MFC Media Freedom Coalition

Media Freedom Coalition 2024 Annual Report

Prepared by the Media Freedom Coalition Secretariat
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Overview

2024 marked the 5th anniversary of the Media Freedom Coalition, a cross-regional partnership of countries working together to advocate for media freedom at home and abroad.

Since being established in 2019, the MFC has grown to 51 member states from six continents and has developed close working relationships with its key stakeholders, including the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (HLP), the Consultative Network (CN) of media freedom organisations from around the world, UNESCO, and the MFC Secretariat.

This report documents the MFC's activities and progress during 2025, which includes activities within the framework of the MFC as well as relevant actions by individual MFC member states.

Actions are reported under the following headings:

- 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 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.

To protect sensitive data and/or actions, 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.

2024 at a Glance

22 cases acted on by the Media Freedom Coalition

- Joint government statements to advocate for journalists' safety
- Private or "quiet" diplomacy
- Monitoring trials of journalists
- Briefings for member states on key emerging threats to media freedom

123 actions by embassies in 37 countries

- Public and private diplomacy on media freedom
- Events to highlight important issues
- Visiting imprisoned journalists or requesting access
- Funding to media initiatives

5 MFC events at the central government level, and 37 events at the embassy level

- The MFC's 5th anniversary
- World Press Freedom Day
- International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists
- Summit for Democracy

8,000 journalists, 1,500 lawyers and 240 NGOs have benefitted directly from activities supported by the Global Media Defence Fund

- Over 1,100 legal assistance cases for journalists
- Over 230 investigations of crimes against journalists
- Over 170 strategic litigation instances for freedom of expression and journalist safety standards

Membership and partnerships

At the start of 2024, **the Kingdom of the Netherlands** completed its two-year term as MFC co-chair and handed over to **the Federal Republic of Germany**. Germany joined MFC co-chair **the Republic of Estonia**, which began its term as co-chair in 2023.

Since taking over the co-chair role from the UK in 2022, **the Netherlands** took a leading role across all areas of the Coalition's activity, including embassy networks and actions on cases of concern. The Netherlands also shared its domestic experience on media freedom by connecting experts working on Persveilig – the Dutch press safety mechanism – with their counterparts in other countries. In 2023, the Netherlands commissioned a scoping research study on a potential international investigative task force on crimes against journalists (the publication of this study is covered later in this report). When stepping down as co-chair, the Netherlands pledged to support the Global Media Defence Fund and also to remain a member of the Executive Group.

Germany assumed the role of co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition – having joined the MFC's Executive Group in 2023 and following its continued and deepening engagement on press freedom. Germany created an International Media Policy division within the Federal Foreign Office to lead on efforts in this area. In 2022, Germany launched the Hannah Arendt Initiative to support and protect at-risk media professionals. Since its inception, the initiative has supported over 6,500 media professionals at risk and more than 150 media organizations in various ways. This includes fellowships, technical support, psycho-social counselling, capacity strengthening and training, relocation and corresponding measures for journalists living in exile abroad or in Germany.

In 2024, **Estonia** continued its co-chairship of the Media Freedom Coalition, which it took over from Canada in July 2023, reinforcing its commitment to protecting press freedom and the safety of journalists worldwide. Estonia placed a special emphasis on combating disinformation and promoting media literacy, organizing a series of seminars and events in Kenya, South Africa, Moldova, and other countries and regions. By fostering international collaboration and advocating for stronger legal protections, Estonia actively contributed to the coalition's mission of upholding media freedom as a cornerstone of democracy and human rights.

2024 also saw a new country join the Coalition: **the Kingdom of Belgium**, which announced its membership on World Press Freedom Day (May 3rd). In its announcement, Belgium said:

"The Belgian affiliation offers new opportunities for various forms of cooperation with other members to protect media freedom and pluralism around the world."

As well as collaborating with its key stakeholders, the MFC also developed and strengthened its partnerships with other actors working on media freedom and related issues. The MFC now has regular interactions with, among others, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Freedom Online Coalition, the Open Government Partnership, the Forum on Information and Democracy, and the Council of Europe's Platform on the Safety of Journalists. Such interactions have proven valuable for organising events and convenings, as well as coordination and information exchange.

Strategic workshop

In May 2024, on the margins of the global conference marking World Press Freedom Day in Santiago, Chile, the MFC held its second strategic workshop involving around 40 participants from government, the Consultative Network, media and the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, with more participating virtually. Before starting the discussions, the MFC Secretariat reported on progress made since the previous workshop in 2023, including greater engagement of member countries outside the MFC co-chairs in responding to cases of concern, and the introduction of briefings for member states on emerging media freedom issues.

The 2024 workshop focussed on three core areas of the MFC's activity: embassy networks, legal reforms by member countries, and cases of concern. Outcomes included the development of a process for establishing new embassy networks while incorporating inputs from embassies, civil society and media workers; clarifying the information sharing approach on cases of concern; and boosting coordination with the HLP regarding member engagement.

MFC Annual Survey

The MFC Secretariat ran its second annual survey in April 2024 to gather ideas and feedback from the MFC's member countries and non-governmental stakeholders. Highlights included:

97% agreed the MFC is making a valuable contribution to promoting media freedom around the world

95% of government respondents felt they had an improved understanding of media freedom threats as a result of engaging with the MFC

100% of government respondents agreed that they have the support they need to engage in, and promote media freedom through, the MFC

The level of engagement in the survey was lower than in 2023 (29 respondents in 2024, vs. 43 in 2023). To address this, the MFC Secretariat will ensure the survey is available for a longer period of time in future and keep the overall length of the survey short.

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; **situations of concern**, where the media freedom environment in a particular country is seriously deteriorating; or **issues of concern**, for developments at the global level that require attention in order to protect media freedom. MFC states can then take action in a variety of ways, including public statements and quiet diplomacy.

Key numbers for 2024 (these numbers indicate actions taken by central governments and do not include cases in which embassies led the response)

22
cases acted on by MFC member states

10
resulted in public action

12
resulted in private action

Notable developments during 2024 included:

- **Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala**, a Congolese journalist who was imprisoned in September 2023, was freed in March 2024. Bujakera was found guilty of a number of charges, however he was released because he had already been detained for the duration of the sentence. His release came after embassies of MFC countries in DR Congo, as well as national and international civil society organisations, had worked on his case. The embassies, for example, published a joint statement in March 2024 shortly before his release, and also observed Bujakera's court hearings.

"I felt that I was not alone, it reassured me, and this presence gave me strength on a personal level … The judges and the public prosecutor saw that the case was followed at the highest level and that irregularities and manoeuvres were going to be documented."

Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala, *commenting on trial monitoring by embassies of MFC member countries*

Credit: Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala

- In 2024 the MFC, working with the Consultative Network, introduced **issues of concern** as a new category of case submission that MFC governments could act on. An issue of concern is a media freedom threat that affects journalists across many countries and potentially at a global scale. An example of this was the Summit of the Future, a high-level United Nations event bringing world leaders together to forge a new international consensus on how to safeguard the future. The CN made recommendations to MFC states for language on media freedom that should be inserted in the Summit's outcome document, the Pact for the Future.
- The MFC continued to develop **new ways of acting publicly** on cases of concern – driven by the need for rapid responses in urgent cases. An example was the December 2024 MFC statement on the Safety of Journalists and Media Workers in Georgia. Instead of running a full statement consultation with all members, the MFC co-chairs, Estonia and Germany, rapidly developed a statement which other members were invited to align with. The result was 29 countries in total supporting the statement, with the process taking about one week. In the past, statements with this level of support have taken at least 2-3 weeks to produce.
- During 2024 the MFC co-chairs and Secretariat sought to **engage the wider membership** of the Coalition in responding to cases of concern, aided by the recommendations of the Consultative Network. In 2024, for the first time, countries outside the MFC's Executive Group were involved in proposing cases and joint statements, all of which were taken forward.

Joint statements

During 2024, the MFC published:

13	8	5
joint statements, which included:	case-specific statements	thematic statements

Case specific statements were signed by **58%** of eligible members on average, although this includes the statement on journalists in conflict situations, delivered at the United Nations Human Rights Council, which was only signed by Executive Group members. Excluding those statements, the figure was **53%**.

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

Two of the statements were delivered at the United Nations Human Rights Council:

- The Media Freedom Coalition Statement on journalists in exile was delivered at the 56th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on 26 June 2024, as part of Item 3: *Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression Ms. Irene Khan.*

- The Media Freedom Coalition Executive Group Statement on journalists in conflict situations was delivered at the 57th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on 10 September 2024, as part of Item 2: *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, September 2024.*

The Media Freedom Coalition Statement on journalists in conflict situations delivered at the 57th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on 10 September 2024, Credit: Estonia in Geneva

In 2024 the MFC Secretariat also commissioned a **learning paper on joint statements**, which was produced in collaboration with the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) Support Unit. The paper, titled "Maximising the Impact of Joint Statements", by Dr Aida Al-Kaisy, explored how the MFC and FOC, as well as other initiatives that produce joint statements on human rights issues, can maximise the impact of these statements.

Points featured in the paper include:

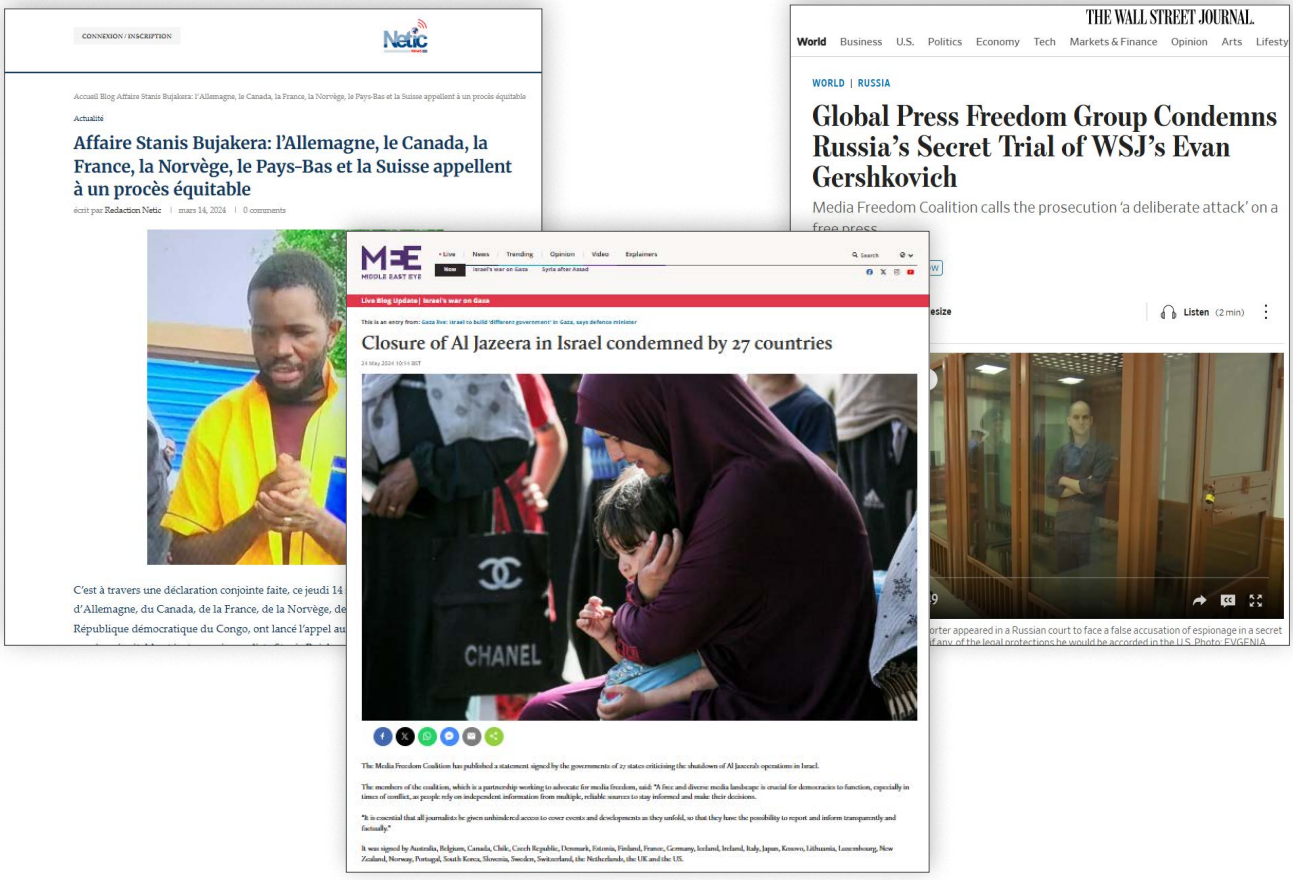
- How joint statements can be an important component of efforts towards media and digital freedom, from expressing solidarity to establishing international norms;
- How joint statements could be improved, such as including more "calls-to-action", linking them to human rights standards, ensuring they are timely, and clarifying objectives across stakeholder groups;
- How to ensure statements are capitalised upon once published, for example by having them amplified by government members of the MFC/FOC and backing them up with other diplomatic actions.

Media coverage and other responses

This report is not able to share responses and outcomes for some cases due to their sensitive nature. However, media coverage and responses can be shared for some other cases, as follows:

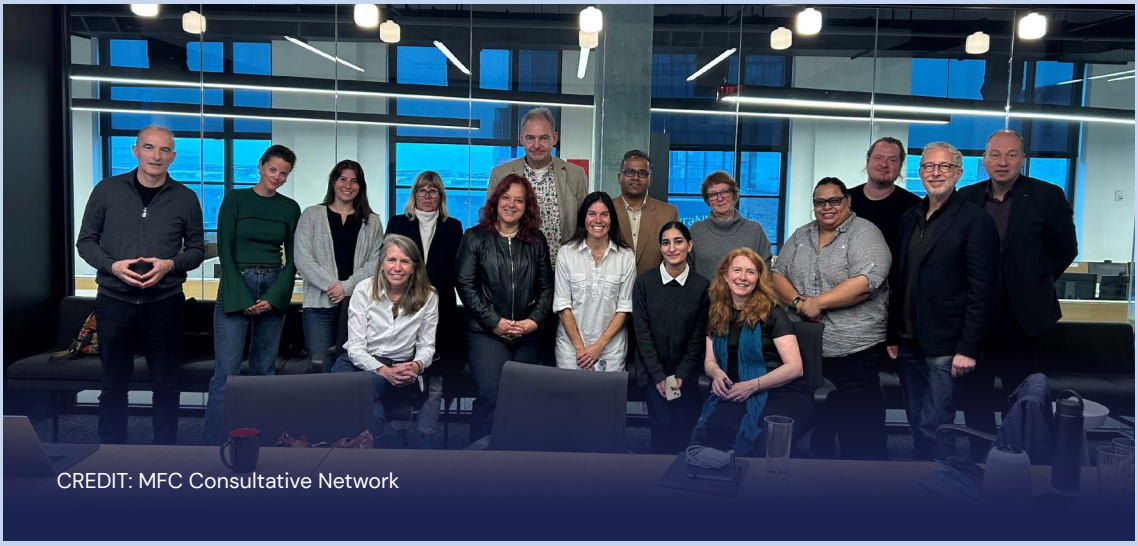
- The embassy statement by embassies in DR Congo about the detention of journalist Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala was picked up by Nectic News, Actualite.CD, and Election-net. Bujakera was subsequently released (more details above).

- The MFC's joint statement on Evan Gershkovich's Trial was covered by Gershkovich's media outlet, the Wall Street Journal. The Russian Embassy in Canada responded to the statement.
- The MFC's joint statement on Stand News in Hong Kong resulted in significant national and regional media coverage, with at least 26 news stories and opinion pieces picking up on the statement. There was also an official response from the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
- The MFC's two statements on Georgia, the MFC statement on Transparency Law in Georgia and the MFC Co-Chairs' Statement on the Safety of Journalists and Media Workers in Georgia resulted in significant national and international media coverage, with at least 21 news stories, and one instance of the statement appearing on national news TV.
- The MFC's joint statement on the closure of Al-Jazeera in Israel was covered by Al-Jazeera, as well as Middle East Eye and the Globalist.



Examples of MFC statement media coverage

2024 in perspective: the view from the Consultative Network



CREDIT: MFC Consultative Network

The Consultative Network (CN) of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) is a group of 22 national, regional, and international organisations that provide advice to the MFC on press freedom issues and cases of concern for action by the Coalition. The CN works with and draws expertise from a broader group of more than 95 civil society organisations globally.

"In 2024, the CN continued to raise key cases of concern for action by the MFC – including the unprecedented killing of journalists in Gaza, the critical situation for journalists in Bangladesh, and attacks on journalists and press freedom in Georgia. The CN issued new cases relating to countries in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. The group also facilitated in-depth briefings on key issues and cases for MFC member states and other MFC stakeholders, which has enabled the CN to provide more in-depth information to states about cases and issues raised. Also in 2024, for the first time, the CN started bringing forward global situations of concern.

In addition, the CN in 2024 raised awareness among MFC stakeholders about key and emerging threats to journalists and press freedom, such as surveillance and cyber-targeting of journalists, and the use of lawfare against the press, including through the use of foreign agent laws and cybercrime laws.

Throughout the year, the CN continued to provide input into ongoing strategic discussions about how to strengthen the work of the MFC. This included offering strategic input and guidance for the expansion of and strengthening of Embassy Networks and their activities. The CN also emphasized the need to strengthen support for exiled journalists with sustained and sustainable assistance to journalists at risk who are living in exile. In addition, we encouraged the MFC to prioritise and support the establishment of an International Investigative Support

Body (IISB) for investigating crimes against journalists, as recommended by the MFC High-Level Panel of Legal Experts (HLP), and as an essential, concrete step toward tackling impunity for crimes against the press. The CN also urged the MFC to strengthen its governance and accountability by establishing clear and transparent mechanisms and procedures for ensuring MFC members uphold press freedom standards and pledges.

The CN is led by co-chairs who are elected to help facilitate their engagement with the MFC and coordinate engagement among MFC stakeholders. In 2024, three new co-chairs were elected: Amy Brouillette (International Press Institute) and Luisa Fernanda Isaza Ibarra and Jonathan Bock from Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) in Colombia, who replaced Sally-Ann Wilson of the Public Media Alliance and Laxman Datt Pant of Media Action Nepal."

The Consultative Network co-chairs, on behalf of the Consultative Network.

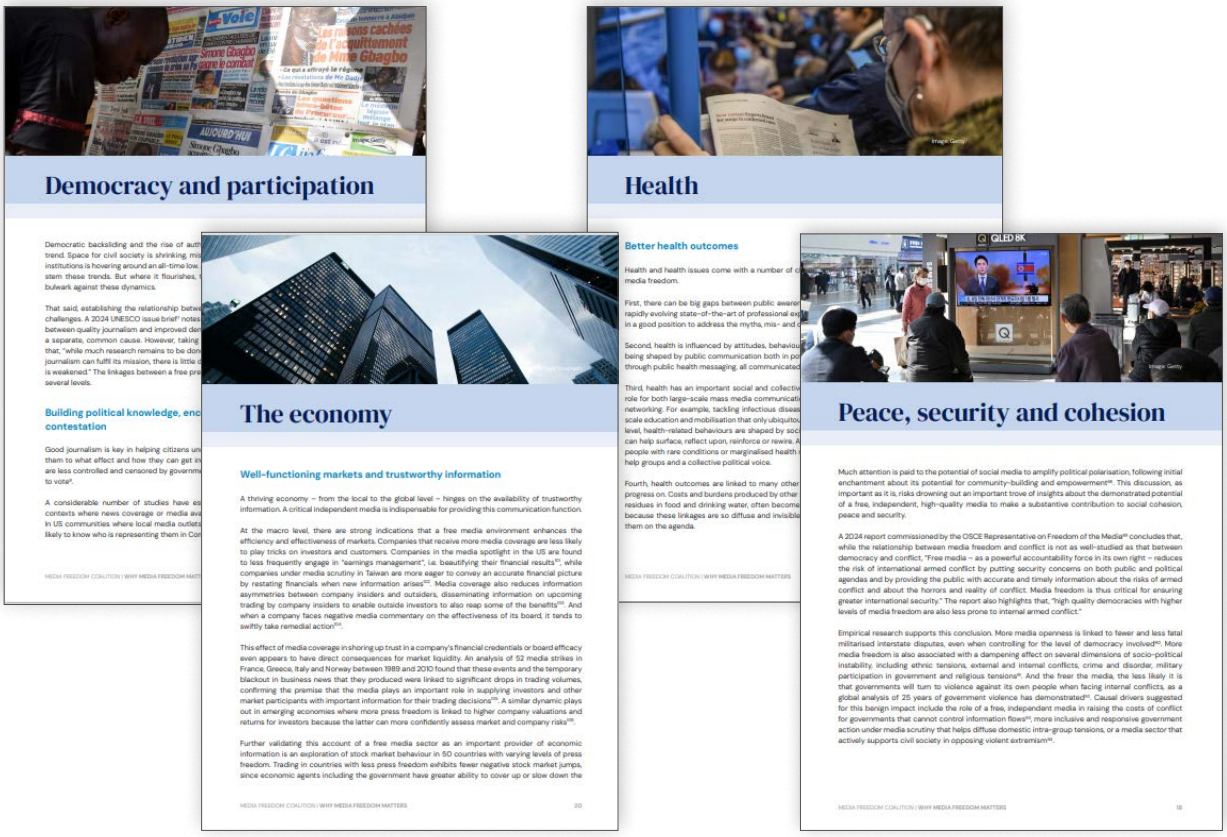
Resource for advocacy: "Why Media Freedom Matters" report

In 2024, the MFC published a report entitled "Why Media Freedom Matters", which aimed to make the argument for protecting media freedom even stronger.

The report brought together over 100 pieces of evidence on the links between media freedom and democracy, health, the economy, peace and security, and the environment. It has been distributed to MFC governments and their embassies to help them advocate for media freedom.

Highlights include how:

- A free media is linked to **greater democratic knowledge and participation** as well as **electoral integrity**.
- A free media can **support improved health through greater awareness among citizens** as well as scrutiny of health systems and providers.
- It can **reduce the risk of escalating state violence** and puts pressing security concerns on public and political agendas.
- It supports a well-functioning economy by **maintaining the flow of trustworthy information** and **detecting fraud and collusion** – sometimes more effectively than regulators.
- It has played an instrumental role in exposing **environmental crimes** and **informing policies** to address the major environmental challenges of our time.



The report was authored by Dieter Zinnbauer of Copenhagen Business School.

Estonia's Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration and Co-Chair of the Media Freedom Coalition Katrin Kivi, wrote an Op-ed on the report for Project Syndicate. The op-ed was consequently picked up by:

- The Business Standard in Bangladesh
- The Gulf Times in Qatar
- The Hong Kong Economic Journal in Hong Kong
- Confidencial in Nicaragua
- The Taipei Times in Taiwan

"We have to be prepared to keep answering the question because the goal posts are moving. What this report does is it attempts to put some empirical meat on those bones and to shift the categorization… it's not just about democracy, this public good hits us where we live in every aspect of our lives."

Catherine Amirfar, *Deputy Chair,*
High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

CREDIT: Catherine Amirfar

Action through embassies

Embassies of MFC member states have played a vital role in MFC action and activity during the Coalition's first five years. The MFC's **Embassy Networks Initiative** seeks to coordinate this work, bringing embassies together so they can act collectively when needed.

Like all areas of the MFC's work, the Embassy Networks Initiative is collaborative in nature, engaging civil society, journalists themselves, and other international representations, such as EU delegations and UNESCO offices.

During 2024, the MFC Secretariat recorded more actions through embassies than in any previous year.

The actions outlined in this section do not constitute all actions on media freedom carried out by embassies of MFC member countries during 2024 around the world. This would be beyond the scope of this report. Rather, this section captures actions that can be linked to the MFC (for example, they were carried out by members of 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 2024, the MFC Secretariat recorded:

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 had a public profile.

Actions by MFC member embassies during 2024 included:

- **The establishment of a new embassy network in Malta**. This network was initiated by the German Embassy in Valletta and followed a roundtable discussion involving MFC member embassies as well as media representatives to consult on how embassies of MFC members might support media freedom, and how this could serve as a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration.
- **Joint embassy statements on cases of concern and thematic issues**, including a statement by the MFC embassy network in **Cameroon** to mark one year since journalist Martinez Zogo was found murdered, calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and a statement by the embassies of 18 MFC members in **the Philippines** to highlight the 15th anniversary of the Maguindanao massacre, which claimed the lives of 32 media workers. Both statements also received media coverage, for example in Cameroon's Guardian Post Daily and the Manila Bulletin, respectively.
- MFC member embassies in **Belarus** issued a statement on the arrest of seven journalists in the month of December, calling for arbitrarily detained journalists to be released. Five MFC member embassies in **Russia** also issued a statement via the MFC's X/Twitter account marking the 18th anniversary of the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, which was covered by the Voice of America Russian service.

Examples of joint embassy statements in the Philippines and Russia

- **Highlighting cases of concern via social media**, for example in **Belarus** where the British and Estonian embassies shared posts on X/Twitter and Facebook about the case of imprisoned investigative journalist Dzianis Ivashyn, and in **Mexico** where embassies issued tweets in response to the murders of journalists Victor Alfonso Culebro Morales and Alejandro Martínez Noguez.
- **Quiet diplomacy with host governments** on media freedom issues and cases of concern.

"We value the work [that the embassies of the Media Freedom Coalition] do because we know that they raise these issues whenever there are opportunities to have dialogues with several government agencies."

Len Olea, *editor-in-chief of news outlet Bulatlat, and the secretary-general of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP)*

- **Events to highlight media freedom issues and the work of media professionals,** for example an event on women in journalism hosted by the American Center at the US Embassy in **Cameroon**, and an event hosted by the German Embassy in **Bangladesh** in observance of Global Media and Information Literacy Week, bringing together media representatives, civil society, students and MFC member embassies to discuss media and information literacy and press freedom in a new Bangladesh. This event was covered by national media outlets the Daily Sun and the Financial Express.
- **A series of events around the world to mark the 5th anniversary of the Media Freedom Coalition, hosted by embassies of Germany, Estonia and other countries**. To name a few, embassies of Germany hosted media freedom events in **Mexico** and **Peru**; in **Pakistan**, Germany and the Netherlands co-hosted an event on media freedom and democracy; and embassies of Germany and Estonia co-hosted events in **Portugal** and **Belgium** (the latter event also being co-hosted by Belgium's Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs).

Ambassador Martin Kotthaus on X/Twitter

German embassy 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**, the British High Commission discussed media freedom issues with local journalists in the northeast of the country and in **Cameroon**, diplomatic missions met with a women journalists association to strengthen their support for female journalism, as well as with media professionals in the northwest of the country to discuss reporting in a challenging security environment.

French embassy in Mexico

- **Trial monitoring**, to show support for journalists facing criminal charges and to observe and document the conduct of their court proceedings.
- **Providing support to journalists at risk**, for example by supporting journalists, as well as their relatives, to relocate, sending joint letters to imprisoned journalists to express solidarity, and meeting with the relatives of detained journalists.
- **Communications activities on media freedom**, including an op-ed by the German Ambassador to **the Philippines**, discussing media freedom initiatives, the MFC, and threats to media workers in the country, and a video message to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists in **Mexico**, featuring journalists and the German Ambassador speaking about the importance of press freedom. In **Bangladesh**, the Acting Australian High Commissioner also spoke about media freedom and the importance of the media in a democracy, as part of a broader national TV interview.
- **Capacity building initiatives for journalists**, for example in **Cameroon**, the French Embassy supported a peer-to-peer seminar for journalists to exchange best practices and challenges specific to their profession, and the U.S. Embassy partnered with the Cameroon Association of English-speaking Journalists to run a workshop on investigative reporting. In **Ethiopia**, the U.S. Embassy organised a workshop focused on advocating for gender equality, safety, and a fair and inclusive media environment and in **Bangladesh**, the Swedish Embassy worked with media and other partners to support the development of a Charter of Commitment for a gender equal media, initially signed by 20 news outlets.
- **Supporting dialogue on media freedom issues**, for example in **the Philippines** where several embassies provided funding towards a two-day media festival celebrating free expression and democracy as the cornerstone of the Philippine creative economy and in **Bangladesh**, where the Swiss Embassy supported a views-exchange meeting on the 'Role of journalists in Protecting Human Rights', organised by the National Human Rights Commission.

Embassy actions: World Press Freedom Day 2024

United States embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh

On World Press Freedom Day 2024, the embassies of MFC members around the world took a range of actions on media freedom, including:

- A joint video message by the Ambassadors and other representatives of 10 embassies in **Vietnam** on the importance of press freedom.
- A joint statement and meeting of MFC member embassies in **Albania**.
- A panel discussion hosted by the British Embassy in **the Philippines**, involving Nobel Laureate and Rappler co-founder Maria Ressa among other speakers, as part of a reception attended by journalists, partners from government and civil society.
- An MFC event organised by the U.S. Embassy in **Bangladesh** on "Press Freedom: Overcoming Challenges", which involved a film screening and panel discussion with prominent journalists, and was covered by national media.

Czech Embassy in Oslo

- A reception and discussion hosted by the German Embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where journalists spoke about the challenges they face there.
- A gathering of MFC member embassies in Iran to commemorate World Press Freedom Day.
- A forum on "media and freedom of expression in democracy" in **Mexico**, hosted by the U.S. Embassy with participation of several other MFC members.
- An event organised in **Norway** by the Czech and Swedish Embassies and the Nobel Peace Center, to present the new World Press Freedom Index and discuss the situation for journalists in Iran and Russia.
- An event organised in **Sweden** by the Estonian, German and Dutch Embassies, alongside International IDEA, on media literacy and elections.

German embassy in Mexico

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. Such actions "at home" are an important aspect of MFC membership.

It is beyond the scope of this report to provide the entirety of relevant reforms and domestic actions across all 51 MFC member states. However, the Annex of this report features some examples of domestic actions by MFC members during 2024.

These examples include improving legal safeguards for press freedom, training police officers and prosecutors on the safety of journalists, new legislation on journalists' protection, measures and reforms to address SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation), collecting data on the safety of journalists, and new funding mechanisms to support the media sector.

Information in the Annex was provided by the following member countries:

- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Chile
- Czechia
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Maldives
- the Netherlands
- the United Kingdom

High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

On pursuing legal reforms, MFC Member States may ask for guidance from **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 in their view 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 2024, the High Level Panel received a number of requests for legal 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 **fourteen MFC Member States**, throughout 2024.

The High Level Panel has continued to engage with one MFC Member State on a request to review draft legislation introduced to strengthen protections for journalists and other media workers. The High Level Panel also continues to provide legal opinions to non-Member States who request it: the High Level Panel advised a non-Member State on the repeal of certain laws in 2024 and has received a request from a non-Member State to review upcoming draft legislation in 2025. The High Level Panel is also in the process of considering and reviewing, of its own volition, the draft legislation of a non-Member State on a matter of international concern to press freedom.

The High Level Panel has continued to engage successfully with MFC Member States on further pledges and commitments in the areas addressed by the High Level Panel's four Advisory Enforcement Reports as detailed below. In 2024, the Netherlands published the Feasibility Study on establishing an International Investigative Task Force to address crimes against journalists and building on a white paper produced by the High Level Panel in 2024 detailing possible approaches to such a Task Force. In addition, the High Level Panel has continued developing a set of recommendations regarding the cyber-targeting and surveillance of journalists and has advised several MFC Member States in this important area. Throughout 2025, the High Level Panel will continue to work with the Consultative Network and engage bilaterally with individual MFC Member States to further promote the uptake of the Panel's recommendations.

In 2024, the High Level Panel also provided legal expertise on other priority issues concerning media freedom, working to support international mandate holders and organisations. This includes (i) contributing to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression's report on 'Journalists in Exile,' which was presented to the UN Human Rights Council in April 2024; (ii) contributing to a side event to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting focused on the Commonwealth Media Principles adopted during their summit in Samoa; and (iii) participating in the launch of the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media's on 'Media Freedom, Democracy and Security' following the publication of a booklet on media freedom and security for the mandate's 25th anniversary to which High Level Panel member Ms. Marietje Schaake, as well as Advisory Council member Ms. Galina Arapova, contributed.

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

Reforms in key areas addressed by the Panel's enforcement reports

The following reforms and developments relate to issue areas covered in the High Level Panel's Advisory Enforcement Reports.

Safe Refuge

In 2024, the MFC Secretariat engaged with the High Level Panel's Secretariat to request updated figures from Member States regarding the number of emergency visas and residence permits offered to journalists in 2023 and 2024 to compare to previous figures and analyse current trends. Following the determination that at least 1,400 visas had been provided by Member States in 2022, initial figures for 2023 and 2024 indicate that issuance for emergency visas and residence permits for journalists has continued to increase.

Estonia continued its commitment to provide emergency humanitarian visas, and 35 residency permits annually for journalists at risk, which was first announced during 2023 UNESCO World Press Freedom Day.

"Safe refuge and initiatives like that gives you the wings to fly. And this is not just safety and refuge, this is the freedom. This is empowerment. This is self-confidence. This is basically enabling you to do what you are trained to do and giving you rebirth."

Lotfullah Najafizada, *co-founder and CEO of Amu TV*

CREDIT: Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

Investigations into abuses against journalists

The Kingdom of the Netherlands: as a result of a motion of the Dutch parliament on December 8th, 2022, that explicitly referenced the work of the High Level Panel, 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.

The study builds upon extensive prior work on this topic conducted by the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, and the members of the Consultative Network of the MFC, as well as a number of other international, regional, and national organisations, who have identified and analysed the issue of impunity for crimes against journalists, and whose recommendations informed the terms of reference for this study. A report by the HLP in 2020 recommended the establishment of a standing independent, international investigative task force 'with the mandate to investigate attacks on journalists and other activists targeted for their role in exposing information.' The High Level Panel also produced a white paper to aid the study.

The report, which was carried out by T.M.C. Asser Instituut and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, was published in November 2024.

The High Level Panel welcomed the study's findings of the continued need for such a body, and recommendations for practical steps to establish and operate the body. The High Level Panel will continue to engage with Member States to drive this effort forward.

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. In 2024, High Level Panel member, Professor Seong-Phil Hong, was appointed to the Initiative's Independent International Panel on Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations.

2024 in perspective: the view from the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom

As 2024 marked the fifth anniversary of the Media Freedom Coalition, and the appointment of the High Level Panel, we continue to work with the Coalition to drive the implementation of our recommendations. Since the Coalition's formation in 2019, however, press freedom has come under increasing threat across the globe. This makes the need for Member States to adopt and respond to our recommendations, as well as those of the Consultative Network, more urgent than ever before.

We were pleased to see the publication of the Feasibility Study, commissioned by the Netherlands on our recommendation to establish an International Investigative

Taskforce to address crimes against journalists. We look forward to working with the Netherlands and other Member States in 2025 and advising them on practical next steps as to how such a body can function to prevent impunity for crimes against journalists.

Beyond this, we have continued to receive requests for legal opinions on draft legislation impacting media freedom. In 2024, we provided feedback on a member State's draft legislation at the request of the State, provided advice on the repeal of certain laws to a non-Member State, received a request from another non-Member State via the Coalition's Embassy Networks, and are in the process of drafting a legal opinion addressing the draft legislation of another non-Member State. We note the increasing number of requests and encourage Member States to continue to work with us regarding legal reform initiatives pertaining to media freedom.

In 2024, we were also delighted to have Baroness Helena Kennedy LT KC – who has served as a member since 2019 – appointed as our Chair, following the conclusion of Lord David Neuberger's term of five years as the inaugural Chair.

2025 will require stronger action to ensure media freedom remains a global policy priority in the face of increasing attacks against journalists, threats of disinformation, and closing of civic space. Member States are invited to contact us 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.

Signed off by the Deputy Chairs of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom.

High Level Panel of Legal Experts

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.

Regarding events organised through central government, the MFC hosted or co-hosted 5 events during 2024.

Summit for Democracy – Seoul

The third Summit for Democracy was held in the Republic of Korea in March 2024, with a primary focus on fostering democracy for future generations. Around 300 delegates including government officials, representatives from international organizations, academia, and civil society, gathered in Korea to discuss policy enhancements and strategic pathways to shape a better future through democracy.

The MFC organised an in person "fishbowl" discussion, meaning that any attendee of the session was welcome to contribute. Attendees were also welcome to observe the discussion if they preferred not to contribute.

Two facilitators ran the discussion:

- **Nick Benequista**, Director of the Center for International Media Assistance
- **Mariam Gersamia**, founder and director of MediaVoice in Georgia and a member of the MFC's Consultative Network

They were joined by speakers/contributors from governments (including representatives of MFC co-chairs Estonia and Germany), civil society from the region and globally, and independent legal experts.

Learn more about the **Media Freedom Cohort of the Summit for Democracy**, and read its Findings Report, here.

CREDIT: UNESCO

World Press Freedom Day – Santiago

In May 2024, the MFC organised events in Santiago alongside UNESCO's official conference for World Press Freedom Day. On the morning of World Press Freedom Day, Minna-Liina Lind, Estonia's Deputy Foreign Minister for Global Affairs, who also represented Estonia as co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition, appeared in a plenary session alongside Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa, actor, producer, and environmental activist Gael García Bernal, and the founder of Water Journalist Africa, Fredrick Mugira.

The MFC also organised a side session at the conference titled "Case studies of action from the Media Freedom Coalition: supporting journalists at risk through safe refuge and coordinated advocacy". This was a chance to look back on, and draw useful lessons from, some of the MFC's recent examples of action. The session was opened by **Ambassador Katrin Kivi** – Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFC co-chair) and the expert panel featured:

- **Dr Aida Al-Kaisy**, co-founder of Jummar, Iraqi independent media platform
- **Matthias Kiesler** – Head of Division, International Media Policy, German Federal Foreign Office (MFC co-chair)
- **Rosie Parkyn** of Internews and the Consultative Network
- **Can Yeginsu**, Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom
- **Jose Zamora** – Son of Guatemalan imprisoned journalist Jose Rubén Zamora, and EXILE's chief communications and impact officer

The session was moderated by **Derek Thorne**, Head of Secretariat, Media Freedom Coalition and closing remarks were delivered by **Laxman Datt Pant**, of Media Action Nepal and the Consultative Network.

A recording of the session is available to watch here.

When people see how much they gain from press freedom – how much prosperity it brings – it means we have to keep on going."

Estonia's Deputy Foreign Minister for Global Affairs
Minna-Liina Lind

5th Anniversary event during UN High Level Week – New York

2024 marked the 5th year of the Media Freedom Coalition. On September 26 the MFC held a 5th anniversary event in New York to take stock of the MFC's progress and redouble states' commitments to promote press freedom. This event, hosted by MFC co-chairs Estonia and Germany, marked the anniversary as part of UNGA High Level Week 2024.

The event featured high-level representation from current and former MFC co-chairs, including:

- **H.E. Margus Tsahkna**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, current co-chair of the MFC
- **H.E. Luise Amtsberg**, Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, current co-chair of the MFC

- **H.E. Lord Collins of Highbury**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Africa), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the United Kingdom, founding co-chair of the MFC
- **H.E. David Angell**, Political Director and Assistant Deputy Minister, International Security and Political Affairs Branch, Global Affairs Canada, founding co-chair of the MFC

Other speakers discussed the MFC's progress during its first five years, as well as its new report titled "Why Media Freedom Matters" (more detail on the report can be found in the Advocacy section of this report). These speakers included:

- **Catherine Amirfar**, Deputy Chair, High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom
- **Andrea Cairola**, Advisor for Communication and Information at the Section for Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, UNESCO
- **Jodie Ginsberg**, CEO, Committee to Protect Journalists, and MFC Consultative Network
- **Paulina Gutierrez**, Head of Protection, Article 19, and MFC Consultative Network
- **Baroness Helena Kennedy LT KC**, a member of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom and Director of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
- **Jason McLure**, Correspondent, The Examination
- **Omar Faruk Osman**, Secretary General of the National Union of Somali Journalists, President of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) **Maria Ressa**, co-founder and CEO of Rappler, Philippines, and Nobel Peace Prize winner 2021
- **Can Yeginsu**, Barrister, Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom
- **Mark Zellenrath**, Director of Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, former co-chair of the MFC

"For the first time, what the Media Freedom Coalition did was bring governments together to look at this problem together as an issue… One way in which we are having impact in 5 years is that there's a sort of collective focus on media freedom that wasn't there before"

Jodie Ginsberg, *CEO of Committee to Protect Journalists, and MFC Consultative Network*

CREDIT: Committee to Protect Journalists

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists – Addis Ababa

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2nd, the Media Freedom Coalition together with the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Addis Ababa organised an event in Addis Ababa focussed on showcasing collaborative methods of protecting media freedom. The event entitled "Working together to protect journalists: What's happened, and what's possible, through the Media Freedom Coalition" highlighted what has been done – and what is possible – when different actors collaborate through the MFC. It also brought to light the role embassies can play, with examples from Africa and beyond, including coordinated advocacy, trial monitoring, and funding for media programmes.

The event was opened by **Dr. Ferdinand von Weyhe**, Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy, Addis Ababa and was moderated by **Nompilo Simanje**, Africa Advocacy and Partnerships Lead of the International Press Institute. The expert panel featured:

- **Catherine Anite**: member of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts and Founding Director of the Freedom of Expression Hub in Uganda
- **William Holton**: Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Mission to the African Union
- **Etornam Maabla Macarthy**: Assistant Programme Officer, Ministry of Information Accra, Ghana
- **Dr Tabani Moyo**: Regional Secretariat Director (MISA) & Executive Director (MISA Zimbabwe)
- **Fitihawok Yewondwossen**: Chairperson of the General Assembly of the Editors' Guild of Ethiopia and Vice President of the Eastern Africa Editors' Society

> We normally look at skilling journalists, but then we leave the lawyers and the judges who are supposed to defend and enforce media rights. We need more judges … who understand media freedom. Who, when cases come before them, are able to adjudicate them excellently."
>
> **Catherine Anite**, *a member of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, and Founding Director of the Freedom of Expression Hub in Uganda*

CREDIT: Ambassador Jean Manes on X/Twitter

Press for the Planet: debrief from World Press Freedom Day 2024

On June 28, 2024, Chile as the host of the World Press Freedom Day Conference 2024, alongside Estonia and Germany as co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition, organised a follow-up discussion on the outcomes of the conference and future perspectives at the UNESCO headquarters, Paris.

The event featured three sessions, the discussions of which focused on key takeaways from the conference in Chile, the progress made by the MFC in the last five years, and the topic of cross-collaboration. The speakers included **Tawfik Jelassi**, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO, alongside:

- **Catherine Anderson**, Team Leader and Senior Policy Analyst in Development Cooperation Directorate, OECD
- **Antoine Bernard**, Director of Advocacy and Assistance, Reporters without Borders (a Consultative Network member)
- **Jamil Chade**, climate journalist (by video)
- **Sylvie Coudray**, Director of Division, Freedom of Expression, Media development and Media and Information Literacy and Secretary of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, UNESCO
- **Raúl Fernández Daza**, Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Chile to UNESCO

- **Katrin Kivi**, Ambassador at large for Human Rights, Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **Johannes Metzler**, Deutsche Welle Academy, Germany
- **Ms. Simona Mirela Miculescu**, Ambassador, President of the General Conference of UNESCO
- **Omar Faruk Osman**, Secretary General of the National Union of Somali Journalists, President of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ)

High Level Panel Events

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

Credit: Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC

Launch of Freedom of Expression in International Law, King's College London
On the 18th of January, then Chair of the High Level Panel, Lord David Neuberger, and Special Advisor to the Chair, Ms. Amal Clooney, launched their co-edited book *Freedom of Expression in International Law*. Members of the High Level Panel spoke, including Baroness Helena Kennedy moderating, and Professor Dario Milo, co-author of the chapter on Insulting Speech. More information on the launch and the book is available here.

Closing Plenary "Confronting Impunity and Safeguarding Journalists in a Global Context", American Society of International Law annual meeting, Washington DC
On the 6th of April, the High Level Panel Deputy Chairs, Catherine Amirfar and Can Yeginsu, spoke as part of a panel session organised by the City of the Hague as the closing plenary to the American Society of International Law's annual meeting. The session was moderated by the lead researcher of the Feasibility Study into the High Level Panel's recommendation on the establishment of an Independent Investigative Task Force to address crimes against journalists, Ms. Gabriele Chlevickaite of the Asser Institute. Other speakers included, Ms. Evelien Wijkstra of Free Press Unlimited and the Media Freedom Coalition's Consultative Network, and Ms. Marielle Vavier, Mayor of the City of the Hague.

This was an opportunity to discuss issues of international law relevant to the Feasibility Study and present the work of the Media Freedom Coalition on this issue to a wider audience. A recording of the session is available to watch here.

CREDIT: High Level Panel

"Defending the Defenders: Upholding Justice in the Face of Lawfare" at the International Journalism Festival, Perugia

On the 18th of April, High Level Panel member, Ms. Karuna Nundy, spoke during the International Journalism Festival in Perugia regarding the threats lawyers who represent journalists face due to their association with the cause of their client and the undue persecution of the journalist for carrying out their professional duties. She spoke alongside Ms. Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, Barrister, Doughty Street Chambers; Mr. Antonio Zappulla, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation; Mr. José Zamora, son of leading Guatemalan journalist Jose Rubén Zamora, and Mr. Carlos Gaio, CEO of Media Defence. Ms. Karuna Nundy spoke on the High Level Panel's work and how the recommendations can be applied to the protection of all human rights defenders.

CREDIT: High Level Panel

Launch of Report on Media Freedom, Democracy and Security, OSCE States Convening, Vienna

On the 17th of July, Deputy Chair Professor Can Yeginsu participated at a convening of the OSCE States at the invitation of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, to discuss the importance of strengthening media freedom to protecting national security. The panel launched a report on 'Media Freedom, Democracy and Security', which highlighted how media freedom and democracy are crucial to international and domestic peace and security. Professor Can Yeginsu also participated in a previous convening of OSCE state ambassadors on the topic. Further information on the event and report launch is available here.

UK & Canada Media Freedom Award, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, New York City
On the 27th of September, Deputy Chair Professor Can Yeginsu, moderated the UK & Canada's media freedom award, with Foreign Minister of Canada, Mélanie Joly, the Foreign Minister of Czechia, Jan Lipavský, the Foreign Minister of Costa Rica, Arnoldo André Tinoco, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Ms. Maria Ressa, and President of the Committee to Protect Journalists, Ms. Jodie Ginsberg.

The event was held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly's High Level Week 2024, and during the celebration of the Media Freedom Coalition's fifth anniversary. Established in 2020, the UK & Canada Media Freedom award recognises those who have championed freedom of speech and democracy. In 2024, the award was presented to Lotfullah Najafizada, CEO of Amu TV, on behalf of his fellow independent Afghan journalists and media organizations. Further information on the event and the award is available here.

Credit: Global Affairs Canada

"Defending Media Freedom in the 21st Century: Countering the Proliferation and Misuse of Commercial Spyware", side event to the UN Human Rights Council's 57th session, Geneva
On the 8th of October, the High Level Panel co-organised and participated in a side event hosted by the United States on the impact of commercial spyware on media freedom. The session was moderated by Ambassador Michele Taylor, US Permanent Representative to the UN Human Rights Council. Deputy Chair Ms. Catherine Amirfar spoke alongside Deputy Assistant to the US President and Coordinator for Intelligence and Defense Policy, Mr. Maher Bitar, Senior Tech-Legal Counsel at Access Now Ms. Natalia Krapiva, Visiting Professor at Columbia School of Journalism Professor Aida Alami, investigative journalist Mr. Szabolcs Panyi, and Human Rights officer at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Tim Engelhart.

The event was co-sponsored by the MFC, Austria, Denmark, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Korea alongside the US and the High Level Panel.

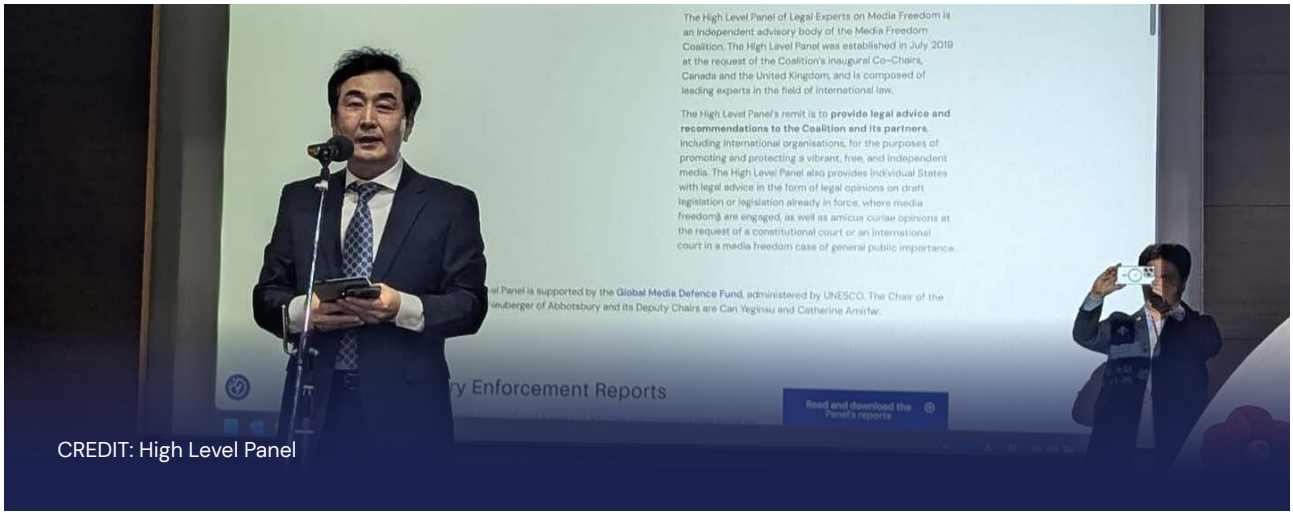
Deputy Chair Ms. Catherine Amirfar spoke to the High Level Panel's work developing a set of recommendations on steps states can take to counter the misuse of commercial spyware, to protect journalists. Highlights from the session are available to watch here.

Side event to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Samoa
On the 23rd of October, the High Level Panel co-hosted and participated in a side event on media freedom to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in Samoa, with the Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and Commonwealth Institute. High Level Panel member, Professor Dario Milo, spoke on the work of the High Level Panel advising States on draft legislation, or legislation already in force, and the legislation's compliance with international standards.

During this summit, the Heads of Governments adopted the Commonwealth Media Principles. The principles draw on the Commonwealth Charter and elements of the key instruments of international law. The Leaders' Statement and Samoa Communiqué urges Member States to take "concrete and meaningful steps" to implement the Media Principles within their domestic frameworks.

CREDIT: High Level Panel

Hinzpeter awards for Video Journalism, hosted by the German and Estonian Embassies, Seoul
On the 2nd of November, the German and Estonian embassies in South Korea organised an event alongside the annual Hinzpeter Awards with the Korean Video Journalists Association and the May 18 Foundation. High Level Panel member Professor Seong-Phil Hong was among the speakers, alongside representatives from the Embassies and organisers. He spoke to the recommendations of the High Level Panel and their work to support MFC states through legal and policy advice.



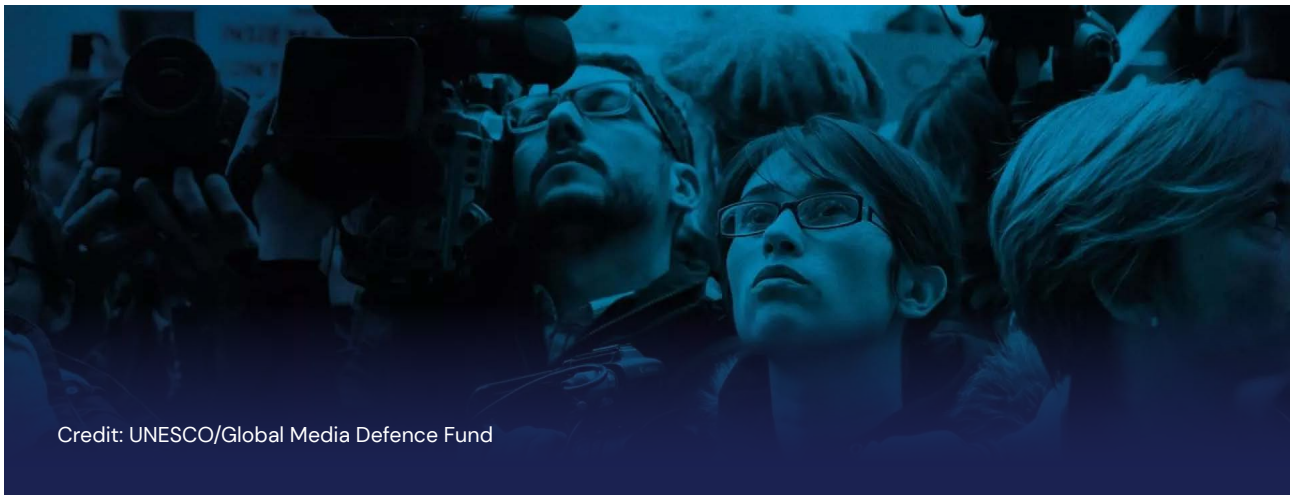
CREDIT: High Level Panel

“Advances and Challenges in the Protection of Journalists” for the fifth anniversary of the MFC, Santiago

On the 10th of December, the Embassies of Germany and Estonia in Chile hosted a session to mark the fifth anniversary of the MFC. High Level Panel member Justice Manuel José Cepeda Espinosa participated to speak to the work of the High Level Panel in providing legal advice to MFC States on how to strengthen the protection of journalists, and advances that have been made to date through the work of the MFC. A recording of the session is available to watch here.

Credit: German Embassy in Chile

Global Media Defence Fund



Credit: UNESCO/Global Media Defence Fund

The Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF), originally established at the initiative of two MFC members (the United Kingdom and Canada) 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.

2024 marked the Fund's fifth year of implementation. Since 2020, the GMDF has supported over 100 non-profit partners in the implementation of 150 projects around the world, through financial grants totaling an estimated USD $4.5 million.

In February 2025, UNESCO finalised the selection of the projects that will be supported under the Fund's first-ever Thematic Call for Partnerships, launched on 2 September 2024 and titled "Defending Environmental Journalism". Out of a total of 100 proposals received by the Call's end date (18 October 2024), 14 projects have been preselected for funding, with an estimated total of USD $570,000 to be allocated in financial grants.

To date, over 8,000 journalists, 1,500 lawyers and 240 NGOs have benefitted directly from activities supported by the GMDF. Since 2020, GMDF partners have reported:

- Over 1,100 cases of providing legal assistance to journalists;
- Over 230 investigations of crimes against journalists;
- Over 170 instances of strategic litigation undertaken to contribute to standard-setting precedents on freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

The GMDF also supports the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network, the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion.

In 2024, the GMDF continued to implement initiatives to provide emergency support to journalists in the context of crises through its Crisis Response Mechanism, in partnership with UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and the Organization's Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP). While the emergency initiatives implemented in both Afghanistan and Ukraine have been completed, the CRM has continued to support journalists in distress in Haiti and Sudan.

Examples of the projects supported by the Fund are provided below.

- The Gulf Centre for Human Rights has promoted investigations into crimes against journalists across the Arab States, providing tailored safety and legal support to the media professionals undertaking these investigations.
- The local CSO Tornavoz has provided specialized legal defense to over 70 journalists in Brazil, integrating a gender-sensitive approach that addresses the unique challenges faced by women journalists. The organization has also undertaken strategic litigation efforts and advocated against the use of secret surveillance tools on journalists.
- The Journalists Legal Defense Unit of the National Union of Somali Journalists has provided legal support to journalists and set up networks of lawyers to facilitate collaboration across Somalia.
- The Media and Law Studies Association's Legal Unit has provided legal assistance to journalists in Turkïye, which in two cases led to landmark rulings by Turkïye's Constitutional Court declaring the imposition of international travel bans on journalists a violation of the right to freedom of expression. This judgment provides a potential avenue for hundreds of journalists to challenge travel bans and other judicial control measures imposed during criminal investigations.

Read articles on the above projects and more at the homepage of the Global Media Defence Fund. Additionally, the GMDF has launched a new video interview series featuring conversations with GMDF partners and beneficiaries, highlighting the real-world effects of GMDF-funded projects.

The Global Media Defence Fund has received funding from 21 donors, including 20 MFC members: Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as from Siemens AG.

Working Group on Media Development

The MFC's Working Group on Media Development ensures that the MFC's work on media freedom incorporates issues relating to the financial viability of media as well as media capacity building. It brings together MFC government representatives, the Consultative Network alongside other civil society organisations, researchers, and other international organisations.

The group's work in 2024 was focussed on the **Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment**. These six principles set out how donors can improve both the quality and quantity of their financial and other assistance to the media sector. They were developed through a global consultation process led by the Global Forum for Media Development and the Consultative Network and in March 2024, they were adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC). The MFC welcomed their adoption via a joint statement here.

Following adoption, the working group focussed on dissemination of the principles to promote their use by donors and others involved in media support. MFC member governments used the working group to share their experiences and early lessons learned on integrating the principles into their work, whether through formal strategies or internal knowledge exchange. Meanwhile, civil society members of the group were promoting the principles at various international meetings and conferences. As a result of this, the working group engaged some MFC member governments that had not previously been part of the group.

Moving into 2025, the group will continue to use the principles as a foundation for promoting and shaping future support to independent media, as well as to coordinate with donors and actors outside of the MFC ecosystem.

More information on the principles can be found at the OECD Principles Resource Centre here.

Credit: Global Forum for Media Development

Annex

Examples of domestic actions by MFC member states during 2024

Australia

Australia's free, independent media has long underpinned its democratic strength. Democracy requires openness and transparency about the workings of government, and the free flow of information in the public realm, so that people have reasons to trust – or question – democratic institutions and processes.1 Australia recognises this by having a system of laws, policies and practices that uphold press freedom and the rights of journalists in Australia.

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.

The Australian Government recognises that media diversity and public interest journalism play an important role in the functioning of Australian society and democracy by ensuring people have access to credible information about matters of public interest. 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.

Australia has two national broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). They are both free-to-air, publicly funded networks but have operational and editorial independence so their programs are free of political influence. The Australian Government is committed to protecting the independence of the national broadcasters through legislation and provision of stable and adequate resources.

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) establishes a legal framework that provides individuals, regardless of country of origin, with the right to obtain access to Australian Government documents, subject to some exemptions. The FOI Act promotes Australia's

representative democracy by increasing scrutiny, discussion, comment and review of the Government's activities and decisions, including by the media. The FOI Act supports journalists' investigations and reporting of government issues of importance to the public.

Please see below the domestic actions that the Australian Government took in 2024 to support media freedom.

Measures to support **public interest journalism** include:

- The Australian Government is implementing the Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS)'s recommendations in its inquiry in 2020 into the impact of the exercise of law enforcement and intelligence powers on the freedom of the press. These recommendations include requiring public interest advocates to consider warrants relating to journalists for the investigation of disclosure offences.
- Following the Review of Commonwealth Secrecy Provisions in 2023, the Australian Government committed to reforms to secrecy offences to improve protections for press freedom. This includes commitments to apply a public interest journalism defence to specific secrecy offences where appropriate and to legislate requirement for ministerial consent to prosecute a journalist for certain secrecy offences. This is in addition to secrecy offences that have an existing legislated ministerial consent requirement, for example several national security-related offences and the secrecy offences in Part 5.6 of the Criminal Code which already require the Attorney General to give consent to prosecute.
    - In 2024, the Australian Government committed to further reforms to Commonwealth secrecy offences following the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor's statutory review of the secrecy offences in Part 5.6 of the Criminal Code (INSLM Secrecy Review). The INSLM Secrecy Review made 15 recommendations to improve the operation of secrecy offences, including recommendations about safeguards for press freedom.
- 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 (SCAG). In 2023, the SCAG agreed to amendments to model defamation provisions with a view to striking a better balance between protecting reputations and not unreasonably limiting freedom of expression in the various circumstances where third parties publish defamatory matter via internet intermediaries. In 2024, three Australian states and territories commenced these amendments. Other Australian jurisdictions are at varying stages of implementing the model law amendments.

- The *Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024* introduced a statutory tort that allows individuals to seek redress in a court for serious invasions of their privacy. The tort provides an exemption for invasions of privacy by journalists and other individuals and entities who facilitate journalism and a mechanism for the early determination of exemptions. This exemption is consistent with the right to freedom of expression and recognises the essential role of journalism in a free, safe and democratic society.
- 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.

Austria

- **Establishment of "dialogue teams" in the context of demonstrations in April 2024**
    - Dialogue Teams are specially trained police officers deployed in the context of demonstrations with a focus on de-escalation and preventing disruptive behavior. One of the tasks of the teams is to ensure that the actions of the police are well-communicated and understood by participants as well as journalists reporting on demonstrations. Dialogue teams serve as a point of contact and are called to clarify/counteract targeted disinformation in social networks during demonstrations. Still in the trial phase, 15 specially trained police officers have covered 17 events (protests, major events, etc.) so far. They are easily recognizable through blue waistcoats with "Dialogue Team" labelling.
- **2nd security briefing on 15 April 2024 for officials of the Austrian football association and journalists on the occasion of UEFA EURO 2024**
    - Briefing held by a police tactical-/close protection unit; topic: security-related behaviour at UEFA EURO 2024; rules of conduct for journalists to avoid dangerous situations, in the event of crisis/turmoil and behaviour after an incident.

Belgium

- Belgium upholds media pluralism through a legal framework that includes **constitutional safeguards** for press freedom and freedom of expression: Articles 19, 25, 32 and 150 of the Belgian Constitution protect freedom of expression and press.
- At the Belgian federal level, the **law on the protection of journalistic sources** protects journalists from attempts to reveal their sources, as well as any kind of investigative measures taken by the judicial authorities to circumvent the right of journalists not to reveal their sources. A positive step is the recently adopted Criminal Code to include journalists in the list of persons with a societal function, which means that violence used against them will be more severely punished (Articles 79 and 111 of the **Criminal Code** published in the Belgian Official Gazette on 8 April 2024, entering into force on 8 April 2026).
- In the European Union, on 11 April 2024, the European Parliament adopted a **new directive** to protect journalists, media outlets, researchers, artists and human rights defenders from abusive legal proceedings against them to prevent their work or silence them **(Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation - SLAPPs)**. Since

the directive officially entered into force on 6 May 2024, Belgium has two years to transpose it into Belgian law, i.e. until 7 May 2026. On 15 December 2022, the Federal Institute for the protection and promotion of Human Rights was officially designated to the European Commission as the Contact Point for SLAPPs in Belgium.

- In the framework of the Council of Europe's **"journalists matter" campaign**, a first meeting of the follow-up mechanism of this campaign at the Belgian level was organised. This **"focal point group"** brings together representatives of the various administrations concerned by the campaign (FPS Foreign Affairs, FPS Justice, FPS Home Affairs, Federal Police, French Community, Flemish Community and German-speaking Community) and offers a space for dialogue and consultation to stimulate exchanges and information sharing between participants.
- To celebrate Belgium's first six months as member of the Media Freedom Coalition, the FPS Foreign Affairs co-organised on 27/11/2024, together with Germany and Estonia as MFC co-chairs, an **awareness-raising event** in Brussels for an audience of professionals (international organisations, professional journalists, diplomats) on the theme **"Media freedom under pressure in the digital age: a gender perspective"**. The panel's exchanges led participants to reflect on the impact of technology on the safety of journalists in Europe and on gender-based violence against women journalists and media workers.

Chile

- **The 31st World Press Freedom Day 2024 Conference in Santiago, Chile**
  - The 31st World Press Freedom Day 2024 Conference, organized by the Government of Chile in collaboration with UNESCO, was held in Santiago, Chile, from May 2 to 4. Under the slogan "Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of the Environmental Crisis," the event was led by the President of Chile, Mr. Gabriel Boric, and addressed diverse areas of debate, as well as the design of public policies and research focused on strengthening press freedom and the safety of journalists. Nearly three thousand people attended during its three-day duration.
- **World Press Freedom Day Academic Conference**
  - As part of the World Press Freedom Day activities, the Government of Chile supported the organization of an academic conference hosted by the Universidad de Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. This event took place on May 4, 2024. It brought together 168 speakers from more than 40 countries in 31 panel discussions and two keynote speeches. The conference was attended by over 600 participants.
- **Bill for the protection of journalists and communications workers**
  - The Chilean Government, through the Ministry General Secretariat of Government, sponsored and presented indications to the Bill for the Protection of Journalists and Communications Workers (Bulletin No. 14964-24). The purpose of the bill is to protect those who work in the field of communications, as a legal asset that helps to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and information, as well as access to information of public interest. Those who exercise the profession of journalists or work in the area are recognized as

defenders of human rights and, therefore, of democracy. In 2024, during the drafting process, the Government of Chile received recommendations from the High Level Group of Legal Experts on Freedom of the Press (the "High Level Panel"). If approved, the law would fulfil the standards established by UNESCO on the protection of journalists and communication workers.

- **Police Training by the Government of Chile and UNESCO**
    - The **"Training of Security Forces on Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists"** program aims to develop the capacity of security forces to uphold citizens' rights to freedom of expression and access to information by enhancing journalists' safety. It seeks to establish more professional relations between security forces and journalists, fostering a better environment for freedom of expression for all citizens. Since 2013, this program has been implemented in several countries worldwide.
    - The second training session for Carabineros de Chile (the national police force of Chile) took place in November 2024 over three full days. The event was held at the Carabineros' training school and was attended by 30 officers, including all personnel from the Communications area and others who will be responsible for training additional police officers in the near future.
- **Bill to Strengthen Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN)**
    - Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN) is the only public broadcaster in Chile. However, it is financed through advertising and does not receive any state funding. The government of President Gabriel Boric has introduced a series of amendments to a bill aimed at strengthening the public television broadcaster.
    - This bill seeks to reinforce the legal foundation of TVN's public mission and establish a regulatory and institutional framework that promotes—or at least enables—the fulfillment of this mission. Specifically, the bill aims to define, expand, and formalize TVN's public mission; modify its internal governance; establish a sustainable financing structure; and adapt its economic framework.
- **Strengthening Local and Community Media**
    - The project **"Strengthening Community and Public Media in Chile and Mexico"** is funded by the Chile-Mexico Fund of the Chilean Agency for International Development Cooperation. In Chile, the program aims to support local and community media, with a particular focus on intercultural media.
    - The project was structured into four stages, including an unprecedented assessment of the capacities and needs of community radio stations in Chile. Additionally, a training plan was developed, benefiting 76 local and community communicators from various regions of the country. This training included an in-person meeting in Santiago in November 2024.

Czechia

- In June 2024, the Government of the Czech Republic accepted a draft version of **amendments of the Czech Television law, the Czech Radio law and the radio and television fees law**, which had been prepared by the Ministry of Culture. Subsequently, the draft was presented to the Chamber of Deputies, with the goal to strengthen the independence of public media service among others by improving

the sustainability of their financing. This initiative comes after a long period of 16 years, during which there was no serious discussion at the government level about the necessity of raising the concession fees. Currently, the Chamber of Deputies is discussing the laws within the third (and last) reading and if approved will be proceeded to the Senate.

Germany

Freedom of the press is not only a fundamental right in democracy, but also has absolutely constitutive importance for a democratic society. Its role is to safeguard the existence of a free press as an institution. A democracy without freedom of expression and freedom of reporting is inconceivable.
The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany therefore attaches great importance to supporting independent media as a means of preserving plurality of opinion and democratic discourse, in light of the global increase in censorship and restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. The requirements of the state neutrality obligation derived from paragraph (1) of Article 5 of Germany's constitution, the Basic Law, underpin the Federal Government's structural support for the press. This support focuses on basic conditions and techniques needed for professional journalism. The Federal Government does not provide funding for the preparation, creation or dissemination of journalistic content or individual media.

- In October 2022, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media joined forces with the Federal Foreign Office to launch the Hannah Arendt Initiative. This protection programme, implemented by non-governmental partners, is designed to support at-risk journalists, media professionals and defenders of freedom of opinion both in crisis and conflict zones abroad and in exile in Germany. Its domestic component funds a wide range of assistance measures through partnerships with civil-society and non-profit networks. Since the Initiative was established, over 6500 media professionals and 150 media organisations have received support.
- Among these are the European Fund for Journalism in Exile (JX Fund), via which 2477 media professionals were supported in 2024, and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), which in the same year enabled 2169 exiled media professionals to continue their independent reporting through various support measures.
- There is also a funding programme in place to protect and structurally strengthen journalistic work, via which the Commissioner has supported model projects to improve structural conditions and help protect independent journalism and a diverse media landscape.
- Another project focuses on the development of a civil society-led body, the No SLAPP Contact Point for the Protection of Journalistic Work. This provides journalists with advice and support services in relation to abusive lawsuits known as SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation). As well as offering information and advice to affected journalists, it raises awareness of the phenomenon among the public and legal professionals. It is supplemented by the government-run Focal Point SLAPP set up at the Federal Office of Justice.
- In addition, the Commissioner provided one-off seed funding for a project by

Publix gGmbH to develop and establish a media innovation fund. The resulting Media Forward Fund pools funding for journalism in Germany, Austria and Switzerland to support the development of new business models in media organisations which serve the common good.

Italy

- **Conflict of Interest/Media Concentration/RAI Reform**
  - Regarding **the supervision of conflicts of interest of holders of government offices pursuant to Law 215 of 2004, holders of government offices perform their activities in the exclusive public interest, deferring to the Antitrust Authority (in Italian, *AGCM*)** the verification that for instance, the "Italian **Competition Authority"** *(AGCM)* is **not involved in the conflict of interest**:
    - while in office, the holders of Government offices do not find themselves in situations of: (i) incompatibility; (ii) conflict of interest due to incompatibility; (iii) conflict of interest due to "impact on assets".
  - **The AGCM's ascertainment of situations of incompatibility and conflict of interest is made possible by the imposition of disclosure requirements on holders of government offices** both at the time of their appointment and when leaving office, and by the possibility for the AGCM to request information and to cooperate with other organs of the Administrations. **The AGCM also submits a report to Parliament every six months on the activities carried out in application of Law 215/2004.**
  - Regarding **pluralism**, the Department for Information and Publishing of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers **promotes policies to support pluralism of information and publishing products**, such as newspapers and periodicals, as well as press agencies. In this way, the Department contributes to implementing the constitutional right of citizens to be informed in an independent, diverse and plural media environment. **Financial sustainability today is a major challenge for quality journalism:** both traditional and digital publishers are in dire straits. This situation is likely to have an impact on the work of journalists and, therefore, on the quality of content. **Therefore, the Department, through its policies, also contributes to strengthening the integrity of the information ecosystem.**
  - **Support for newspapers and periodicals**
    The Budget Law for 2024 established the **Single Fund for pluralism and digital innovation in information and publishing, an instrument that brings together all the resources allocated to support publishing** and that replaced the previous permanent and temporary funds (in particular, the Fund for pluralism and digital innovation in information and publishing and the Extraordinary Fund for publishing support). **The establishment of the Single Fund has had a substantial impact on the sector, making it possible to rationalize and stabilize, making them structural, the resources allocated to support information**.
    In addition, an innovative turning point compared to the past has been marked, as **specific resources have been dedicated to the digital transformation of the sector and to the innovation of information content models**, which are

now more necessary than ever for the survival of newspapers.

- **Support for press Agencies**
  The press agency sector in Italy is characterized by the simultaneous presence, on the one hand, of **a large Agency of international importance** and, on the other, of **a plurality of medium-sized generalist Agencies**, all of which operate nationally and, in some cases, also internationally.
  Through **Decree-Law 198 of 2022, a new system of support for press agencies was designed with the following objectives: to raise the quality standards of primary information; to reduce the fragmentation of supply; to guarantee greater certainty for operators; and to protect the employment of journalists**.

- About **external pluralism**, Legislative Decree 208 of 2021 (TUSMA) **entrusts the AGCOM Authority with competences to protect pluralism and competition in the media sector** (so-called "external pluralism"). **Article 51 *("Positions of significant market power detrimental to pluralism in the integrated system of communications") states: "In the integrated system of communications ("SIC") and in the markets that make it up, the establishment of positions of significant market power detrimental to pluralism, in the market and in information services, is prohibited"*** - then indicating, in the following paragraphs, the operational methods by which the Legislator intends to achieve the objective of protection.

- More in detail
  As for RAI and pluralism, in addition to AGCOM, the relevant parliamentary Oversight Committee. This Committee is entrusted by law to providing guidance, in order to ensure, inter alia, respect for pluralism.

- **41A: Protection of Journalists**

  - The **Italian Constitution (1948)**, contemporary with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protects freedom of expression and freedom of the press under Article 21: *'Everyone has the right to express his or her thoughts freely by word, written and any other means of dissemination. The press shall not be subject to authorization or censorship'*.

  - The Department of Information and Publishing is ***National Focal Point* of the Council of Europe's campaign for the safety of journalists, '*Journalists Matter'*.** This initiative, which runs for five years (2023-2027), aims to promote a safe environment in which journalists can carry out their role freely and independently, without being subjected to threats, violence, or intimidation.
    For **the implementation of the national chapter of the campaign, a National Committee led by the aforementioned Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been set up. This campaign inter alia actions for female journalists and other media workers, who face gender-related risks in their work, such as threats, assaults (including sexual assaults) and violence.**

  - The aforementioned Department **is also engaged in the implementation/ transposition of the 2024 European Regulation on Media Freedom, which aims to guarantee the independence and pluralism of the media, including through measures to protect the journalists' profession. Article 4 of the Regulation** contains a **specific provision on the protection of journalists**

against external interference in their work and the **protection of journalistic sources.**
The Department is currently coordinating the national implementation exercise of the regulations, in compliance with the timetable that envisages the application of the new rules as of 8 August 2025.

- Also within the Council of Europe, **mention should be made of the Platform for the Protection of Journalists and the Safety of Journalists, directly monitored by the Inter-ministerial Human Rights Committee, *National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up*** that coordinates, with an inter-ministerial exercise, the responses to so-called alerts.
- At the Ministry of the Interior, of relevance is **the *UCIS*-Central Inter-Agency Office for Personal Security, which guides the most appropriate protection measures with regard to national and international dignitaries, together with those persons and members of their families, who, for work or proven reasons,** are exposed to potential and current threats and dangers, pursuant to Article 1 of Law 133/2002. **This situation usually - and it must be emphasized - mainly concerns those journalists who investigate organized crime.** UCIS, together with the Prefects, determines the level of risk, in light of the degree of exposure to danger (level 1 to 4) 107.
- Chaired by the Minister of the Interior, **the 'Coordination Centre for the monitoring, analysis and permanent exchange of information on the phenomenon of acts of intimidation against journalists'** was established by decree of the Minister of the Interior in November 2017. The Coordination Centre, through the enhancement of monitoring tools and the exchange of information between the various stakeholders, promotes in-depth studies and analyses on the phenomenon of acts intimidating journalists and formulates proposals aimed at identifying targeted prevention and counteraction strategies.

- **41B: Freedom of Expression & Defamation-Related issues; Hate speech, especially against LGBT+ & women and girls with disabilities**
  - The Italian Constitution (1948), contemporary with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protects freedom of expression and freedom of the press under **Article 21: '*Everyone has the right to express his or her thoughts freely by word, writing and any other means of dissemination. The press shall not be subject to authorization or censorship'*.**
    Article 21 of the Constitution ensures the free expression of thought, by word, writing and any other means of dissemination, **within the limits of the protection of the right to honor and reputation.** The **press cannot be subjected to authorization or censorship** and may only be seized by a reasoned act of the judicial authority in the case of offences, for which the law on the press expressly authorizes it, or in the case of violation of the rules that the law itself prescribes for the naming of those responsible.
  - **As regards the offence of defamation, for the conduct that offend or discredit the reputation of a person, not in his or her presence, Article 595 of the Criminal Code provides for imprisonment of up to one year or a fine of up to about 1000 Euros** (1,032 Euros).

A draft Law (AS 466-81-573-616), **on defamation is currently under discussion at the Parliament level, which contains, among other things, specific provisions on the exclusion of prison sentences for journalists.**

- The **Department for Information and Publishing promotes policies to support pluralism of information and publishing products, such as newspapers and periodicals, as well as press agencies.** The Budget Law for 2024 established the **Single Fund for Pluralism and Digital Innovation in Information and Publishing**, an instrument into which all the resources intended to support publishing converge, **making them structural. Specific resources have been dedicated to the digital transformation of the sector and the innovation of information content models**, which are now more necessary than ever, for the survival of newspapers.
- The **main action to combat disinformation** is to **create antibodies to disinformation** itself, through **media and digital literacy** and the **strengthening of the professional media ecosystem.**
  The aforementioned Department **finances the purchase by schools of all levels of education of one or more subscriptions to newspapers, periodicals and scientific and trade journals, also in digital format.**
- Allow me to recall that in **April 2024, Directive (EU) 1069 was adopted on the protection of persons engaged in public participation against manifestly 109 unfounded claims or abusive legal proceedings ("strategic legal actions aimed at blocking public participation").**
  The Directive contains relevant indications regarding the protection of journalists against unfounded and intimidating complaints and lawsuits and must be transposed by Italy by 7 May 2026.
- Regarding ***'hate speech'* against women, allow me to recall the 'White Paper for training'** of the Observatory on violence against women and domestic violence, at the Department of Equal Opportunities, **which in the chapter dedicated to the training of journalists and communication-related workers, men and women, underlines the fundamental role played by the media in combating violence.**
- The **Postal and Cybersecurity Police monitors all forms of online racism.**
  Activities against hate speech also include intensive prevention campaigns on the conscious use of social media and the dangerousness of messages users may encounter online.
  The Postal Police constantly promotes prevention campaigns, to combat hate speech, including online, through 24-hour monitoring.
- Since 2016, **in view of the growing phenomenon of "hate speech" and online discrimination, UNAR has been carrying out a specific activity to combat hate speech, mainly through its Contact Centre, which receives reports of discriminatory content concerning the web in its multiform expressions and constantly monitors the media, social networks and other online platforms to identify it.**
  This Office has also chosen to maintain specific and direct relations with the managers of the main social media (Facebook, Google, Twitter) - an activity that has enabled UNAR to send reports to the Platforms *in trusted mode*, allowing for

a faster and safer removal of the reported content.

- More in detail, **The White Paper** devotes an in-depth study to 'Women Subjected to Gender-based Violence with Multiple Discrimination', as well as taking up the CEDAW 2024 Observations, with reference to gender stereotypes at the societal and institutional level and hate speech against LGBT+ women and girls and women and girls with disabilities.
- The Department of Information and Publishing is **the lead administration of Measure 24 of the Plan for the Implementation of the National Cybersecurity Strategy** (2022-2026) concerning the fight against the phenomenon of online disinformation, aimed at conditioning and influencing the country's political, economic and social processes. **The issue of information integrity was also explored by the Commission for the Study of the Impact of Artificial Intelligence in the Information Sector, which the Department established in October 2023.** The Department also contributed to the drafting of the **OECD Recommendation on Information Integrity**, approved by the OECD Council on 17 December 2024, which contains international standards to support governments in combating disinformation and promoting reliable information spaces while safeguarding freedom of expression.
- By **Legislative Decree 208 of 2021, AGCOM** may provisionally suspend the reception or retransmission of audiovisual media services provided by a provider under the jurisdiction of another Member State in the event of a manifest, serious and serious breach of the prohibition to broadcast programs, containing incitement to violence or hatred towards a group of persons or a member of a group, on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality.

Ireland

- **European Media Freedom Act**
  - The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) was adopted in April 2024, which aims to strengthen the internal market for media services and protect media pluralism and independence in the EU. The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media launched a public consultation on the proposed approach to implementation of EMFA in September 2024. This included proposals to amend the existing media mergers regime under the Competition Act 2002 (as amended) and to establish a new framework for state advertising, and give new responsibilities to Ireland's independent media regulatory authority Coimisiún na Meán. The responses to the public consultation will inform the drafting of legislative proposals in 2025.
  - Existing protections for media freedom in Ireland are broadly aligned with the provisions of the EMFA, elements requiring further implementation will be addressed through forthcoming legislative amendments.
  - The EMFA also envisaged the establishment of the European Board for Media Services, which plays an additional role in supporting media freedom across Europe, and in which Coimisiún na Meán is playing an active role.
- **Media Engagement Group**
  - In 2022, a Media Engagement Group (MEG) was established, with the aim of

protecting media freedom by ensuring media personnel operating in Ireland are as safe as possible and feel safe in their employment.

- The MEG is chaired by An Garda Síochána (Ireland's police force) and, in line with the European Commission's Recommendation on the Safety of Journalists, provides an important forum for collaboration between media personnel, an Garda Síochána, Coimisiún na Meán, and Government Departments. In response to concerns raised by media organisations, An Garda Síochána has established a dedicated incident report registration process for journalists and media personnel. Incidents involving media workers are reported to a dedicated Garda Media Engagement Officer by a nominated point of contact within media companies.
- Through the MEG, An Garda Síochána also offer a range of training initiatives to journalists and media professionals. In 2024, An Garda Síochána began offering training on personal safety at protests and demonstrations – with a particular focus on photographers and videographers, who are often easily identifiable and particularly vulnerable at these events.
- A Gender Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Ireland's media sector launched in 2024. The MEG and Coimisiún na Meán are responsible for supporting strategies and collaborating with other industry actors to create a safe online environment for all journalists and media workers to combat online abuse.

- **Disinformation**
  - A Working Group tasked with the development of a National Counter Disinformation Strategy was established in February 2023. Independently chaired by a media literacy expert, it comprised representatives from Government Departments, public bodies, industry, academia and civil society. The Working Group met monthly and heard from a range of experts in different fields related to disinformation. Three subgroups, which included invited experts on disinformation, explored key aspects of tackling the issue including existing countermeasures, the legal and regulatory environment, and ways to help support the provision of free, independent, high quality journalism and protect the supply of public interest information.
  - Following an online public consultation process and a stakeholder consultation forum, the strategy is currently in its final stages of completion.
- **Further Support for Journalists**
  - In July 2024, Coimisiún na Meán launched new Journalism Funding schemes to contribute to the sustainability of independent local journalism in Ireland. The 2024 schemes aim to supplement and enhance coverage of local authorities and district and circuit court hearings.
  - Coimisiún na Meán's Code of Fairness, Objectivity & Impartiality sets out the standards that apply to news and current affairs content broadcast by broadcasters regulated in Ireland. This Code has been updated in 2024 to provide additional protection for confidentiality of journalistic sources.
  - In November 2024, Coimisiún na Meán launched a public consultation on developments in Media Plurality in Ireland from 2021 to 2023. This consultation,

which takes place every three years, reviews the ownership of media business, how such ownership or control has changed in the period under review, and the implications of media plurality.

Latvia

- **Media Policy Guidelines**
  - On 1 October 2024, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers approved the Media Policy Guidelines for 2024–2027, developed by the Ministry of Culture in close collaboration with media industry professionals.
  - The guidelines focus on fostering a robust Latvian media environment and information space by ensuring the development of public media, aligning its funding levels with European averages, and establishing a more predictable and transparent financing model. The public media broadcasters Latvian Radio and Latvian Television were merged into a unified public service media company in January 2025 – VSIA "Latvijas Sabiedriskais medijs".
  - Guidelines also emphasise improving commercial media conditions through enhanced support mechanisms and regulations. The strategic directions include strengthening journalist and media professional safety, preparing media for crisis scenarios, and enhancing media literacy through coordinated, strategic approaches. Additionally, the guidelines aim to bolster media independence by strengthening the independence of institutions overseeing the media sector, improving the regulatory framework, enhancing the independence of journalists, and promoting media self-regulation.
  - In November 2024, the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation held media crisis resilience training with over 50 participants from national and regional media. The Ministry of Culture, in close collaboration with the media sector and state institutions, is working to strengthen the industry's crisis resilience, including developing crisis plans and conducting training.
- **Legislation**
  - Amendments to the Copyright Law were adopted on 12 December 2024 enabling the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) to restrict access to websites that infringe upon copyright or neighbouring rights.
  - On 9 July 2024, the Ministry of Culture established a working group comprised of representatives from various state institutions to assess the compliance of the Latvian legal framework with the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083) and to propose any necessary amendments. Actions required for Latvia's legal framework to comply with the EMFA Regulation are detailed in the group's EMFA Report.
- **Safety of journalists**
  - Latvia is actively participating in the Council of Europe's "Journalists Matter" Campaign. On 10 April 2024, the Ministry of Culture established a multi-stakeholder working group to develop an action plan that will address safety issues faced by journalists and other media professionals in Latvia. Specifically, the plan will focus on implementing the "Secure Media Space" action line of Latvia's Media Policy Guidelines 2024-2027. This includes promoting media

freedom, protecting journalists from violence and threats, ensuring digital safety, assisting in establishing an appropriate legal and institutional framework, and improving the practical security situation. The plan will take into account the relevant research on the safety of journalists in Latvia and Europe, as well as the recommendations of the Council of Europe and European Commission, the European Media Freedom Act, and other relevant legislation.

- In mid-2024, the tender for the National Focal Point of the "Journalists Matter" Campaign was won by the Latvian Journalists' Association (Latvijas Žurnālistu Asociācija – LŽA).
- The Ministry of Culture cooperates closely with the Focal Point. For example, on 8 November 2024 with the support of the Ministry of Culture, the Focal Point held a seminar "Journalists and civil society in the disinformation era" which took place in Rēzekne in eastern Latvia. The seminar was organised to promote citizen's understanding of the functions and role of journalists in a democratic society, also focusing on various aspects of journalists' safety.
- The LŽA now has an "Alarm Button", which was publicly announced on 4 December 2024. This feature is designed for journalists who have experienced any form of violence, it provides a quick and easy way for them to report threats. The Focal Point will collect information on these cases to monitor the situation and contact the competent authorities if necessary. To promote the use of this tool social media accounts have been created in "X" (previously – Twitter), "BlueSky", "Facebook", "Threads" and "Instagram" under the name "TrauksmesPoga" (Latvian for "Alarm Button").
- The Ministry of Culture began talks with the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration on the possibility of including training for judges on safety of journalists issues in the programme of the newly founded Academy of Justice.
- In mid-2024, the Ministry of Culture commissioned a study on the "Safety situation of journalists and other media professionals in Latvia". Through interviews and case studies, the study empirically identified the main risks and security challenges faced by journalists. The study summarises the main challenges faced by law enforcement officers and provides proposals on how to implement better the recommendations of the Council of Europe and European Commission in the legal framework of Latvia. The researchers also summarised proposals for quantitative and qualitative monitoring of data concerning journalists' safety in Latvia.

Lithuania

In 2024 Lithuania continued to successfully implement the 2023-2025 Action plan for the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists. In 2024 state institutions took the following actions:

- Trainings for prosecutors, police officers and contract staff on "Investigation of criminal offences against journalists" were held.
- On 22 November, a four-hour academic training session for judges on protection of the rights of journalists and guarantees related to ensuring the right to freedom of information was held. 79 judges attended.

- The Media Support Fund awarded grants to investigative journalists.
- Police officers have participated in trainings on protection of journalists organized by the Council of Europe.
- Relevant institutions have actively spread information for journalists on available funding, grants and non-financial assistance, including for psychological and mental health.

Other activities not related to the Action plan were:

- On October 11, 2024, Minister of Culture Order No. IV-828 amended the rules for submitting projects for funding by the Media Support Fund. The amendments expanded the possibilities for media funding: (a) the activities of minority media can be funded, (b) experience requirements have been reduced to support emerging/ startup media."
- An additional 4 mln. EUR were added to the Media Support Fund (now it's 10.5 mln. EUR) in connection with tighter restrictions on gambling advertising
- Also, the Ministry of Culture project (The algorithm of knowledge: application of artificial intelligence in Lithuanian journalism | Kurk Lietuvai) has started discussions about the application of artificial intelligence in Lithuanian journalism.

Maldives

- Efforts are underway to deregulate the media, with measures being taken to reform the Right to Information Act.
- Engagement with the media sector remains a key priority. Several consultative meetings have been held between senior government officials and media representatives to discuss strengthening the Maldives Media Council and the Maldives Broadcasting Commission. These discussions have also explored strategies to further empower the media while ensuring its independence from sponsorship by state-owned enterprises.
- During one such engagement with the Attorney General and media-focused NGOs, concerns raised by the media sector were shared with the government. In response, the Attorney General announced that the government will pursue media deregulation rather than continuing the practice of government-led media regulation. Additionally, the government is working towards the establishment of a self-regulatory system within media organisations to further strengthen media operations.
- The government is also making significant progress towards merging existing media regulatory bodies, which are administered independently.
- President Dr Muizzu has decided to allocate 0.1% of the State budget to local media, with policy formulation currently in progress in consultation with media representatives. Budgetary support will be disbursed starting this year.
- To support media houses impacted by COVID-19, the government has extended loan repayment periods and continues to facilitate loan schemes and budgetary support to enhance the long-term sustainability of media organisations.
- The government recognises that since the implementation of the current Constitution of the Maldives in 2008, media reform and development efforts have largely stalled.

To address this, the government is actively working to reform media and broadcasting laws, strengthen regulations, enhance capacity building, and create an enabling environment for the media to operate responsibly within a democratic framework.

- Efforts are also underway to promote specialisation among journalists in various fields. In this regard, the Maldives Media Council and the Maldives Broadcasting Commission have organised training programmes for local journalists. Furthermore, higher education opportunities are being facilitated to encourage young people to pursue careers in media and journalism through government-supported higher education programmes. The government strongly encourages youth to enter this field.

Netherlands

- As of 1 January 2024, doxing, the collection or sharing of personal data such as an address or telephone number, is criminalized in the Netherlands. Prior to this, we had no figures on the number of cases, because doxing was not yet a crime. Since the doxing law came into effect, there have been only a few reports of doxing of a journalist in police records. Although the numbers were too small to draw any real conclusions, an informal survey found that since the doxing law came into effect, the number of cases involving journalists may have decreased.
- In 2019 the media sector, police and the Prosecutors Office took steps against violence and aggression against journalists, which resulted in the establishment of the PersVeilig platform ("Press Safety"). PersVeilig received a positive evaluation from independent research firm CEBEON in the summer of 2024. The evaluation clearly shows that all stakeholders consider it desirable for PersVeilig to continue. The aim of the platform is to improve the position and resilience of journalists against violence and other forms of aggression and to increase social awareness. PersVeilig also developed a Protocol entailing agreements between the media sector (employers/clients), the police and the Public Prosecution Service to combat aggression and violence against journalists from the various roles. Due to the positive evaluation, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science since 2025 provides structural resources to PersVeilig.

United Kingdom

- The UK Prime Minister wrote an article in the Guardian newspaper on 28 October 2024 on protecting media freedom and the importance of journalism. *Journalism is the lifeblood of British democracy. My government will protect it | Keir Starmer | The Guardian*. "Whether it is online intimidation, journalists imprisoned abroad or the cynical use of Slapp lawsuits, we will fight any threats to those who hold the powerful to account".
- The UK received two alerts through the Council of Europe's Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists – one in September on defamation legislation, and the other in November 2024, on police action. We have replied to one and are working on a reply to the other.
- **The National Committee for the Safety of Journalists (NCSJ)**
    - Ministers from both the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office chaired the NCSJ, which brings together representatives from government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society to

ensure that journalists operating within the UK can do so free from physical threats, abuse and violence.

- Members reviewed progress and agreed to refresh the UK National Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists. In 2025, work will focus on three priority areas via relevant official-led sub-groups under the Committee:
  - Enhancing the criminal justice response in tackling crimes against journalists
  - Online and offline harassment of journalists at work
  - Legal threats

- UK National Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists:
  - On 1 November 2024 the National Union of Journalists launched its Journalists' Safety Tracker, part-funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The tracker will enable freelance and staff journalists to share experiences of harassment, abuse and 'lawfare' across the UK and Ireland confidentially.
  - The SLAPPs Taskforce, convened in October 2023 as a 12-month time-limited Task and Finish group for non-legislative actions, made progress against its workplan. In 2025 it will publish guidance on SLAPPs for journalists and a final report. The Taskforce will be brought under the umbrella of the National Committee as a sub-group focused on legal threats against journalists.
- **Implementation of anti-SLAPPs measures in the Economic Crime and Corruption Transparency Act 2023:** work was completed on rules which will give effect to the anti-SLAPP measures. The rules will be implemented in law in 2025. The Government will monitor the effectiveness of these measures, to inform any future action on SLAPPs.
- **Implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023:** In December 2024, Ofcom's first draft codes of practice for the illegal content duties were laid in Parliament. Robust enforcement action against those failing to comply with the relevant duties can be taken from Spring 2025, once the illegal harms codes of practice have come into force. Firms will have to risk assess for harms to children from Spring 2025 and the child safety regime will be fully in effect by Summer 2025. The Act applies to social media and search services even if the companies providing them are outside the UK, should they have links to the UK (e.g. is capable of being accessed by UK users).
- **Media Literacy:**
  - The UK government is committed to making the internet safer. This requires a broad toolkit: using the Online Safety Act to ensure platforms limit harmful content and equipping both children and adults with the knowledge and skills to navigate the online world. Media literacy can help tackle a wide variety of online safety issues for all internet users, including children. Media literacy ensures an understanding that online actions have real-world consequences, critically evaluating online information, and contributing to a respectful online environment.
  - Since 2022, DSIT has provided nearly £3 million in funding for media literacy projects that empower users to make safe and informed choices online. In 2024, this included £0.5 million to scale up two programmes, to provide media literacy

support to teachers, children aged 11-16, parents/carers and other professionals working with families.

- The Online Safety Act updated Ofcom's statutory duty to promote media literacy. To fulfil the new objectives, Ofcom is required to increase public awareness of how to stay safe online, the impact of harmful content and online behaviour, and the nature of mis- and disinformation. Ofcom's first three-year strategy, 'A Positive Vision for Media Literacy', was published on 7 October 2024.

MFC Media Freedom Coalition

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