

New plans to ensure safety of UK journalists

Minister for Media and Data John Whittingdale and Minister for Safeguarding Victoria Atkins will today co-chair the first meeting of a new committee to make sure journalists can operate without fear of violence or abuse.

Recent events such as attacks on journalists reporting on protests and threats to members of the press in Northern Ireland have exposed the fact that those who play an important role in the democratic process are not always safe.

The National Committee For The Safety of Journalists will bring together representatives from government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and the civil service to work in collaboration to make sure journalists are free from threats and violence.

The Committee's first task will be to develop a National Action Plan which sets out a framework through which the safety of journalists can be ensured and they can be protected from physical harm and threats of violence. The committee will meet twice a year and be tasked with monitoring progress in the area.

Minister for Media and Data John Whittingdale said:

"The UK has been at the forefront of the global campaign for media freedom but it is also essential that we protect the safety of journalists at home.

"The rise in misinformation during the pandemic has highlighted once again the valuable role played by journalists working for reputable news organisations who produce accurate and balanced high-quality journalism. We must do all we can to ensure that they can carry this out free from threats and intimidation."

Representatives from police services across the UK, the press, including the National Union of Journalists, Reporters Without Borders and the Society of Editors have been invited to join as members of the Committee. The Committee may ask journalists to attend on an ad hoc basis to share their experiences.

As well as operating within and supporting journalists in the UK, the Committee will invite observers to provide international perspectives.

Safeguarding Minister Victoria Atkins said:

"News media fulfil an extremely important role in our democracy and it is right that we do everything we can to protect them from harm."

Ian Murray, Executive Director of the Society of Editors said:

"The Society of Editors is pleased to be able to support and play a role in

the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists.

Journalism is not a crime nor is it at odds with society. Indeed it plays an important role in keeping society free, and yet increasingly we see journalists targeted for violence and abuse.

"This committee's role in pinpointing action to combat this is both welcome and of vital importance."

Rebecca Vincent, Director of International Campaigns at Reporters Without Borders said:

"Reporters Without Borders is pleased to see this Committee moving forward at a time when journalists are facing greater risks than ever before. We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure better protections for journalists throughout the UK – and that the UK government is leading by example in its efforts to champion media freedom globally."

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said:

"Attacks on journalists are on the rise in the UK and around the globe. Increasingly the press is harassed and singled out for attack while doing their job. Unfettered journalism is a vital part of our democracy and the NUJ looks forward to working with the committee to protect a free media and end the impunity of crimes against journalists."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- In April 2019 the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the world's largest security oriented inter-governmental organisation, urged member states to establish "a national committee for safety of journalists which would gather representatives of the prosecutor's office, the police and journalist associations to verify that all attacks and threats are properly investigated, improve procedures if needed; propose protection measures when necessary and implement preventive action to reinforce the security of journalists." This followed attacks, threats, and murders of journalists around the world.
- Last year the Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched its international Media Freedoms Campaign to shine a global spotlight on media freedom and increase the cost to those who are attempting to restrict it.
- The UK supports freedom of expression as a fundamental right in itself and as an essential enabler of the full range of other human rights protected by UK and international law.

- A full list of membership is as follows:

Police Service Northern Ireland

the National Police Chiefs' Council

Police Scotland

Crown Prosecution Service

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

Reporters without Borders

Society of Editors

News Media Association

Head of Newsgathering, BBC

National Union of Journalists

Index on Censorship

Observers:

UNESCO

BBC World Service

Justice for Journalists

International Federation of Journalists

Committee to Protect Journalists