1.0 Introduction

1.01 I am currently Professor of Political Journalism at the University of Sussex and previously held similar posts at City University and Goldsmiths, University of London. I have had wide experience as a broadcast journalist (specialising in politics) with BBC TV and Radio, ITN, Channel Four and Sky News. I have spent a great deal of time working with journalists in post-conflict situations, mainly, but not exclusively, in sub-Saharan Africa. However, my main qualification for making this submission is that for the past 10 years I have been the UK’s representative on the main UN body charged with monitoring and defending press freedom – the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) based at UNESCO. I was initially appointed to the governing body of the Council by the UK Government in 2008 and have been twice re-elected by European and North American member states. However, I am making this submission on a personal basis and am confining myself to the UK’s activities on the IPDC.

2.0 Summary Responses to the Committee’s Call for Submissions

2.0.1 The threats to global media freedom are evolving in a number of ways – fewer ‘war casualties’, more victims of terrorism and criminal gangs. The biennial report from the Director General of UNESCO gives full information: https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/dgreport

2.0.2 In the UN system the UK has a relatively high profile as a defender of journalists (although not as high as that enjoyed by a number of other European states, in particular Sweden and the Netherlands) mainly through the activities of UK NGOs working in this field and the UK’s work at the IPDC, which has included initiating an international conference at UNESCO on combatting fake news

2.0.3 The FCO has been generally supportive of this work but, until recently, has not been funding it – UNESCO comes under the remit of the Department for International Development (DfID)

2.0.4 The FCO needs to work with the UN and the NGOs’ - both those based in the UK and those locally based.

2.0.5 It is near-impossible to put any definitive ‘value’ on the UK’s work in this field, but in terms of ‘soft power’, particularly among journalists, a high profile in this area is invaluable.

3.0 The UK’s Role at the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)

3.1 The IPDC was established to mobilize the international community to promote media development in developing countries. However, as more and more journalists came to
demand safety training the Council has widened its focus to encompass reporter safety and the issue of impunity. In 2010, at the initiative of the UK delegation, the Council initiated a UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists. Apart from the training of journalists, human rights activists, judges and police the Plan assists countries in developing legislation and mechanisms that support media freedom and provide ongoing support for measures to promote the safety of journalists. It also seeks to strengthen the ability of governments to monitor attacks on journalists and to report them, and judicial follow-up, to UNESCO’s Director General. This enables the international community to have a fuller grasp of the overall situation and, in particular to be aware of those governments and regimes that are doing little, or nothing, to protect journalists (indeed, in some cases might be perpetrators themselves).

3.2 In the interests of brevity I will not go into any further details about the work of the IPDC (I understand that you have invited UNESCO to make a written submission) I will only highlight the work of the UK in this area.

3.3 The UK’s membership of UNESCO is funded by DfID but the work of the IPDC falls more into the area covered by the FCO’s Human Rights section with whom I have worked with over a number of years. I was nominated by the UK National Commission for UNESCO (the organisation is unique among UN body in that civil society representatives are fully involved in its deliberations) and appointed to the Council by the Government in 2008 as the ‘expert’ representative on the IPDC, working alongside the Permanent Delegation. Over the years as the Permanent Delegation has decreased in size I have, for most of the time, been the sole UK representative on the Council. I sit as a member of the grouping of Western European countries, the US and Canada. In 2012, at the expiry of my term the Group re-elected me as one of their representatives on the governing council and they did this again in 2016.

3.4 In that period, in consultation with the Delegation, and (presumably) the support of the FCO, we have achieved the following:

3.5 The initiating of a UN-wide Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity with UNESCO as the lead agency. The Director of UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector has publicly described me as “the father of the UN Plan of Action”

3.6 Increased transparency and accountability of those countries where journalists’ safety is imperilled. Whenever a journalist or media worker is reported to have been killed the DG of UNESCO asks the member state involved for a full report of the incident and an account of what steps are being taken to bring the perpetrator to justice. For many years the DG’s report named those countries that had responded to requests for further information but did not name those that had not. The UK argued that this allowing those counties to remain unnamed enabled them to escape international opprobrium. A UK initiative ensured that all countries, whether they responded or not, were identified in the DG’s Report. As a result, between 2015 and 2017 the rate of response from member states went up from 47% to 73%.
3.7 The IPDC is an extra budgetary agency of UNESCO which means that it is not funded through the normal grant-making process. Individual countries make donations to provide the Council with its funding. The UK has been noticeable for its failure to contribute to the running of the Council. Despite playing an active role in its deliberations and receiving funding from the Council for UK-based consultants, NGOs and academics.

3.8 However, this year the FCO, under its Magna Carta Fund, has granted £68,000 to an IPDC project in Afghanistan and Pakistan – “Building and Strengthening National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists in Afghanistan and Pakistan” The project will be implemented by UNESCO field officers in the respective countries but supported by a team of consultants based at the University of Sussex.

3.9 If the UK is to continue its high profile role on the IPDC it needs to consider providing year-on-year funding for the work of the Council – the lion’s share of which is to support small-scale media development programmes in the developing world. If this were to occur then the UK would be much better-placed to play a more active role in developing Council policy and perhaps enabling it to secure a place, either as Council Chair or Deputy Chair, or to gain membership of the Bureau of the IPDC, the body that is in charge of the day-to-day project decision-making.

3.10 Overall the UK should give higher priority to the work of UNESCO in the broad area of freedom of expression, this applies to the broader work of Communications and Information Sector rather than just that of the IPDC alone. It is the only UN body that has prime responsibility for work in area of freedom of expression and a firm UK commitment both to this specific area of work and to UNESCO in general would greatly enhance the reputation of the UK in this field of work.

3.11 It should also be noted that suggestions from successive Secretaries of State at DfID of withdrawing from UNESCO do not enhance the UK’s reputation, nor facilitate effective operation, either at the organisation itself or in the international community at large.

3.12 Similarly, the under-funding of the UK National Commission for UNESCO seriously limits the UK’s ability to play an influential role in the deliberations of the Council, in that much of the policy formation takes place in Paris in discussion among the permanent delegations, prior to Council meetings. Despite the best efforts of the UK Embassy in Paris to cover, the UK is unable to play a fuller role in this area because, along among major countries, it has no staff permanently based at the organisation’s headquarters.

3.13 In view of the 13.11 and 13.13 I would like to emphasise that this is a personal submission that has been drafted without reference to the UK National Commission, UK staff in Paris or anyone at UNESCO headquarters.

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