

UK strongly condemns all attacks on journalists and media workers: UK statement to the OSCE

Mr Chair, strong, independent media and journalists are part of the bedrock of democratic societies and are essential to hold governments to account. We support the vital work of ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media as an early warning mechanism when fundamental freedoms are challenged.

In times of war, the media's role in providing timely and accurate information is even more important. As Ukraine liberates more territory, journalists expose the atrocities caused by Russia's military aggression.

We are appalled by the findings of the Moscow Mechanism reports on Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Journalists have been subjected to unlawful detentions, abductions, enforced disappearances and torture. At least 15 killed so far; with reports that hundreds more have been shelled, shot, or detained. In the parts of Ukraine temporarily controlled by Russia, the information space has been severely restricted. We share the condemnation by the UN and other international organisations of the cyber-attacks on Ukraine's media and internet infrastructure.

The Moscow Mechanism report on Russia's internal repression exposes a systemic and repressive war against the freedom of the Russian people. Propaganda, repressive legislation, and violence have created a climate of fear and intimidation. From 1992-2021 reportedly at least 58 journalists were killed in Russia for their work.

Since February, legislation has suppressed freedom to express dissent and criminalised the "discrediting" of Russia's Armed Forces. How is this legislation and practice compatible with the human dimension obligations that Russia freely signed up to as an OSCE founding member? And, what message does this send? Be quiet or be persecuted.

As we have seen, most independent journalists and media outlets have left Russia or closed. The Russian government is isolating the Russian people from credible information, from the world outside of Russia's borders. Those reporting accurately on Ukraine, face jail, including dual British-Russian national Vladimir Kara-Murza. As the Moscow Mechanism report clearly says, "this is military censorship". We remind the Russian Government of the Milan Decision on Safety of Journalists in 2018, and urge them to comply with the 1991 Moscow Declaration which stressed the importance of protecting vulnerable groups in armed conflict, including journalists.

And we call for accountability – for Ukrainians persecuted in occupied territories and for Russians seeking simply to be able to tell the truth.