

## **STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTRIES LISTED BELOW DELIVERED ON INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS 2022**

This statement is on behalf of the following Countries; Albania, Andorra, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Republic of North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United States, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Today we recognise the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, a day which emphasises the importance of the implementation of definite measures countering the present culture of impunity. Impunity not only facilitates further crimes against journalists and other media workers, but has the potential to damage whole societies through its impact on media freedom and access to information. Without freedom of expression and information, there can be no democracy or lasting peace. In 2020, UNESCO's Director General Audrey Azoulay recognised that countering impunity requires a 'concerted effort of all stakeholders'.

As we work today to counter impunity across the globe, it is essential that we do not forget the impact of Russia's brutal war of aggression on journalists and other media workers in Ukraine.

Since February 2022, Russia's brutal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine has directly endangered hundreds of journalists. At least ten journalists and media workers have been killed as the result of Russia's aggression. These actions call into question Russia's compliance with Article 79 of Additional Protocol 1 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and run directly counter to UNESCO's work and principles. Whilst Russia's actions have been condemned by at least 46 international organisations, to date, no individual or group has been held responsible.

Furthermore, Russia's attempted illegal annexation of Crimea has had concerning consequences. UNESCO's direct monitoring activities on Crimea from 2019-2021 found that temporary Russian occupation had '*deeply affected the safety of journalists*' since it began in 2014. Journalists in Crimea, particularly those who belong to the Crimean Tatar ethnic group, face harassment, unjust arrest, maltreatment, and imprisonment based on false charges. Journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko, for example, who was reportedly tortured to extract a false confession, is now serving a six-year prison sentence on spurious charges. These incidences have been on the rise since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Inside Russia, Putin's government has further tightened its already extensive control over Russia's media environment since launching its full-scale invasion in February. Authorities have detained dozens of journalists who were reporting on anti-war protests and brought charges against or issued military summonses to some of them. Journalist and pro-democracy activist Vladimir Kara-Murza was detained in April and

faces the prospect of decades in prison on politically motivated charges stemming in part from his anti-war speech.

We cannot remain silent as journalists and media workers are harassed and killed. We cannot allow UNESCO member states to act in blatant violation of international law with impunity.

In the midst of Russia's war of choice, we commend the actions of UNESCO and many of its members in support of journalists in Ukraine, and look forward to further action to protect journalists' and media workers' safety and freedom all over the world. Above all, we reiterate our calls for Russia to withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine beyond its internationally recognised borders, respect international law and do its utmost to protect civilians, including journalists, technicians, fixers, and other media professionals in war zones.