

Freedom of expression in Russia: UK statement

Madam Chair,

Upholding freedom of expression is a key principle of the OSCE and a key commitment made by all OSCE participating States. Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy and is essential for holding governments to account.

People must be able to discuss and debate issues freely, to challenge their governments, and to make informed decisions, supported by access to information provided by a strong, robust and independent media.

We congratulate Mr Dmitry Muratov and Maria Ressa on co-receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Muratov for his tireless efforts to safeguard freedom of expression in Russia, where independent media faces increasingly adverse conditions.

For decades the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, co-founded by Mr Muratov, has published articles on subjects ranging from corruption, police violence, unlawful arrests to electoral fraud in Russia. We commend the bravery of the staff working at Novaya Gazeta in the face of intimidation and verbal attacks.

Since its founding in 1991, six journalists working at Novaya Gazeta have been killed for simply doing their job, including Anna Politkovskaya, who reported on human rights violations in the Chechen Republic.

Fifteen years on from the murder of Ms Politkovskaya, the situation for independent media and independent journalists remains dire. The Russian authorities continued assault on freedom of expression targets independent media outlets and journalists, but also wider civil society organisations and activists.

We reiterate our concern about Russia's laws on so-called "foreign agents", "undesirable organisations", and "extremism".

We condemn the recent listings under these repressive laws, including Bellingcat and Caucasian Knot, and urge the Russian authorities to reverse these designations with immediate effect.

As an OSCE participating State, the Russian Federation has committed to protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, including the right to freedom of expression. OSCE participating States, and indeed the Russian people, have a right to demand that the Russian authorities take urgent steps to bring Russia back into compliance with these commitments as quickly as possible.

The UK calls upon the Russian authorities to take all measures necessary to fulfil their obligations under the OSCE's human dimension and other

international human rights commitments.

Thank you Madam Chair.