century", at Georgetown University Law Centre's Human Rights Institute on 28th March 2023. Speakers included Lynn Sicade, from the U.S. State Department, Jodie Ginsberg, President of the Committee to Protect Journalists, Laurent Richard from Forbidden Stories, Nushin Sarkarati from the Atlantic Council, and with closing remarks from Professor Elisa Massimino of Georgetown University's Human Rights Institute. The event drew on two of the priority themes of the Summit, i.e. to chart progress made to date implementing the High Level Panel's recommendations, and to call for further action on the issues of cyber-targeting and surveillance of journalists.

Following this, High Level Panel Member Marietje Schaake took part in a main stage event at the Summit in Washington D.C. on 30th March 2023, moderating the session "Countering the Misuse of Technology and the Rise of Digital Authoritarianism", with speakers including U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, John Scott-Railton, a Senior Researcher of the Citizen Lab, and Neal Mohan, CEO of YouTube. This builds on the High Level Panel's work on the issue and was directly preceded by the U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's announcement of a U.S. Executive Order prohibiting the operational use by the U.S. Government of commercial spyware that poses significant risks to national security.

Recordings of the events are available [here](#).

High Level Panel Member Catherine Anite contributed to the Summit for Democracy's activities in the Hague which focused on media freedom. On 29th March 2023, she led a breakout session focusing on the outcomes of the Working Group Two of the Democracy Cohort on Media Freedom, aimed at making recommendations to States on implementing their commitments. On 30th March 2023, she took part in a [globally streamed talk](#) show hosted by the Netherlands.

UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights: Expert Seminar on Legal and Economic Threats to the Safety of Journalists

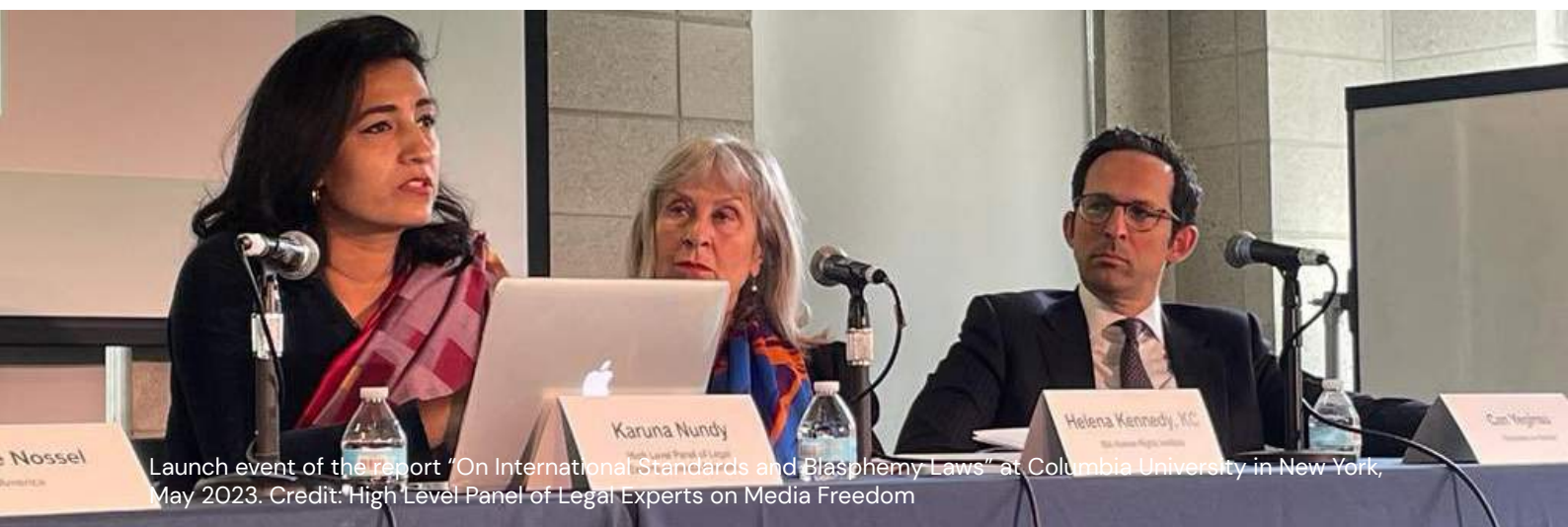
On 25th April 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights held an expert seminar on legal and economic threats to the safety of journalists, focusing on the issue of SLAPPs. High Level Panel Advisory Council Member Galina Arapova took part and spoke alongside UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression Irene Khan, OSCE Special Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro, Chairman of the Information Regulator of South Africa Pansy Tlakula, and UNESCO Chief of Section for Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi. They were joined by representatives from major international press freedom NGOs, including Media Defence, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, the Media Foundation for West Africa, and Consultative Network Members ARTICLE 19 and International Media Support.

The MFC at the United Nations: Beyond the Crisis – Embedding Safe Refuge for Journalists at Risk

On 1st May 2023, as part of the Media Freedom Coalition events taking place in connection with World Press Freedom Day, the High Level Panel, the Republic of Estonia, and the Committee to Protect Journalists – a Consultative Network Member – hosted an event at the UN to announce Estonia’s implementation of the High Level Panel’s recommendations in its Advisory Enforcement Report on “Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk”. At the event Estonia committed to providing emergency humanitarian visas and 35 residency permits annually for journalists at risk.

The event featured High Level Panel Members, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic, the President of the Committee to Protect Journalists Jodie Ginsberg, the then Estonian Ambassador for Human Rights Minna-Liina Lind, and journalist Mohammed Mosaed. Interventions were also made by the Ambassador for Human Rights and Deputy Permanent Representative to the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN in New York, the Head of Czechia’s Permanent Mission to the UN, the Head of the Department for Information Society at the German Federal Foreign Office, the Organisation of American States’ Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Pedro Vaca Villarreal, and the Director of Policy and Advocacy of Consultative Network Member Free Press Unlimited, Evelien Wijkstra. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

World Press Freedom Day



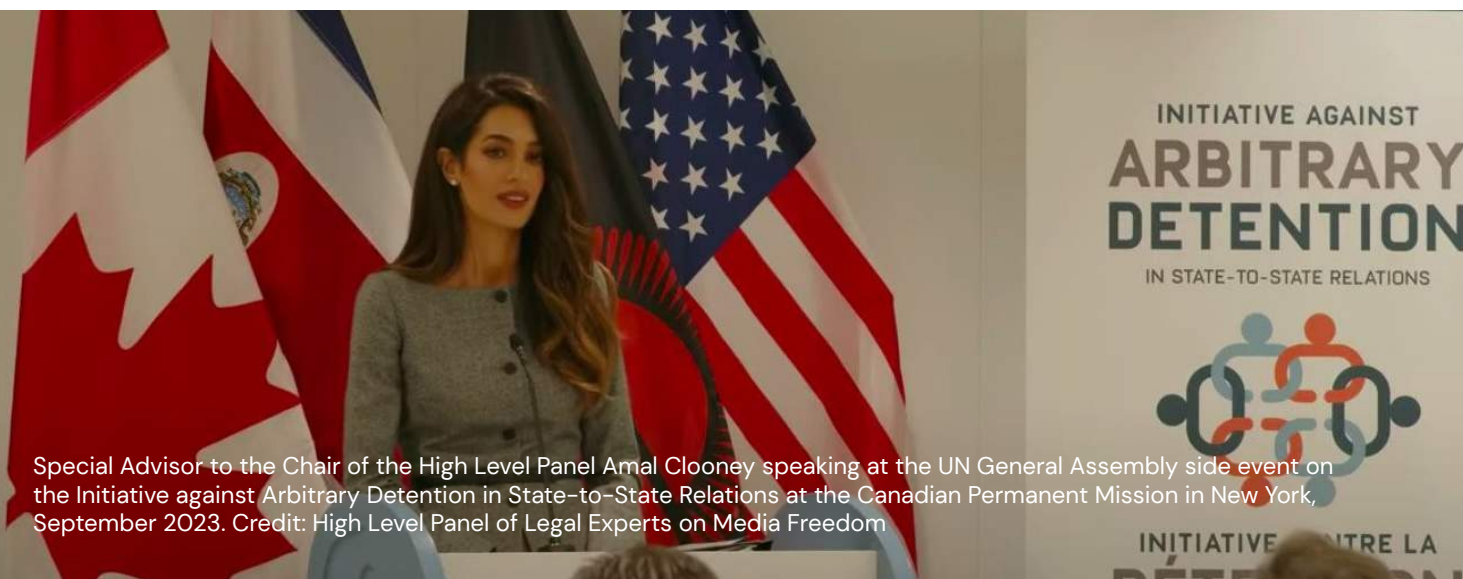
On 3rd May 2023, to mark World Press Freedom Day, the High Level Panel launched its International Standards report “On Religious Freedom and Discontent: Report on International Standards and Blasphemy Laws” at an event hosted by Columbia University’s Global Freedom of Expression Initiative. Chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, the event included opening remarks from the Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu, and speeches from Suzanne Nossel of PEN America and High Level Panel Member Hina Jilani. Read the report and watch a recording of the event [here](#).

On 5th May 2023, as part of World Press Freedom Day events in New York, the High Level Panel

held a side event on “Dismantling the Independent Media Through Systemic Restrictions”, with Covington & Burling LLP and Columbia’s Global Freedom of Expression Initiative.

The event was joined by, and brought together, Deputy Chair Professor Can Yeginsu, with President of the Committee to Protect Journalists Jodie Ginsberg, Partner of Covington & Burling Daniel Feldman, Senior Counsel of the New York Times Dana Green, and General Counsel of the Associated Press Karen Kaiser.

UN General Assembly: High Level Dialogue on the Initiative against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations



Special Advisor to the Chair of the High Level Panel Amal Clooney speaking at the UN General Assembly side event on the Initiative against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations at the Canadian Permanent Mission in New York, September 2023. Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

On 20th September 2023, the High Level Panel’s Special Advisor to the Chair (and inaugural Deputy Chair) Amal Clooney spoke at Canada’s United Nations General Assembly side event on the Initiative against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations. Ms. Clooney referred to the High Level Panel’s Advisory Enforcement Reports as she called on States to “ensure that officials who are responsible for arbitrary detention are systematically subjected to targeted sanctions.” Following consultations held by Canada with the Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu, and Panel Member Professor Irwin Cotler, on the arbitrary detention initiative, the High Level Panel was pleased to see States reaffirming their commitment to the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention. A recording of the event is available to watch [here](#).

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

On 1st November 2023, members of the High Level Panel took part in a session at the International Bar Association’s Annual Conference on “Combating the threat of disinformation to democracy and freedoms: the role of international law”. The session was moderated by Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu, and included Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa, Undersecretary for Global Affairs of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Minna-Liina Lind, alongside Karen Kaiser, General Counsel of the Associated Press.

In addition, the High Level Panel was engaged in two further events in connection with the 2023 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, in Paris and Washington D.C., the details of which are provided in the section above.

OSCE High Level Session on Media Freedom and Security: Shaping the Future – Media Freedom and Security in a Changing World



Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu, at the OSCE Ambassadorial convening in Vienna, November 2023. Credit: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

On 22nd November 2023, Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel Professor Can Yeginsu provided the keynote lecture to the OSCE high level ambassadorial convening, entitled “Shaping the Future: Media Freedom and Security in a Changing World”.

The event was hosted by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro and took place at the OSCE’s Headquarters. It was attended by Ambassadors from the 57 OSCE states, and focused on the critical role of media freedom for democracy and comprehensive security in Europe. Professor Yeginsu’s keynote lecture was followed by a panel discussion, moderated by Principal Adviser to the OSCE Representative Ton van den Brandt, and featuring British journalist Carole Cadwalladr.

A summary of the event is available [here](#), along with resources related to media freedom and security issues [here](#).

Global Media Defence Fund



Credit: Getty Images

The [Global Media Defence Fund](#) (GMDF), initiated by MFC members and administered by UNESCO, supports non-profit organisations around the world in the implementation of local, regional, and global projects that seek to bolster journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom through relevant investigative journalism and strategic litigation.

Since 2020, the GMDF has supported **over 120** projects around the world through financial grants totalling **USD \$4.1 million** to relevant stakeholders undertaking or upscaling local, regional, and global initiatives.

The GMDF has finalised the selection of organisations under its 4th Call for Partnerships, launched in autumn 2023, with an estimated total of **USD \$1.4 million** made available in financial grants for projects selected. Out of a total of **129** proposals received, **33 projects** have been preselected for funding, with a significant increase in partnerships in Africa and with a strong representation from national and grassroots entities. Further details are provided in [this article](#).

To date, **over 5,000** journalists, **1,500** lawyers and **200** NGOs have benefitted directly from activities supported by the GMDF. As a result of these activities, since 2020 there have been:

- Over **1,000** cases of providing legal assistance to journalists;
- Over **150** investigations of crimes against journalists;

- Over **160** instances of strategic litigation undertaken to contribute to standard-setting precedents on freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

In 2023, the GMDF continued to implement initiatives to promote the safety of journalists through its Crisis Response Mechanism, in partnership with UNESCO's [International Programme for the Development of Communication \(IPDC\)](#) and the [Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists](#), in **Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan and Ukraine**, resulting in the following:

In Ukraine

- Nearly **2000** journalists supported through capacity-building and trainings
- Over **90** journalists trained on documenting and investigating crimes against journalists
- Establishment of a searchable news resource to foster collaborative investigations and a training course on psychological, digital and physical safety, with over **100** journalists trained
- Support for the establishment of **6** hubs for journalists

In Afghanistan

- **550** journalists have been trained on physical and psychological safety, conflict-sensitive reporting and journalism best practices
- Over **90** women journalists have received emergency financial grants
- Over **35** female media workers have secured employment in media houses

In Sudan

- **70** Sudanese journalists and media workers received financial grants meeting their most urgent needs and allowing them to continue their jobs
- **1** in-depth needs assessment of journalists

In Haiti

- **60** journalists received security trainings
- **1** survey conducted on the threats journalists are facing, to inform future programmes
- **30** sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) distributed to journalists

Further examples of the projects supported by the Fund are provided below.

- **Cambodia:** with GMDF support, the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia has established the first Women Journalists' Network in the country. It provides women journalists with a safe space to discuss the threats they are facing and provides crucial gender-sensitive legal advice, counselling and peer support.
- **Brazil:** during the 2022 elections, local NGOs Sitawi and Tornavoz ("Gives voice") joined forces to provide crucial legal defence to women journalists unable to afford legal representation. This initiative has become a frontline defence against those attempting to silence these journalists.

- **Colombia:** gender-based violence against women journalists has been recognised by the courts in a ruling which particularly recognised online violence, after a two-year civil society campaign by la Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (Foundation for Press Freedom, FLIP).
- **Bolivia:** the Fundación para el Periodismo (Foundation for Journalism) has established a dedicated mechanism to receive, process and address cases of aggression and persecution against journalists. In its first year, this mechanism offered legal assistance to 30 journalists from almost all regions of Bolivia, with two thirds of them having been victims of physical assaults.
- **Indonesia:** the Indonesian NGO LBH Pers has successfully piloted the provision of legal assistance for journalists with a dedicated tool for digital legal aid. The Legal Aid Portal Indonesia (“Lapor”) enables journalists to report and get expert assistance on a vast variety of legal issues.
- **Philippines:** the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) successfully concluded two trainings aimed to equip journalists to operate in the complex legal landscape, with 35 Philippine journalists attending in person or virtually.

Read articles on the above projects and more at the [homepage](#) of the Global Media Defence Fund.



Training workshop run by the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, supported by the Global Media Defence Fund. Credit: The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

The Global Media Defence Fund has received funding from **19 countries:** Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as from Siemens AG.

Working Group on Media Development



Credit: Getty Images

The MFC's **Working Group on Media Development** ensures that the MFC's work on media freedom incorporates issues relating to strengthening of media sectors, such as the skills and capacities of media outlets and their financial viability. It brings together MFC member governments, civil society organisations including those from the Consultative Network, and other experts. During 2023, the group's primary activities were:

- Taking forward the development of the Draft Principles on Support to Media and the Information Environment, a set of principles that will guide donors on their media assistance strategies. During 2023 the principles received feedback from a range of MFC stakeholders and were then finalised and submitted to the OECD, with a view to their being adopted by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2024.
- Leading a working group as part of the Summit for Democracy's Media Freedom Cohort, which generated commitments on media freedom from governments and civil society organisations (read more about the MFC's engagement in the Summit for Democracy in the Events section). The working group was focussed on "Bolstering Independent and Diverse Media."
- Promoting coordination of support to the media sector through the MFC's Embassy Networks Initiative. Within this initiative, some embassies are involved in providing support to independent media and associated civil society, through activities like funding and capacity building. The working group provided guidance on how embassies can better

coordinate this support, which was integrated within the MFC's Diplomatic Toolkit.

- Information sharing, with presentations on topics such as media viability and resilience, and recent innovations in the media sector.

Annex

Examples of domestic actions by MFC member states during 2023

Australia

- The Australian Government recognises press freedom as essential to promoting transparency and upholding democracy. Australia recognises this by having a system of laws, policies and practices that uphold press freedom and the rights of journalists in Australia.
- The Government recognises that an independent news media, free from government influence, is essential to a functioning democracy.
- The Australian Government does not seek to influence the editorialisation or reporting by the free press, with the content of individual news stories being an editorial decision for each broadcaster or publisher.
- The Australian Press Council, a self-regulatory body responsible for promoting responsible journalism, publishes Standards of Practice and handles complaints against publishers for alleged breaches of those standards.

Please see below the domestic actions that the Australian Government took in 2023 to support media freedom.

- Media Diversity
 - The Australian Government recognises that media diversity and public interest journalism play an important role in the functioning of Australian society and democracy. Australian media organisations play a crucial role in informing Australians about events and developments that are important to their daily lives and enable them to participate in our democratic processes. Journalism is vital to holding public office holders and those in positions of power to account and exposing wrong doing and injustice.
 - Australia's regulation of the media sector is primarily focussed on media diversity and aims to promote a strong independent media sector capable of producing trusted public interest journalism. Existing rules relating to media diversity seek to encourage the production and distribution of a wide range of viewpoints across the media market, so that Australians have access to a range of relevant news and information and that no one voice dominates.
 - On 12 December 2023, a new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia was introduced, which better reflects the modern ways news is produced, distributed and consumed. It is anticipated these contemporary metrics will inform consideration of options to reform or update the current *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* rules.

- Public interest journalism
 - The Australian Government supports a diverse and sustainable media sector through its provision of long-standing funding to Australia's national broadcasters – the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service. The national broadcasters help to strengthen Australia's media diversity, and are major contributors to public interest journalism.
 - The Australian Government has begun consultation on the News Media Assistance Program – a principle and evidence-based policy framework to help guide the implementation of measures supporting public interest journalism and media diversity in Australia.
 - The proposed framework consists of four key policy objectives:
 - Access – Citizens should have access to public interest journalism to support their democratic participation at all levels of government.
 - Quality – News content should generally be of sufficient accuracy, impartiality and quality so that it properly informs Australians.
 - Media diversity – No organisation, agent or individual should be capable of substantially defining the agenda, content or character of news coverage. The public interest is best realised through a diversity of perspectives, voices and presentation.
 - Engagement – Government should endeavour to foster citizens' civic engagement and trust in democratic government, news and journalism; and support citizens to develop the capability to critically interpret and contextualise information relevant to their democratic participation.
 - Other measures to support public interest journalism include:
 - The Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) is a legal framework that provides individuals, regardless of country of origin, with the right to request access to documents from the Australian Government, subject to some exemptions.
 - The Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) concluded an inquiry in 2020 into the impact of the exercise of law enforcement and intelligence powers on the freedom of the press (PJCIS inquiry). The Australian Government is implementing the recommendations by:
 - Ensuring that only Supreme or Federal Court judges can issue warrants in relation to journalists for the investigation of disclosure offences by law enforcement agencies
 - Ensuring warrants can only be issued in relation to journalists to investigate an unauthorised disclosure of government information after consideration by a Public Interest Advocate
 - Enhancing reporting requirements for warrants in relation to journalists, and
 - Established media disclosure liaison units in Commonwealth national security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

- Following from a comprehensive review of Commonwealth secrecy provisions in 2023, the Australian Government committed to reforms to secrecy offences to improve protections for press freedom. This includes legislating a public interest journalism defence and legislating a requirement for ministerial consent to prosecute a journalist for certain secrecy offences.
 - Journalist shield laws generally operate to create a rebuttable presumption that journalists are not required to give evidence that would disclose the identity of a confidential source of information. The Standing Council of Attorneys-General have agreed to work together to consider ways to harmonise shield laws, or bring greater consistency to shield laws.
 - The Australian Government supports the aim of achieving coherent and effective defamation laws in Australia. States and territories are responsible for defamation legislation. The Australian Government maintains a strong interest in this important area of the law and supports the defamation reform process under the auspices of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General.
- Law enforcement
 - The Australian Government is progressing (including in 2023) legislative reform to improve press freedom protections, including to extend its Public Interest Advocate (PIA) and Journalist Information Warrant (JIW) regimes so that they apply to all relevant warrants that relate to a journalist or media organisation for the purpose of identifying a confidential source, where appropriate. These reforms would also expand the role of PIAs to require the issuing authority for a JIW to have mandatory regard to any submissions made by a PIA.
 - Through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, the Australian Government is working with states and territories to consider ways to harmonise, or bring greater consistency to, journalist shield laws.
- Whistleblower laws
 - The Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) (PID Act) enables former and current public officials to disclose suspected wrongdoing in the federal public sector, including fraud, serious misconduct and corrupt conduct.
 - The Australian Government is undertaking a staged reform of the public sector whistleblowing framework. The first stage of reforms in the Public Interest Disclosure Amendment (Review) Act 2023 commenced on 1 July 2023, implementing 21 of the 31 recommendations of the 2016 review of the PID Act by Mr Philip Moss AM (the Moss Review). This reform strengthened protections for disclosers and witnesses; focused the scheme on integrity wrongdoing; made the scheme easier to administer, and enhanced oversight of the scheme. The Australian Government is currently considering outcomes of consultation on stage 2 reforms undertaken in late 2023.

- The external disclosure mechanism in the PID Act enables public officials to disclose alleged wrongdoing to the media or the public where an agency has failed to adequately handle the disclosure internally (provided the other criteria for external disclosure are met). Consistent with recommendation 8 of the Moss Review, the Australian Government will consider the external disclosure mechanism to ensure it is working effectively to support public sector whistleblowers to report wrongdoing outside government, including to the media, where this is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- The National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022 (NACC Act) contains strong safeguards to protect the identities of journalist' sources and uphold the public interest associated with a free press.

Chile

- Chile has been chosen as the venue for the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day in 2024.
- Progress is being made in the Culture, Arts, and Communications Committee on the Journalists and Communications Workers Protection Bill, which is based on the UNESCO Model Law for the Protection of Journalists. In March 2024, the discussion will resume in the Chamber and be sent to the Senate for approval.

Czechia

- In 2023, an amendment to the law on Czech Radio and the law on Czech Television was approved. The members of the Council of Czech Radio and the Council of Czech Television are now elected by both chambers of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, not just the Chamber of Deputies. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to dismiss the Councils of Czech Radio and Czech Television as a whole. These changes contribute to greater stability in public media and also strengthen their independence.
- Additionally, there have been adjustments to the Grant Procedure in the field of cinematography and media for the year 2024, specifically in the area of Popularization of Media Production and the Professionalization of Media. The change aims to support the importance of media, broaden the scope of potential applicants from the media sector, and encourage new projects contributing to media freedom. Projects included in the grant procedure are expected to contribute to the innovation and development of media, promote gender balance in decision-making positions, and thus support media freedom.

Ireland

- The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act was commenced in March 2023. This Act provided for the formal establishment of Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's new regulator for media and online safety. An Coimisiún published a draft of its first Online Safety Code in December 2023. This code, when finalised, will apply rules for how designated video-sharing platform services deal with defined categories of harmful online content, including in terms of their use of content moderation and delivery systems.

In doing so, the online safety code will provide for systemic obligations that protect online users from some of the most serious forms of harmful online content, including illegal content like hate speech, and certain offensive and abusive communications. The code will also ensure online services are operating suitable user reporting and redress mechanisms.

- A national counter disinformation strategy is also in progress, with an online public consultation process and a stakeholder consultation forum held in late 2023.

Italy

- Italy made a contribution to the Global Media Defence Fund, disbursing the grant in April 2023.
- The Italian Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU), as National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up, is in charge of the Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalists, receiving reports and involving the other Italian Ministries from which it receives the elements to be provided to the Council of Europe in feedback. By the Platform, bodies and institutions can be timely alerted in a more systematic way, thus, it is possible to take timely and coordinated action to protect media freedom when necessary.
- The financial resources allocated to the 'Fund for pluralism and innovation in information' (Law No. 198/2016) increased by 25% between 2020 and 2022. In addition, the Budget Law 2022 established a new Fund, called the 'Extraordinary Fund for interventions in support of publishing'. The new Fund is endowed with increasing financial resources (90 million in 2022 and 140 million in 2023), which are added to those of the previous Fund.

Furthermore, in 2023 Italy contributed 20,000 euros to the extra-budgetary project on the safety of journalists launched in 2022 by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), Teresa Ribeiro, with the aim of implementing the Ministerial Decision No. 3/18 on the safety of journalists, adopted in Milan during the Italian Presidency of the organization.

- At the Italian Ministry of the Interior-Department of Public Safety, the Central Bureau of Inter-Forces for Personal Security (acronym in Italian, UCIS) provides guidance to ensure the implementation of the most appropriate protection measures for domestic and foreign public figures, as well as for those persons, including their family members, who, due to their functions or for other proven reasons, are exposed to a potential or real danger or threat (Article 1, Law No. 133/2002). This situation usually mainly concerns those journalists investigating organized crime.

The UCIS, in cooperation with the competent Prefects, determines the level of risk in light of the degree of exposure to danger (level from 1 to 4, in descending order of danger), in accordance with Ministerial Decree dated 28.5.2003. Measures range from providing the person concerned with an armored car to a round-the-clock police escort.

Moreover, in December 2017 the Ministry of Interior established the "Coordination Center for monitoring, analysis and permanent exchange of information on the phenomenon of intimidating acts against journalists".

This has been the first initiative of this kind in Europe.

Given the multi-stakeholder approach and the use of territorial divisions, the Coordination Center can be immediately operational in cases of threat by evaluating the individual episodes and arranging the appropriate protection measures to protect journalists and to guarantee the right of citizens to be informed.

AGCOM (The National Regulatory Authority on Communications), in collaboration with NGOs, such as “Ossigeno per l’Informazione”, has defined and classified the threats to journalists, for comparable data. It has also identified a new detection methodology, for both the emerged and the submerged phenomena.

Latvia

- Latvia had its second Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. One of the three priorities for Latvian Presidency was promotion of freedom of expression, the safety of journalists and the digital agenda of the Council of Europe.
 - In this regard, from 5–6 October, the Presidency organised an international conference in Riga titled “The Pen is Mightier than the Sword? Meeting today’s challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists”. It was dedicated to one of the core elements of democracy – protection of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, including in wartime.
 - During the conference, the new Council of Europe’s Campaign on Safety of Journalists was launched, to which Latvia made the first voluntary financial contribution. The Campaign for the Safety of Journalists aims to raise awareness, stimulate effective tackling of pressing issues and ultimately increase the safety of journalists and other media actors in all situations.
 - The Presidency also organised an informal Committee of Ministers’ meeting on 29 June on combatting disinformation, protecting journalists and promoting free speech.
- In 2023 the Latvian Government also contributed to the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Latvia was elected to the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC until the end of 2023 and Latvia continued to provide expertise in the areas of media freedom, media literacy and protection and training of journalists.
- Working group for the drafting of new Latvian National Media Policy Guidelines under the Ministry of Culture was created in 2023, and the first meetings were already held. The Media Policy Guidelines are a medium-term policy planning document developed by the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with other institutions and industry representatives.
- Through cooperation of more than 30 participating parties, the National Council of Electronic Media (NEPLP) created a unified Latvian Media Literacy Platform. Its purpose – a sustainable website in Latvia, which serves as a repository of knowledge and an information database, as well as a communication platform in the field of

media literacy, regularly posting current information and materials related to the promotion of media literacy in Latvia. The database has been created in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, including state institutions, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and experts.

- During the Global media and information literacy week 2023, Ministry of Culture along with different stakeholders held various events, including seminars, training, classes, and discussions on media literacy were held. One of the events was a presentation of the website <https://melnsuzbalta.lv/>, which is a project by the State Chancellery that aims to increase the resilience of Latvian society against disinformation and other methods of manipulation in the information space.
- From September 28 to October 20, the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (a non-profit NGO) in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture held professional development classes for Latvian national and regional media journalists and media industry employees. 37 representatives of national and regional media from all over Latvia participated in eight workshops “Power in mobile journalism”.

Lithuania

- In September 2023, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania approved an inter-institutional 2023–2025 action plan for the protection, safety, and empowerment of journalists. Public institutions together with the media community made specific commitments in order to increase the safety of journalists that focus on a range of different issues. Main objectives of the action plan are to:
 - provide journalists with more knowledge, training and resources;
 - train prosecutors, police officers and judges about threats to journalists and responses to them;
 - monitor attacks;
 - raise public awareness.
- Training courses shall be organized for journalists, prosecutors, police officers and judges about threats to journalists and responses to them. Meetings will be organized between law enforcement and journalists, their associations will be organized to prevent and combat threats and attacks against journalists. Ministry of Social Security and Labour will collect the data on the available support (e.g. legal advice, psychological support) and the activities carried out by the state, municipalities and other public institutions, this information shall be shared with the media community. A mechanism to collect data on physical, online and other forms of attacks against journalists will be created. This data will be publicly available. Individual grants will be available to investigative journalists. There is a plan to finance certain activities via recently established Media Support Fund.
- Also, as Russia and Belarus continue their crackdown, leaving no space for independent journalism, Lithuania continues to support independent Russian and Belarusian media suffering from persecution. Lithuania provides visa assistance for journalists and their families, helps to find premises for journalistic studios and technical broadcasting possibilities, provides contacts of relevant institutions and

helps to receive accreditation for journalists, media workers and media outlets that have found safety and transferred their activities to Lithuania.

Luxembourg

- The coalition agreement 2023–2028 of the Luxembourg Government explicitly mentions the importance of the protection of journalists by stating that “The Government is committed to strengthening the protection of journalists against acts of physical violence and attempts at intimidation. This approach aims to establish a safe and conducive environment for freedom of expression and democracy.”
- The Luxembourg Criminal Code as modified in 2023 (Loi du 7 août 2023 portant modification du Code pénal) now includes new rules in case of attacks against journalists during demonstrations. Persons who express potential threats can be subject to imprisonment, with an aggravating factor if the target of the threat is a journalist. Furthermore, the modified Article 459 specifies that the disclosure of private and professional information (‘doxxing’) can lead to criminal liability for the perpetrator; with again an aggravating factor if the target is a journalist.
- The Government concluded a new multiannual agreement in 2023 with the national Public Service Media 100,7, which contains an encouragement to collaborate with Reporters without Borders’ Journalism Trust Initiative, an international mechanism rewarding ethical journalistic practices and encouraging the discovery of journalistic content by the online platforms which collaborate with the initiative. (source: <https://smc.gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/section-mdias/documents/O-convention-1007-final-public-31032023.pdf>)
- In August 2023, the Prime Minister and Minister of Communications and Media, Xavier Bettel, met Christophe Deloire, Secretary General of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and President of the Forum on Information and Democracy, in Luxembourg in order to discuss the challenges regarding the protection of democratic information spaces.
- Finally, the public press funding amounts to more than 10 million EUR in 2023. 21 editors, including citizen media and media start-ups, benefit from the Luxembourg Law of 30 July 2021 on an aid scheme in favour of professional journalism.

Norway

- The Director of Public Prosecution published his annual letter to the Norwegian Prosecuting Authority, instructing it to specifically prioritize cases of threats and violence against journalists and other media workers, with regards to adequate investigation, as well as sufficiently severe sentencing submissions.
- State film classification was abolished with effect from 1 January 2023. This meant that the last system of systematic prior censorship of media content in Norway, practiced since 1913, was dismantled.
- The Minister of Culture and Equality held the second of two dialogue meetings with representatives of Norwegian editorial media and global tech companies. The purpose has been to establish a better dialogue, and to explore how the parties can collaborate on rules of engagement while securing freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Norway.

- The Minister of Culture and Equality presented her annual statement on freedom of expression and media policy in the Parliament.
- The Norwegian Media Authority published a review of the implementation of the European Code of Conduct on Disinformation by Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines as designated under the Digital Services Act.
- The Norwegian Media Authority published a new edition of its Media diversity report, finding that Norway still has a wide diversity of publishers and editorial media outlets.

Switzerland

- Switzerland published its National Action Plan for the safety of media professionals (NAP) on 3 May 2023. It aims to put the issue of the ‘safety of journalists’ on the public agenda and to raise awareness in society and among politicians of the challenges facing journalists and of the fundamental importance of the media as part of an effective democracy in Switzerland. In close cooperation with the media sector, the Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM) has drawn up nine specific measures in the areas of awareness-raising and prevention, protection and support in cases of violence and threats, and also monitoring the legal framework.
 - To this end, a Sounding Board was created consisting of representatives from media associations, journalism schools, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), the Swiss Press Council and trade unions. The Sounding Board and OFCOM met for discussions several times in the course of the work. The Sounding Board is also involved in the implementation of the NAP and the follow-up process.
 - Furthermore, studies and research have been conducted in the field of the NAP. For instance, a study on Strategic Lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) was mandated and will soon be published. A further study on the safety of journalists in Switzerland is planned for the second semester 2024.

United Kingdom

- Online Safety Act
 - The UK Online Safety Act received Royal Assent in October 2023. This legislation will ensure that technology companies take more responsibility for the safety of their users, particularly children, online.
 - This ground-breaking legislation has been designed to tackle illegal content, empower adult users to have more control over what they see online, and protect children from being exposed to harmful content online, while including robust provisions to protect press and media freedom, and ensure people can continue to access diverse news sources online.
 - News publishers’ own sites are not in scope of the Online Safety Act’s safety duties; and news publisher content shared on in-scope services is also exempt from these duties. This means tech companies will have no new duties to subject this content to moderation.

- In addition, the largest online platforms will be required to offer recognised news publishers a right of appeal before removing or moderating their content. Their content will remain online while the appeal is considered unless it is illegal. This will provide a critical protection against tech companies arbitrarily removing news content at the height of the news cycle.
- The UK regulator, Ofcom, will now develop and consult on guidance and codes of practice that will set out how platforms can meet their duties. Ofcom published its consultation on tackling illegal harms on 9 November 2023 and its consultation on the duties relating to published pornography on 5 December 2023. Those focused on children’s safety will follow in 2024.
- National Committee for the Safety of Journalists
 - The National Committee for the Safety of Journalists was established in 2020 to ensure that journalists operating within the UK can do so free from physical threats, abuse, and violence.
 - The Committee is co-chaired by the Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for Victims and Safeguarding in the Home Office and includes representatives from policing and prosecution authorities, journalism organisations, and non-governmental organisations.
 - The Committee meets biannually. In 2023 discussions focused on delivery and impact and progress of the National Action Plan for Safety of Journalists. The Committee will meet again in Summer 2024.
- Refreshed National Action Plan
 - In 2023 the UK reviewed the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists (NAP). A refreshed NAP was published on Monday 30 October 2023.
 - New commitments in the refreshed plan include:
 - The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the National Union of Journalists will create a data gathering tool for journalists to highlight threats taking place in the UK.
 - To encourage police forces across England and Wales to adopt new Public Order training for police officers to prevent the unlawful arrest of journalists covering news events.
 - To encourage appointment of Journalist Safety Liaison Officers by all forces across the UK and identify opportunities to promote the role of police officers to newsrooms.
 - An employers’ sub-committee, which brings together publishers and broadcasters to share best practice in protecting journalists, was also established as part of the Plan, and held its first meeting in November 2023.
 - In response to the emerging threat of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), the refreshed Plan also includes a new Taskforce to take action against SLAPPS.

- Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation
 - The UK Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023. The Act includes measures which aim to tackle economic crime related SLAPPs, which represent up to 70% of all SLAPPs in the UK.

The measures include:

1. A statutory definition of a SLAPP claim to enable judges to identify this cohort of cases;
 2. An early dismissal mechanism for claims identified as SLAPPs and where the claimant cannot prove that their claim is more likely than not to succeed at trial; and
 3. A costs regime via secondary legislation to protect defendants in these cases from excessive costs in the event that a SLAPP claim has merits and proceeds to a trial.
- These measures will equip the courts with the necessary powers, tools, and guidance to swiftly deal with SLAPPs lawsuits aimed at stifling freedom of speech and stopping journalists exposing economic crime.
 - Now the Act has received Royal Assent work has begun on implementing the measures through secondary legislation in conjunction with the Civil Procedure Rules Committee.
 - These measures have been positively received by civil society organisations, the press and parliamentarians.
 - SLAPPs span beyond economic crime. That is why the UK government will continue to actively explore the options to legislate against the full spectrum of SLAPPs. The UK will continue to expand the evidence base on the full spectrum of SLAPPs cases to inform this future legislation.
- SLAPPs Taskforce
 - A SLAPPs Taskforce was launched in September 2023 to bring together government, civil society groups and representative bodies for journalists and legal services to coordinate a non-legislative response to SLAPPs which target journalists.
 - The Taskforce published its workplan in December 2023 which will tackle SLAPPs across four separate workstreams: understanding and monitoring the prevalence and nature of SLAPPs; guidance for journalists; legal services ethics; and awareness-raising.
 - A sub-group of journalists who have experienced SLAPPs was also established as part of the Taskforce, and has met twice to discuss how the Taskforce's work can most effectively support journalists.

- Journalism Matters Week 2023
 - Media Freedom is a top priority for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. In October 2023, to coincide with the UK's Journalism Matters week, she hosted a reception for national, regional and local journalists from across the country to celebrate their valuable contributions to media freedom.
- Council of Europe Focal Point
 - In October 2023, the Council of Europe launched its 5-year Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, which seeks to “set the path for a safer, independent, pluralistic media environment, by encouraging states to put in place national plans and mechanisms for ensuring the safety of journalists, and consequently the protection of journalism and information.”
 - Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director for Radio, Advertising and Press at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, is the UK's National Focal Point (NFP) for the Council of Europe, and acts as a point of contact between domestic initiatives and the CoE Campaign Secretariat to share information.
 - The first meeting of the NFPs took place at the launch of the Campaign for the Safety of Journalists in Riga at the beginning of October 2023.



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