Introduction

1. Internews\(^1\) is an international charity whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard. Formed in 1982, Internews has worked in more than 120 countries with current offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North America. Internews’ European headquarters is in London.

2. In 2018, Internews provided a range of assistance to upwards of 10,000 individual journalists and institutional support to more than 1,000 media organisations in 60 countries. Internews’ partners operate in a wide range of contexts, from more open democracies with emerging economies, to those with a more authoritarian approach to media freedom.

3. Internews has been actively engaged with officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in a series of consultation meetings to advise on the approach to the Foreign Secretary’s Media Freedom campaign since December 2018. We welcome this opportunity to draw upon our extensive international experience to expand upon the wider challenges to media freedom, and to reinforce a number of the recommendations already made to the FCO through on-going consultation.

Executive Summary

4. Internews makes the following recommendations to this inquiry:

   a. The balance of resources between DFID and the FCO to support media freedom, the distinct mandate of each department, and the coherency of current methodologies should be reviewed.
   b. The FCO should ensure the longevity of the current campaign by expediting the process of identifying future programme funding priorities and the resources to support them.
   c. The FCO should ensure Value for Money in its approach to media freedom by directing resources at clearly identified themes or mechanisms that are currently underserved by other international donors.
   d. The FCO could further leverage its convening power to ensure ongoing donor coordination around support to media freedom and, furthermore, engagement with the private sector and other relevant bodies.

The threats to global media freedom and how they are evolving

5. Whilst figures from the various press monitoring organisations vary slightly for last year; there is general consensus that the number of fatal incidents and detentions continues to increase with every set of annual data. Reporters Without Borders, which compiles the annual press freedom index, puts the numbers of deaths at 80 last year, with more than 400 journalists otherwise in detention.\(^2\)

6. The most egregious of these cases are part of a concerning wider trend of intimidation and harassment for journalists going about their business worldwide. In Serbia for example, the Independent Journalists’ Association handled double the number of such incidents in 2018 compared to 2017.\(^3\)

7. As will be further explored below, the interrelated global challenges to the economic model for journalism are further eroding the enabling environment for media freedom and demand equal attention.

---

\(^1\) www.internews.org
\(^3\) http://saenpm.org/serbia-balkans-black-champion-journalists-safety/
The reputation and capabilities of the UK in promoting global media freedom, and combating disinformation

8. For the scope of this inquiry, it is necessary to consider the varying contributions to global media freedom (and media development) made to date by the (FCO) together with the Department for International Development (DFID).

9. In recent years, the most explicit support to media freedom provided by the FCO has been via the Human Rights and Democracy (briefly the Magna Carta) Fund. Total funding through this instrument tends to be in the low tens of millions of pounds each year which in turn is split across a broad variety of, equally deserving, sub-themes ranging from the Death Penalty, Post-Holocaust Issues, Freedom of Religion, Modern Slavery, LGBTI Rights, Democracy and Civil Society; the latter of which includes Freedom of Expression as a further subordinate theme. As a consequence, direct financial support to initiatives that directly support media freedom have played a relatively minor theme in wider FCO priorities and spending to date.4

10. Nevertheless, with the advocacy of embassies and posts, organisations such as Internews have benefitted from discrete funding to deliver targeted efforts such as a 2-year £211,000 project with national partners in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to increase local media skills and draft a new ‘Press and Publications’ law.

11. The committee will be aware that the former Foreign Secretary, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, launched a £1m FCO fund to support press freedom in late 2017. It was unclear at the time if this was an additional contribution to the existing Human Rights and Democracy Funding and there remains little publicly available information on how this fund was, or is, to be spent. In any scenario, this was still a relatively modest contribution compared to the overall fund, DFID budgets for similar work or the contributions of other international donors.5

12. As the largest departmental consumer of the government’s Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), 61% in 2017/18, the FCO has used such funds to commission larger international projects where some form of media component is present, for example in governance programming. However, such work more often takes the form of general technical assistance to media institutions, as opposed to rights-based media freedom activity. In some cases, the CSSF has been a vehicle through which to combat disinformation; there is a risk when such work is perceived through the lens of stability and national security that the resulting interventions lean towards methodologies of strategic communications or counter-propaganda. Whilst such efforts may seem highly tactical in the short-term, Internews would contend that they are methodologically at odds with the current emphasis of the Defend Media Freedom campaign; for media freedom to genuinely flourish in the countries where it is most constrained, then the media environment in such countries must be allowed to develop its own independent capacity and sustainability, free from any external editorial influence.

13. To date, DFID has provided far more explicit funding for the development of public interest media. Perhaps most notably through a £90m, 5-year ‘global grant’ to the BBC’s international charity, BBC Media Action. DFID has also supported the role of free and professional media through other thematic programmes, such as the ‘BRACED’ fund which supported initiatives to increase resilience to climate extremes and disasters. More recently, DFID has committed £12m to ‘Open Societies’ programmes through the UK Aid Connect mechanism and, at the time of writing, has a centrally managed open call for proposals for project proposals of up to £12m with an explicit ‘Protecting Media Freedom’ programme objective.

14. Taken together, the above practical and financial contributions to media development and media freedom are internationally significant and place the UK alongside other significant donors to this

field such as the United States, EU multilateral funds and various Scandinavian governments. However, it might be argued that the approach to date has been somewhat fragmented between government departments, different funding instruments with highly varied methodologies, budget ceilings and varying levels of political interest.

15. The UK’s reputation in this arena is clearly not defined by funding alone; with opportunities to highlight media freedom issues also presenting themselves through international diplomacy. Internews is given to understand that as a result of the current FCO campaign, more strident diplomatic representations will be made to other governments with a questionable track record on media freedom.

16. To take a rounded view of the UK’s reputation on this issue, the committee may wish to consider more detailed evidence from freedom of expression advocacy groups who have publicly expressed concern around potential implications for domestic media freedom of recent regulatory proposals. Specifically: recommendations of the Cairncross Review into high quality journalism, the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Select Committee’s final report into Fake News and Disinformation and, most recently, the government’s Online Harms White Paper. All contain a range of proposals for greater oversight, editorial arbitration or entirely new regulatory vehicles for online media and social media companies. There is a degree of inconsistency in each set of proposals which is an issue worthy of appropriate scrutiny. However, for the scope of this inquiry, due consideration should also be given to the downstream impact of more restrictive regulation on the UK’s own media freedom rankings and, thus, the future of the UK’s reputation on media freedom issues globally.

17. **Recommendation:** The balance of resources between DFID and the FCO to support media freedom, the distinct mandate of each department, and the coherency of current methodologies should be reviewed.

The role of the FCO in supporting those individuals and groups – both in the UK and abroad – that serve these goals

18. Given the above, it may reasonably be inferred that DFID, rather than the FCO, has a more robust record in in supporting media freedom and media development at scale; certainly in the last decade. Yet despite more modest explicit funds for media freedom the FCO, given its differing mandate, has been more able to support and highlight the international human rights principles at the heart of media freedom; whereas DFID might be more likely to support media development in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, mostly commonly goal 16.10, but also as an enabler to other SDG outcomes.

19. Therefore, the new Defend Media Freedom campaign represents an opportunity to significantly amplify the FCO’s rights-based work in this arena to date.

20. Plans for an international media freedom conference in July are particularly welcome and it is evident that the majority of planning and consultation around the new campaign is being invested in the conference at this point in time. For the conference to be credible, it is essential that the event avoids duplicating other international gatherings in this field, especially UNESCO’s annual World Press Freedom Day celebrations in May. There is also an opportunity to ensure post-conference traction through coordination with a follow-on seminar planned by the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in September.

21. The process of consultation with the FCO has offered less clarity on how the campaign’s support to media freedom will manifest itself in the longer-term after the conference. Whilst it is being described as a 5-year initiative, there is relatively scant detail on the anticipated next steps, beyond plans for on-going diplomatic representations on media freedom issues and for Canada to host a similar conference next year.

22. Importantly, there has not, to date, been any discernible increase in funding for media freedom related projects through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund or other FCO instruments. Internews understands that consideration may be given to additional support in the 2020/2021
budget but that this is yet to be confirmed or fully designed. There is a perceivable risk, therefore, that the impact of the media freedom campaign would be limited if it is not accompanied by demonstrable practical action at an international level. As above, numerous other international donors are already making significant contributions to this field and have established authority on the subject. The campaign presents an important opportunity for the FCO to find complementary value through additional contributions to the field, for which possible approaches and priority themes are explored further below; the timeliness of confirming such support will be an important measure for the long-term impact of the campaign.

23. **Recommendation:** The FCO should ensure the longevity of the current campaign by expediting the process of identifying future programme funding priorities and the resources to support them.

The best priorities and approaches for the FCO in this field and the impact of the UK's support for global media freedom abroad

24. The media freedom campaign provides two distinct opportunities for the FCO to make a constructive impact; by using the convening power of the international conference to secure political commitments on the protection of media freedom (which would be distinct from the UNESCO World Press Freedom celebrations in May), and in determining specific areas of focus for future programme funding commitments.

25. Through the process of consultation with the FCO, Internews was asked to provide suggestions for the commitments that might be sought at the conference. The following are the recommendations already submitted to the FCO on this point:

a. **All Governments:**
   i. Step up efforts to end impunity; constant global political attacks on the press give further license to already repressive states to do the same and, in turn, water down efforts on impunity. The conference should be used to reset the international tone on this and reassert existing UN declarations, etc.
   ii. If governments recommit to the principles of press freedom, that should be accompanied by a commitment to international cooperation on the issue.
   iii. From Internews’ perspective, that means protecting the right for unfettered access for international assistance organisations to provide support and resources to journalists in countries where that support is consistent with international human rights law and principles. It can often be the case that governments treat basic safety awareness training and support as a reason to increase surveillance on a subject.
   iv. We advocate some form of pledge to end the use of blanket internet shutdowns in response to civil unrest or similar; e.g. Cameroon, Zimbabwe most recently.

b. **Donor governments:**
   i. More emergency funds/rapid deployment assistance for journalists in distress and/or country programmes where there is sudden backsliding.
   ii. Greater understanding of the real costs of supporting journalists in high-risk environments; e.g. reducing the use of small-grants in difficult environments where it becomes impossible to cover the necessary security and risk management costs.

26. Internews understands and welcomes that all such recommendations are being given due consideration. Internews has consistently highlighted the need for the broadest possible understanding of the threats to media freedom to inform future priorities for the FCO. Whilst the most egregious affronts to media freedom rightly draw the most international attention, they are a smaller component in a landscape of threats affecting tens of thousands of journalists globally.

27. Meaningful priorities and approaches the FCO can seek are to address specific areas of concern that are currently less addressed by other international donors. Informed, well-resourced programming in this area will be more likely to achieve lasting impact than advocacy and diplomacy alone.
28. Internews has sought to highlight two further priority areas through the process of consultation with the FCO:

a. **Media Sustainability:** the troubling global landscape for media freedom is made all the worse by the dramatic decline in the direct advertising-based revenue model for independent media over the last decade. Most data points to online advertising as the only growth market in recent years; with a significant global majority share of that market being consumed by online search and social media firms⁶. As direct financing for public interest journalism declines, so does the resilience of journalistic independence and/or the enabling environment for journalist safety and protection. There are signs that DFID is becoming one of the first international donors to explicitly direct support to new economic models to ensure the survival of public interest journalism; such investment could be further enhanced with complementary FCO programming for the wider enabling environment.

b. **Digital Safety and Security:** a foreground to many of the physical security risks posed to journalists lie in their vulnerabilities online. Compromised digital security not only affects the individual journalist, but also their contacts and the public interest content they are seeking to disseminate. Whilst the FCO has signalled some intent to focus the media freedom campaign on issues of safety and protection, it is essential that this has a significant, technically adroit digital component. This must be accompanied by an understanding that different settings for media freedom, or the lack of it, demand highly contextualised responses to digital threats. Physical threats to journalist safety inevitably capture the most attention and international condemnation; but they remain a minority of cases.

29. For a broader, multilateral understanding of the opportunities for the FCO to add value to the sector through future programming, it is highly advisable to consult the recent analysis produced by the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), ‘Confronting the Crisis in Independent Media: A Role for International Assistance’⁷. This contemporaneous research is informed by a broad understanding of existing global donor investments and specifically calls for increased political will for media support, strengthened approaches to international cooperation on media development and a move to a better-coordinated, demand-driven approach.

30. FCO officials were party to a conference convened by CIMA and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) under the auspices of the OECD GovNet earlier this year at which CIMA’s preliminary findings were extensively discussed. The gathering, of at least 20 donor agencies and a range of the larger implementing organisations such as Internews was the first of its kind for many years and a welcome aid to the international cooperation that CIMA identifies as being necessary. The FCO should be encouraged to champion more regular, at least annual, conveenings of this kind and, furthermore, could make a meaningful impact by supporting such work practically and financially.

31. There is far more limited coordination between international donors and civil society groups with an interest in media freedom than, for example, social media companies, international news media brands or other private media organisations. Nevertheless, social media companies in particular are increasing their footprint as donors in this field, as expectations of their corporate social responsibility back to the news media environment they have disrupted, grows. The Google News Initiative supports a wide variety of international projects whilst Facebook has substantially increased its funding to support local news projects this year, including in the UK. Again, the FCO could use its convening power to encourage greater coordination and collaboration between governments and private sector organisations with a stake in global media freedom. Anecdotal evidence suggests the private sector will press ahead with its own initiatives, irrespective of government engagement, with the potential to create further disruption; positive and negative. This concern is one of the driving forces behind Internews’ co-creation of the United for News⁸ coalition,

---

in partnership with the World Economic Forum; one of few truly multi-sectoral coalitions addressing media sustainability issues.

32. Recommendation: The FCO should ensure Value for Money in its approach to media freedom by directing resources at clearly identified themes or mechanisms that are currently underserved by other international donors.

33. Recommendation: The FCO could further leverage its convening power to ensure ongoing donor coordination around support to media freedom and, furthermore, engagement with the private sector and other relevant bodies.

April 2019