International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November

This statement is made on behalf of the newly-founded Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Strasbourg consisting of the following member States of the Council of Europe: *Austria, France, Greece, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom*. This Group will join the four existing Groups of Friends on this subject in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna. A joint statement of all five groups issued on the same occasion can be found in the annex.

2 November marks the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, a day that raises awareness of the fact that journalism remains a high risk profession. We are witnessing a disturbing rise in cases of arrests, persecution and harassment of journalists and media workers, both online and offline, as well as smear campaigns to discredit their work. The alarming phenomenon of increased targeting of journalists can be observed worldwide, as well as in the member States of the Council of Europe. It is deplorable that a majority of crimes against journalists go unpunished.

This international day, introduced in 2013 through the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, serves as a reminder of those who risk their life and health in their mission to inform. Through their role as "public watchdogs", journalists and other media workers, online and offline, find themselves in a very vulnerable position. Women journalists are disproportionately targeted.

A free, independent and pluralistic media is a precondition for the protection of human rights and lies at the core of every democracy. The current health crisis also demonstrates the importance of access to reliable and verified information for the general public.

Impunity for crimes against journalists has far-reaching consequences for our societies. It not only encourages further attacks, but helps to cover up human rights violations, corruption, misuse and abuse of power and criminal activities, and creates a serious "chilling effect".

Therefore, we call on all States to protect journalists and media workers and uphold their rights enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Safety of journalists is closely linked to other rights guaranteed under the ECHR, among them the duty to protect life, the duty to investigate fatalities and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.

Under the Court's well-established case-law member States are under a positive obligation to carry out effective, independent and prompt investigations into alleged unlawful killings or ill-treatment, either by State or non-State actors. We urge all member States to uphold these obligations.

In addition, member States need to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers to perform their work independently and without undue interference.

The Recommendation on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2016 (CM-Rec(2016)4) offers clear guidelines and is accompanied by an Implementation Strategy under the supervision of the CDMSI. It contextualises the ECHR case law with a focus on the positive obligations of States. We fully support this document and are strongly attached to its 4 pillars: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Promotion.

We highly appreciate the work of the Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists and consider it a highly important tool within the framework of the Council of Europe to address the challenges media faces today. Its establishment has brought us closer to the situation on the ground and has linked the work of the Committee of Ministers with civil society. It is a unique instrument that strengthens the Council of Europe's role and allows for early warning and quick reactions to threats to media freedom or against journalists and media actors.

We fully support the reinforcement of the Organisation's work on freedom of expression as agreed in the decision at the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki in which our ministers decided "*to enhance its co-operation and dialogue with the relevant tools of the Council of Europe, including the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists*". We are of the view that this dialogue should be more engaged and should take place in regular follow-up reports and discussions on the work of the Platform within the Committee of Ministers.

Finally, we thank all organs and units of the Council of Europe contributing to the important task of promoting the safety of journalists and media freedom, in particular the Commissioner of Human Rights, and assure them of our fullest and continued support.

Joint Statement on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) on 2 November

Issued by the Chairs of the Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists and members of the Groups of Friends in Paris, New York, Geneva, Vienna (OSCE) and Strasbourg (CoE) listed in the annex

On 2 November, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, established pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163, we commend the work of all journalists and media workers, online as well as offline, who daily risk their lives and health in the service of the general public, upholding a free, independent, plural and diverse media, and pay tribute to those who lost their lives exercising their profession. Journalists have a crucial function in maintaining the integrity of democracy, rule of law and good governance, inter alia by uncovering economic injustices and inequalities, human rights violations and abuses, environmental crimes, corruption, the decline of political freedoms, and growing authoritarianism. Journalists play a crucial role in promoting and demanding respect for the right to exercise freedom of expression; they are also pivotal in countering misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, racism and sexism. Highlighting the importance of access to information for the general public in times of a health crisis or any other crisis, we commend independent media's indispensable role during the COVID 19 pandemic in fostering transparency and accountability, affording communities access to reliable and verified information from all relevant sources, including measures to curb the spread of the virus.

We are deeply alarmed by the significant surge in attacks against journalists and media workers covering protests. We unequivocally condemn all attacks, reprisals and violence against all journalists and media workers. These actions have included killings, torture, enforced disappearances, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest and arbitrary detention, expulsion, intimidation, threats and harassment, online and offline, including targeting their family members. Such acts often deter journalists from continuing their work or encourage self-censorship, consequently depriving society of important information. We are deeply concerned that the vast majority of crimes against journalists go unpunished as evidenced by the recently published key findings of the report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the safety of journalists and the danger of impunity. Ensuring accountability through the strengthening of the response by law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice systems is crucial, including through access to effective remedies for victims and their families.

We welcome increased cooperation and synergies between relevant Special Rapporteurs on the issue of the Safety of Journalists and in this regard we thank the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences for her report on [Combating violence against women journalists](#). We also welcome OSCE's and its Representative on Freedom of the Media's continued efforts on that matter. We are deeply concerned that women journalists are disproportionately targeted through systemic and structural gender-based violence and harassment – both online and within their work place -, threats to their family, sexual assault and rape, and murder. We must take all appropriate steps to obtain accountability for these crimes. Women are targeted for violence not only because of critical reporting but also for speaking out as women. Online, women have become

specific targets, more exposed to online attacks than their male counterparts and forced to contend with specific gender-based violence directed against them because they are women. Gender-based violence and abuse, online and offline, is often underestimated and can result in deepening existing gender-related inequalities in the public space and impact negatively on pluralism.

In light of these recurrent and increasingly serious challenges, further efforts have to be made to ensure the safety of journalists as well as access to reliable information through free, independent, plural and diverse media. This requires even closer cooperation among all stakeholders, particularly with the actors in the field of law enforcement and criminal justice, especially prosecutors and judges. Indeed, members of the judiciary have a crucial role to play in order to ensure that those responsible for actions against journalists are held accountable.

More than ever, we are determined to fight impunity and ensure accountability in these critical times.

Annex:

(List of co-signatories, members in any of the five Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO in Paris, the United Nations in New York and Geneva, the OSCE in Vienna and the CoE in Strasbourg, in alphabetical order)

Albania	Latvia
Argentina	Lebanon
Australia	Liechtenstein
Austria	Lithuania
Brazil	Luxembourg
Bulgaria	Montenegro
Canada	The Netherlands
Chile	Nigeria
Colombia	Norway
Costa Rica	Pakistan
Denmark	Paraguay
Estonia	Poland
Finland	Republic of Korea
France	Senegal
Germany	Sweden
Ghana	Switzerland
Greece	Tunisia
Japan	United Kingdom
Jordan	United States
Kenya	Uruguay