Written evidence from UNESCO (GMF0005)

1. Thank you for offering the opportunity to provide this contribution. UNESCO is a UN specialized agency that aims to promote “the free flow of ideas by word and image” (quote taken from the Constitution of UNESCO, adopted in London on 16 November 1945) with the strategic objective of “promoting freedom of expression, media development and access to information and knowledge” as detailed in UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy, 2014-2021 (page 26) and also in our current 38 C/5: Approved programme and budget (please refer to Programme V, Main Line of Action #1).

2. This contribution has been compiled by UNESCO’s Section on Freedom of Expression, within the Division for Freedom of Expression and Media Development in UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector.

• Threats to global media freedom and how they are evolving:

3. General Trends

As outlined in UNESCO’s latest World Trends in Freedom of and Expression Media Development GLOBAL REPORT 2017/2018, a profound transformation in the field of media freedom is underway - making progress in certain areas, but losing ground in others. Media freedom is limited particularly by several legal restrictions on the right to impart information and ideas, although progress is being made concerning legal guarantees to seek and receive information. With regards to media pluralism, the last five years have seen a considerable increase in the number of sources of information. However, the concentration of ownership of media companies and Internet services raises major concerns. The filtering effects of social media, which create “bubbles” in which people do not access the full truth or points of view they may consider “irritating” or “inappropriate”, is one example of the manipulation and dissemination of false information by propaganda mouthpieces. There has also been a standstill in the progress of gender equality in content and staffing. Trends show that media independence is weakening and the professional standards of journalism are being eroded by economic forces on the one hand and lack of recognition by political actors on the other. Media and Internet companies are increasingly aware of the need for self-regulation. Finally, with regards to the physical, psychological and digital safety of journalists, trends remain extremely alarming, although the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity offers hope. New mechanisms to monitor, protect and strengthen justice for crimes against journalists are gaining momentum. This momentum must be encouraged. (More information can be found in the full report available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261065)

4. Safety of journalists and the issue of impunity for crimes against journalists
Concerning the safety of journalists, the UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity issued in October 2018 (full version available at https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/dgreport) highlights that in 2016 to 2017, a journalist was killed every four days. One witness was silenced every four days. The total number of victims reached 182, with killings taking place in every region. These deaths shine a light on the extreme risks that can be faced by the individuals in this profession. Some of these fatal attacks occurred in countries previously unaffected by such extreme acts of violence against journalists. However, not all regions were affected to the same degree. In 2017, the largest number of killings took place in the Asia and the Pacific region (34% of all killings), while in 2016, the largest number of killings occurred in the Arab States (31%). An increase in the number of journalists killed outside of armed conflict zones can be noted in the last few years, with a majority of journalists (55%) in 2017 killed in countries not experiencing armed conflict. Many of these journalists were reporting on topics related to corruption, trafficking, and political wrongdoing. In line with observations of previous years, local journalists remain the vast majority among victims. A rise in the percentage of women journalists among those killed in 2017 (14%) marks the continuation of a trend that has become apparent over the last years. However, while the proportion of women among fatalities has risen, a clear majority of killed journalists are men. Impunity for these crimes remains a key challenge. Out of the 1010 killings recorded by UNESCO in the last 12 years, only 115 were followed by a judicial procedure that led to the conviction of one or multiple perpetrators. This means that 89% of cases remain unresolved. Impunity for crimes against journalists emboldens attackers and leads to self-censorship in the profession and among the public. The overall effect is to impede progress towards “public access to information and fundamental freedoms” which is an agreed target for the world in Sustainable Development Goal 16.10. The killing of journalists, the ultimate form of censorship. But it is just the tip of an iceberg of attacks against journalists, which range from non-lethal physical attacks, kidnapping, illegal detention, threats, harassment offline and online, to retaliations on family members.

For more information, please visit UNESCO’s new, interactive observatory of killed journalists: https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory as well as UNESCO’s latest newsletters on the implementation of the UN Plan (https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists/newsletter).

- The reputation and capabilities of the UK in promoting global media freedom and combatting disinformation:

- The role of the FCO in supporting those individuals and groups – both in the UK and abroad – that serve these goals:
5. The role of the UK by type of entity:

I) UK institutions:

- The UK Delegation to UNESCO is active during discussions concerning media freedom in our governing bodies (Executive Board, the General Conference) as well as in the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).
- The UK is a donor to UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector.
- The UK National Commission for UNESCO is working with British civil society organizations (CSOs) and carries out regular activities on media freedom, several of which are organised in collaboration with the UNESCO Secretariat (e.g. the last World Press Freedom Day celebration).

II) UK CSOs:

We have regular cooperation, collaboration, and coordination with UK-based media development institutions (e.g. BBC Media Action, Thomson Foundation, Media Diversity Institute, OSF’s Independent Journalism Programmes, Institute for War and Peace Reporting etc.) as well as with UK-based leading international NGOs on freedom of expression, such as Article 19, Frontline Club, International News Safety Institute (INSI), Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), Freedom Online Coalition’s (FOC) Secretariat, just to name a few. This cooperation is both on global advocacy (i.e. on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, both led by UNESCO) or on specific projects/activities in given region/countries.

III) UK academia:

UNESCO cooperates with UK academia on a regular basis (e.g. with the “UNESCO Chair in Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity” at the University of Sheffield) or ad-hoc on specific projects/publications (e.g. a study on “Countering Hate Speech online” by researchers from the University of Oxford’s Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy, and very recently on the handbook “Journalism, ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training” co-authored by the Oxford Internet Institute’s Julie Posetti).

IV) Ad-hoc collaborations on specific issues:

UNESCO also collaborates ad-hoc with associations concerning specific matters (e.g. most recently on the conference of the Worldwide Association of Women Journalists and Writers held in London on 6 to 9 November 2018, or participating in the conference “The Commonwealth and

• The priorities and recommendations for the FCO in this field:

6. Securing the safety of journalists worldwide and combating impunity for crimes committed against them requires a concerted effort of all stakeholders. This is also the approach of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Spearheaded by UNESCO, this plan aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. Its measures include, among other undertakings, the establishment of a coordinated inter-agency mechanism to handle issues related to the safety of journalists, assisting countries to develop legislation and mechanisms favorable to freedom of expression and information, and supporting their efforts to implement existing international rules and principles. To further reinforce prevention, the UN Plan of Action recommends working in cooperation with governments, media houses, professional associations and NGOs to conduct awareness raising campaigns on a wide range of issues such as existing international instruments and conventions, the growing dangers posed by emerging threats to media professionals, including non-state actors, as well as various existing practical guides on the safety of journalists.

More information can be found at https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists

• The impact of the UK's support for global media freedom abroad:

7. See section 5 of this contribution, The role of the UK by type of entity, as UK institutions and CSOs are supporting/partnering with UNESCO’s activities in the field of media freedom and the promotion of safety of journalists.

8. Most recently, UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector has also been discussing with FCO’s representatives about collaborating in view of:

i) The upcoming celebration of the World Press Freedom Day (3 May 2019) with the main conference in Addis Ababa and co-hosted by the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union under the theme Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation (more information can be found at https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldpressfreedomday)

ii) FCO’s 2019 Media Freedom Campaign and the conference in London on 10 to 11 July;

iii) The preparation of the upcoming 2 November commemoration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists
(more information can be found at https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/endimpunityday).

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