1. The International Press Institute (IPI) is a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists dedicated to the defence of press freedom and the free flow of news and information. Founded in 1950 by 34 editors from 15 countries, IPI today has members in nearly 100 countries.

2. We welcome this opportunity to provide input to this parliamentary inquiry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)’s focus on media freedom. Equally, we welcome the FCO’s efforts to support media freedom and freedom of expression as fundamental rights that guarantee all other rights and support the functioning of democratic societies. This is a critical moment for such efforts given global efforts to erode media freedom. It is not a time to sit on the sidelines.

**Press freedom under threat globally**

3. Press freedom globally is under threat to a degree not seen since at least the close of the Cold War. Achievements in the protection of press freedom as a fundamental right since that time are at risk of being reversed. At the same time, attacks on press freedom are also growing in countries with traditionally strong guarantees for the work of journalists, which negatively reinforces problematic trends elsewhere.

4. The current threat to press freedom is multifaceted, characterized by a combination of tried-and-true methods of silencing independent journalism as well as newer methods that undermine the press’s democratic function without necessarily resorting to overt repression. The following sections briefly summarize several of IPI’s key concerns.

**Impunity for the killings of journalists**

5. Killing remains the single most effective method of silencing a journalist’s voice. Since 1997, IPI’s Death Watch has tallied journalists deliberately targeted because of their profession and those who lost their lives while covering conflict or while on assignment. Between May 2018 and May 2019 alone, 55 journalists lost their lives in connection with their work, at least 18 of whom were targeted in retaliation for their reporting. Those responsible for such killings, especially the masterminds, are rarely brought to justice. This state of impunity fosters a cycle of violence. The global failure to hold Saudi Arabia to account for the brutal assassination of Jamal Khashoggi has only underscored the ease with which journalist killers can avoid justice, regardless of how transparent their crime.

6. Mexico and Afghanistan were the deadliest countries for journalists in 2018, with 13 deaths each. Recently, however, journalist killings have occurred in states previously spared such violence, including those of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, Ján Kuciak in Slovakia and Ahmed Hussein-Suale in Ghana. Serious efforts must be undertaken to ensure that impunity does not take root here: once set in motion, the cycle of violence is extremely difficult to break. While the lack of progress in the Caruana Galizia investigation remains a scandal and an affront to the fundamental values of the European Union, the recent indictment of the suspected mastermind in the Kuciak murder is a positive step.

**Arbitrary jailing of journalists and violations of the rule of law**

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7. Arbitrary imprisonment coupled with rule of law violations remains a central concern for press freedom. With 139 journalists in prison and many more being prosecuted for their work, Turkey remains the world’s top jailer of journalists. The country’s crackdown on independent media widened in 2018 with the arrests of 46 more reporters, mostly on spurious terrorism-related charges. Journalist jailings in Turkey rest on arbitrary application of the law, exemplified by the lengthy jail sentences handed to 14 journalists and staff members with the secular daily Cumhuriyet in April 2018 following a drawn-out show trial in which prosecutors produced neither coherent indictments nor credible evidence. Freed while on appeal, several of the defendants, including IPI Executive Board member Kadri Gürsel, face an imminent return to prison or have already been jailed.

8. Between July and December 2018, IPI together with the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) monitored 90 hearings of journalist trials in Turkey, witnessing routine and severe violations of defendants’ right to a fair trial, including extensive pre-trial detention in violation of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) standards and violations of rules on judicial independence and the right to a lawful judge.

9. The situation is often worst for Kurdish journalists, who in many cases have been denied the right to even defend themselves in court or cross-examine witnesses. Kurdish journalist Nedim Türfent, arrested for covering the activities of Turkish special forces in the country’s southeast, is serving a nearly nine-year prison sentence partly based on the testimony of witnesses who said they had been tortured into giving evidence. The Turkish state continues to suppress all pro-Kurdish media. As the trial of Reporters without Borders (RSF) Turkey Representative and IPI member Erol Önderoğlu last month demonstrated, even showing support for the rights of pro-Kurdish media risks criminal prosecution.

10. Turkey is not alone in jailing journalists whose work it dislikes. Tens of journalists are currently behind bars in Egypt, including IPI member and Al Jazeera correspondent Mahmoud Hussein. Arrested in December 2016, Hussein has spent nearly 900 days in jail without charges, representing an outrageous violation of the rule of law and the rights of defendants The U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has ruled Hussein’s detention arbitrary. Last month, Myanmar’s Supreme Court upheld seven-year jail sentences handed to Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo over their coverage of alleged abuses by the country’s security forces in Rakhine state. The court refused to overturn the pair’s conviction on violating the Official Secrets Act despite evidence that they were set up by the police.

New laws stifling critical media

11. IPI is deeply alarmed over new and disproportionate laws that seriously impede the work of independent journalists, often in the guise of national security, cybersecurity or combating terrorism.

12. In Bangladesh, journalists face up to life imprisonment for violating the country’s new Digital Security Act. Egypt’s recently passed media regulation law makes it prohibitively expensive for online newspapers to become registered and allows the government to shut them

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2 https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/
4 https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/nedim-turfent-one-trial-countless-injustices/
5 https://ipi.media/pressegypt/free-mahmoud-hussein/
The Tanzanian government has used the Media Services Act and other laws to ban critical newspapers and suspend radio broadcasters. In recent meetings with IPI, Tanzanian officials committed to reviewing the law after the East African Court of Justice ruled that parts of it violated the right to free expression. Russia has passed a succession of laws to crack down on criticism of public officials online.

**Undermining the role of the press in society**

13. While it is clear that arbitrary imprisonment, physical attacks and disproportionate laws remain serious threats to press freedom, illiberal- and authoritarian-minded governments are increasingly employing tactics that seek to broadly erode the credibility of independent media and undermine journalism’s watchdog role without necessarily resorting to visible oppression. While such methods are not new, their impact in recent years has grown.

14. One clear tactic is the smearing of critical media and journalists who challenge power or question the status quo – activities inherent to the practice of journalism – as threats to security, stability and national identity or as purely political actors whose criticism is ideologically driven and therefore biased. The impact of such rhetoric is twofold: on the one hand, it exposes the targeted journalists to a heightened risk of physical violence and can be used to justify prosecutions and jailings; on the other, the public mistrust that it deliberately generates toward the media also serves to negate the impact of critical, investigative journalism. In Pakistan, military officials have worked to smear critical media outlets, such as the daily Dawn, as threats to national security, resulting in system of self-censorship that editors have said is “far more suffocating than martial law”. IPI World Press Freedom Hero Cyril Almeida, who has been the target of such campaigns, also faces treason charges for conducting an interview with a former prime minister.

15. Closely connected to this development is the phenomenon of online harassment targeting journalists. While in some cases such harassment may reflect organic expressions of anger at journalist content, in others it is orchestrated – or at least tacitly encouraged – by politicians and political parties. IPI research has clearly documented the negative impact of online harassment on journalists’ personal and professional lives and the failures of state authorities to hold the perpetrators of online harassment accountable when such conduct rises to the level of a criminal act, as in the case of direct threats. Our work also shows that online harassment induces self-censorship and endangers a diverse and pluralistic media, given that female and minority journalists are disproportionately victims of online harassment. IPI encourages a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing online harassment, emphasizing the different responsibilities of states, Internet companies and newsrooms.

16. Yet another tactic seeks to weaken the economic position of independent media so that they do not have the resources, reach or market share to hold power to account effectively. These measures include the manipulation of state advertising; the construction of pro-government or oligarchic ownership networks to buy out or drown out critical competitors; and the arbitrary, targeted application of tax laws and administrative regulations.

17. Hungary is a prime example of the use of such methods, as independent media in that country are increasingly encircled by a state media machine and are being deliberately starved of both public and private advertisement revenue. But it is far from alone: governments from

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9 [https://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/](https://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/)
Cambodia\textsuperscript{11} to Zambia\textsuperscript{12} have invoked alleged tax violations as a pretext to shut down critical publications and exert nearly total control over traditional media. The Turkish government has brought an estimated 90 percent of the country’s media outlets under its control through a system of friendly ownership, tax threats and advertising manipulation.

**Recommendations for engagement**

18. We applaud the UK government for prioritizing media freedom as part of its efforts to protect the international rules-based system. However, we strongly urge that this be a sustainable effort. Reversing the current trend of attacks on the press is not something that can be reversed in a single governing period but rather requires a long-term investment on the part of the government and, critically, the dedication of sufficient resources.

19. With regard to the UK’s efforts to defend and promote media freedom globally, we offer the following points.

20. Raise, in both public and private, media freedom issues with governments and use all available platforms to call for the freeing of jailed journalists, an end to impunity, the revision of media-related laws that do not meet international human rights standards and an end to campaigns to silence independent media. While we acknowledge that closed-door diplomacy may be effective in some situations, a campaign to support to media freedom must be willing to publicly confront governments that undermine journalists’ rights. Raising media freedom issues in public increases their significance and constitutes a show of support for independent media organizations on the ground, who can also use such opportunities as an excuse to highlight media freedom issues in their own reporting.

21. Give support and visibility to those journalists and media outlets that are fighting to remain independent. Raise the voices of those who – especially in the face of smear campaigns and efforts to discredit them – are dedicated to practicing quality, independent journalism.

22. Like attacks on press freedom, disinformation undermines democratic accountability. As noted above, disinformation in the form of smear campaigns against journalists also erodes public trust in the media and weakens journalism’s watchdog role. However, a focus on disinformation should not detract or distract from efforts to counter more “traditional” attacks on the free flow of information, in particular through the jailing and killing of journalists. Efforts to address disinformation should always be undertaken in a manner that complies with international human rights law around freedom of expression and in consultation with expert freedom of expression organizations.

23. Push back against efforts to weaken international organizations and intergovernmental bodies that protect journalists’ rights and the rule of law. We especially urge the FCO to offer its full support to the European Court of Human Rights, which is often a last guarantor of press freedom in countries where the rule of law does not function. It is urgent that the UK government put pressure on states to implement the Court’s rulings in favour of press freedom so as to avoid any precedent that these rulings can be ignored. Additionally, we urge the UK to support initiatives such as the Council of Europe’s Platform for the Protection of Journalists, which tracks attacks on the press and offers an important conduit for media

\textsuperscript{10} https://ipi.media/one-hungarian-media-monster-to-rule-them-all/
\textsuperscript{11} https://ipi.media/cambodia-papers-closure-illustrates-abuse-of-tax-laws/
\textsuperscript{12} https://ipi.media/ipi-report-finds-shadow-over-democracy-in-zambia/
freedom defenders to raise concerns directly with governments in the region. The UK should urge those states that currently do not engage with the Platform to do so in a constructive manner.

24. Engage with and seek the input of civil society organizations dedicated to the defence of media freedom and free expression, both those on the ground in the countries concerned and who know the local situation best as well as international organizations with significant experience in this area. The Safety of Journalists coalition of civil society organizations offers once such venue for this.

25. Dedicate sufficient resources to strengthening media freedom in countries where it is under threat, including supporting projects to monitor and combat attacks on the press and platforms that give independent journalists a voice.

26. Offer public support to journalists who are under threat. However, it is important to be mindful of ways in which certain forms of involvement by foreign governments can place journalists in greater danger. Therefore, it is essential to remain in contact with local actors to gauge possible consequences.

27. Government representatives and embassy officials should make a priority of attending the trials of journalists arrested for doing their job and should closely monitor legal procedures for violations of due process.

28. The IPI network will be glad to provide the inquiry with further information upon request, whether in oral or written form.

May 2019