

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The FCO and global media freedom, HC 1920](#)

Tuesday 21 May 2019

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Foreign Affairs Committee Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Stephen Gethins; Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Catherine West.

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Member present: Jo Stevens.

Questions 41-93

Witnesses

[I](#): Rosie Parkyn, Director of Programmes, Internews, Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists, and Scott Griffen, Deputy Director, International Press Institute.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Internews](#)

[National Union of Journalists and International Federation of Journalists](#)

[International Press Institute](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rosie Parkyn, Michelle Stanistreet and Scott Griffen.

Q41 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and thank you all for coming. Perhaps I can ask you all to introduce yourselves briefly.

Scott Griffen: Good afternoon. My name is Scott Griffen and I am deputy director of the International Press Institute, which is a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists that was founded in 1950 to protect and defend media freedom. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Rosie Parkyn: My name is Rosie Parkyn, and I am the director of programmes for Internews. We are an international non-governmental organisation that has been supporting journalists, information providers and civil society activists since 1982. We are headquartered in London, Paris and Washington.

Michelle Stanistreet: My name is Michelle Stanistreet. I am the general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, which is the trade union for journalists across the UK and Ireland.

Q42 **Chair:** I thank all three of you for coming. It is extremely good to see you here. What are the most significant threats facing journalists today? Perhaps I can start with you, Mr Griffen.

Scott Griffen: Let me emphasise that we see this moment as one of increasing threats to media freedom, and we fear that many of the gains of the past few decades are in danger of being reversed. This really is a critical moment, and those threats are made worse by the lack of costs for states and individuals who are guilty of violating media freedom, including some of the most brazen attacks that we have seen, such as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the consulate in Turkey. Some of the key threats that we see include physical attacks on journalists and impunity for those who commit them. IPI keeps track of the number of journalist killings around the world each year, and according to our statistics, between May 2018 and May 2019, 55 journalists lost their lives in connection with their work. In the majority of such cases, the perpetrators—to say nothing of the masterminds—are not held to account, which perpetuates a cycle of violence.

In recent years, attacks on journalists have taken place in countries where that was not previously the case. For example, in Malta there was the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia, and in Slovakia that of Ján Kuciak. It is essential that we stop the cycle of violence before it keeps going, as it is very difficult to break it once it has started. Physical attacks on journalists is one big area. Another is the arbitrary jailing of journalists. As you may



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know, 140 journalists are currently sitting behind bars in Turkey, most of them charged with violations of Turkey's anti-terror law, which is being applied in an arbitrary fashion. There are a lot of victims of that application of the law, including secular journalists from the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, Kurdish journalists, leftish journalists—across the spectrum.

We see that in other countries as well. For example, in Egypt, Mahmoud Hussein is an al-Jazeera correspondent who has been jailed since December 2016 without official charges. Again, there is an arbitrary application of the law and a lack of due process for journalists who are its victims. A number of new laws are stifling critical media. Those include anti-terror laws, national security laws, and defamation laws that do not meet international standards.

There is a second area that I want to emphasise. Those three areas that I mentioned are what we consider more typical or traditional attacks on the press—censorship—but we also see an area of attacks on media freedom which have more to do with undermining the role of the press in society itself, and which are often done in a less visible way. One of these is smear campaigns against the media, which are rhetorical and verbal attacks on individual journalists and media outlets. They are smeared as enemies of the state, enemies of the nation, traitors. We see that this type of rhetoric has the effect of making these targets more vulnerable to attacks as well as blunting the impact of the media's work more broadly—so pulling the rug out from under the watchdog role that the media should be playing: making this less effective, in other words.

We also see the growing phenomenon of online harassment, which is connected to smear campaigns. Journalists are more and more often the victims of direct threats, indirect threats, harassment and stalking online, which can have a major impact on their personal and professional lives. Finally, one last area I would like to mention is tactics that seek to broadly undermine the economic position of media outlets and the market role that they have, and in this way again undermine the ability of the media to hold power to account and blunt the impact of media investigations.

I just want to say as a last thing about these sorts of developments that undermine the role of the media that they are not just structural questions. It is not just a question of the fact that social media provides platforms for more aggressive types of speech, or the fact that media ownership itself is an issue. These are all things which in many cases are directed by states. They are orchestrated. They are planned. They are thought-through campaigns to undermine the role of independent media.

Q43 Chair: Thank you very much for that very complete answer. May I ask Ms Parkyn and Ms Stanistreet? Don't feel the need to repeat anything that Mr Griffen said. Are there areas of threats to media freedom that tend to be overlooked by international campaigns?

Rosie Parkyn: A very brief point: that was extremely comprehensive so, yes, I will not re-rehearse it. I would just say that Scott spoke in the broadest terms about what the issue is, but also highlighted some of the



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most high-profile cases. I think what we would really like to stress is that thousands of journalists are working under these conditions of constant harassment and threat who we are not hearing about at all. That harassment is taking place offline and online, in the most local circumstances. We are working with journalists, for example, who are threatened by the police and asked to dig their own graves. We will never hear about that kind of stuff but we have to reflect on the number of investigations and stories that just go untold because this sense of pervasive threat is there and leads to a kind of self-censorship whereby fewer and fewer journalists are willing to step forward and play their role.

Michelle Stanistreet: I completely agree. Safety is a massive priority, and a massive threat facing journalists around the world. It is easy sometimes to get lost in the statistics. Obviously the death of every single journalist isn't just a personal tragedy for them and their family and colleagues; it is designed, often, to send a broader message to the rest of the journalistic community. I think it is important when looking at those statistics on killings to understand that actually three quarters of those are not journalists who have been a casualty of a suicide bomb or subjected to crossfire in a hostile environment. They are very targeted, deliberate murders—three quarters of all the killings of journalists. It is about their work. That is often not just in conflict zones. They are journalists who are reporting on domestic issues in their home country.

For us, one other thing that often gets overlooked is the consequences of that. We look at the statistics and the incidence. They trouble anybody that cares about journalism, but in nearly nine out of 10 of those cases the killers of those journalists get away scot-free. There are no consequences. It is a pretty safe pastime, targeting and killing journalists, globally, at the moment. You are pretty much clear that you can get away with it. It is not just necessarily terrorist groups or criminal gangs. There are public officials who are involved in those kinds of conspiracies. I think that is the area that we would really like more robust intervention to take place.

Q44 **Chair:** Can I jump straight on to that and ask has the FCO consulted journalists abroad when it has been shaping its current media freedom campaign? I ask that because our Committee's job is to hold the Foreign Office to account, not anybody else.

Michelle Stanistreet: From the perspective of the NUJ, there has been precious little meaningful engagement and consultation. We are part of the International Federation of Journalists, which represents more than 600,000 journalists around the world and has 160 affiliates in 150 different countries; they have not had that meaningful consultation or engagement either, which I think is a huge own goal. If there is one thing that should happen out of this process, it is a level of engagement with organisations at the grassroots, who genuinely represent journalists and their interests, and who know fine well the day to day challenges that they face all the time. That is the kind of information that should be flowing through the work of the Foreign Office.

Q45 **Ann Clwyd:** Mr Griffen, you mentioned the horrifying case of Mr



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Khashoggi. What would you as journalists expect to have happened as a result of such a high profile incident? What would you expect to happen? Are you happy with the events that have followed?

Scott Griffen: Well no, I don't think that anyone can be satisfied with what has happened in terms of holding Saudi Arabia accountable for what happened. I think that we would have expected a more robust response in terms of making sure that Saudi Arabia essentially feels some consequences for what has happened; there is a lack of a complete and international investigation, and a lack of participation by Saudi Arabia in that investigation.

It is, of course, up to Governments to decide for themselves what measures to take. This is a broader conversation, but, for example, arms sales are continuing to Saudi Arabia from Governments. Are sanctions being considered for those individuals who are alleged to have played some role in the assassination of Khashoggi? The concern is that you see the very brazen and bold attack and murder of a journalist that took place in front of a global audience—it was barely veiled—and that there has not been enough of an attempt to hold the state accountable. That is only going to embolden future attempts. It is not about saying, "Don't do this in the future"; it is about saying, "You need to be held accountable for what happened, now", in order to prevent these types of incident from happening in the future.

Michelle Stanistreet: I completely agree. The fact that impunity levels are so high speaks of the lack of political will that there has been internationally, to tackle that crisis in journalism. Anyone who cares about media freedom would care about journalists being able to do their work safely and without those threats or reprisals, however bold. The fact that that happened with the eyes of the world upon it and there have been precious few consequences, also speaks volumes.

If the UK Government is going to lead in this area, it needs to act and be seen to act. Governments can assert political will on this issue by holding such countries to account for their actions, in a variety of different ways, whether through their arms trade, through normal business relations or through other political means. Having a business-as-usual approach to dealing with these offenders sends all the message that is necessary to other states about the fact that the international community doesn't care enough.

Q46 **Stephen Gethins:** Good afternoon. The Foreign Secretary announced that global media freedom was going to be one of his priorities when he got the job. I am wondering if you have noticed any difference between the Foreign Office and its activities before he took job and since he took the job?

Rosie Parkyn: We are delighted that this commitment has been made. Those of us within the community who care deeply about these issues were very pleased. We are keen to see the Foreign Office not only apply more diplomatic pressure, but engage the British public in the issues,



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which might seem esoteric, but are deeply important to the future of the countries in which the Foreign Office operates as well as to Britain—these issues touch our shores, too.

The consultation for this campaign has been broad in scope and comprehensive, and involved a large number of organisations. We are still keen to understand how the Foreign Office will deliver some longevity to the campaign. We are focused on the event in July, which is still taking shape. We think that will be a great opportunity to draw attention to these issues, and demonstrate what good media law looks like and discuss the implementation of media law in various parts, as well as the lack of implementation or poor implementation.

We would also like to see more discussion about the programmatic and funding implications of the campaign. We know that embassies are on notice to recognise that this is a key priority. The embassies that I have dealt with over the years have tended to take this issue seriously. There are lots of ideas about how we can put more weight behind these issues programmatically and in terms of funding. We are yet to see whether that will bear fruit.

Scott Griffen: Can I just add a small point to that? I cannot comment on what happened before, but I can share the concerns that our members have expressed about the campaign and what they hope it will generate. The first aspect is sustainability. Will this be a short campaign driven by one person's interest or a long-term push by the UK Government to stand up for press freedom around the globe? We hope for the latter, but the fear is that this could disappear as quickly as it came.

There is still some scepticism about how public the FCO will be about standing up for media freedom, particularly in difficult situations, for example in Turkey. Our members in Turkey have been surprised or disappointed by the lack of calling Turkey out in public about its media freedom record. We hope that back-door diplomacy is going on, but many are looking for a stronger public stance as well, to ensure that these issues are not hidden behind doors and brought to light. Those are some of the things our members are concerned about and things they hope to see.

Michelle Stanistreet: From the perspective of the NUJ and our sister unions around the world, there is a degree of cynicism about the outcome from this initiative. In the past, there have been other initiatives. In 2017, £1 million funding was announced, but we do not know what really happened. There may well have been successful and effective projects, but we do not know about them. There is a lack of transparency and information. Beyond garnering a few headlines at the time, there seems to be no meaningful follow through.

If this is not happening with a strategy designed to ensure its sustainability, and the greatest participation of journalists and their organisations, it is doomed to failure from the start. There have been initiatives in the past, for example after the Arab spring. There were lots of things with good intentions, but if they are not constructed in a



transparent way with clear strategic objectives and if they do not engage the people who matter, it is hard to see that the impact at a high level will be significant, and worth all the fuss and attention.

- Q47 **Stephen Gethins:** What you are all saying about sustainability is interesting, because this is badged for 2019. What would the Foreign Office need to do to reassure you about the sustainability of this campaign and that this is a priority beyond 2019? What would you like to see? Could you reflect on some of the evidence about the way the Foreign Office has reacted to attacks on journalists and, as already referenced, the murder of Jamal Khashoggi? Mr Griffen, you reference Turkey as well. It would be interesting to hear what you would like to see and what the evidence is telling you at the moment, including good and bad examples. If there are any good examples you can pick out, they are welcome.

Scott Griffen: We would like to see, on the one hand, some kind of detailed strategy for how this campaign will continue beyond this year, if that is the plan, which is what we hope. A one-year campaign on media freedom will not be able to address the scope of this problem, which is very broad. It is not just something that can be dealt with over a few months, with things back on the right track towards a legal system that respects the rights of journalists, for example. It is a long-term project. We need some kind of signal that this is not just a one-year project.

When it comes to the more concrete, again what is largely missing is the effort to hold states accountable for their actions. We still see a lot of rhetoric about, for example, tackling impunity or addressing illiberal media frameworks, for example in Hungary which, while part of the European Union, has built up a pro-Government media machine and encircled the remaining independent media. Are we going to see any real pressure on states like that to deliver? We know that it is very easy for Governments to sign up to resolutions, to endorse campaigns like this and to make a lot of noise about what they are going to do, but we really want to see some concrete results of that.

The UK is still a very influential player, as the submissions from our members have borne out, and is respected as having a Government that values press freedom and freedom of expression, yet in many cases—Khashoggi is just one; you can also look to Malta. How is it possible that we are still in this situation one and a half years later? The country has strong cultural, political and economic links with the UK, yet there has been no process. Is someone putting pressure on the Maltese Government to solve the murder? We do not see any concrete action being taken there, or at least any impact. We are still waiting.

We have seen some good rhetoric. I was in Addis Ababa earlier this month and heard the Foreign Secretary give a speech, which I thought was good; he addressed all the right issues. However, it is about more than just speaking about the issues. We have to be on the ground and putting pressure where it is needed. It is still a waiting game in that sense. Will we actually see results and not just a list of priorities?

Rosie Parkyn: We must absolutely see some commitments on ending impunity. I hope that will be a really big focus for July. On the longevity, we also want greater co-ordination with DfID, for example, which has been funding work in this area for some time and has significant expertise.

We should also look beyond diplomatic representation and at such issues as how we better equip the journalists across the world who we know are under the greatest threat to be safer and to secure themselves both physically and in the digital environments that they increasingly inhabit. We also want to look at how to better equip them to understand the new laws that are coming into place and having an impact on the way they do their business, and at the threats they are under. There is also the question of business sustainability: something that is making this situation even more distressing is the fact of failing business models across the world. It is increasingly difficult for media outlets to survive, and therefore much easier for them to be suppressed.

These are issues associated with all this that need to be considered and thought about as part of the strategy. We have not yet seen evidence that, if there is a strategy, it is looking beyond questions of political commitments at the event in July. A lot more could be done, including on co-ordination with other donors working in this space, such as the Scandinavians and the US Government, to understand what a strategy that involves them in some way might look like. That would definitely have more impact.

Michelle Stanistreet: If the strategy is to be formulated at that event in July and flow from there, it is critical that the people who are there are not just the employers or NGOs working in the field of press freedom. It is really important that journalists and their organisations are represented and have a voice at that, because there are lots of broader issues that get ignored when we are looking at the challenges facing journalists.

IF the FCO were going to have a focus, they could take their pick from lots of countries—Yemen, Turkey, Mexico, and India and Pakistan, where there has been a real spike in attacks and threats against journalists, particularly in the online realm aimed at women. There are countries that could form a strategic focus in that way. If you take Yemen at the moment, there are more than 2,000 journalists in the public sector who have not been paid for more than two years, so they and their families are totally destitute.

The Government could be doing such a lot more to address some of those practical, immediate and pressing concerns, especially in a climate where the precarity of journalists and media outlets in parts of the world is a significant issue in the weakening of press freedom. If you have people who are reliant on money from brown envelopes, or who are open to corruption, that is not the environment in which decent journalism in the public interest can flourish.

There are lots of different facets to the challenges that exist, which really need the input of those on the ground who can broaden the strategy and



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enrich it in a way that makes it meaningful. How that is done is something that should be transparently communicated and that can be benchmarked with some metrics, so that we can all monitor how it is going and find ways to fine tune that strategy as we go along. Getting it right in July is really important. We have not been invited to participate. Lots of our sister unions around the world have not. That would be a really missed opportunity if that was not addressed.

- Q48 **Catherine West:** Does the panel have a view on the sorts of principles that might determine the treatment of Mr Assange as a publisher/journalist?

Michelle Stanistreet: The NUJ's policy, and that of our sister union in Australia, of which he is a member, is that the terms of the extradition to America are completely objectionable and are a threat to press freedom internationally. That is one issue among many—

- Q49 **Chair:** What about his extradition to Sweden?

Michelle Stanistreet: If that happens in a way that means there are guarantees about any onward extradition to the States, that is something that can be addressed—

- Q50 **Chair:** We are not used to asking the Swedes, those famous human rights violators, for guarantees.

Michelle Stanistreet: They are the concerns that lots of people have, but there are many other issues about the way in which the UK is treating journalists—obviously, he is a whistleblower—that need to be addressed. We are putting ourselves on a platform of addressing the rest of the world and looking at how to improve domestic environments and legislation for journalists when, actually, we have an awful lot of laws here that are compromising the ability of journalists to do their jobs effectively and properly, in a way that protects their sources—our surveillance laws and the abuses from the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. There are lots of issues here that warrant a lot of scrutiny and attention, which are not being got right from the perspective of journalists right now.

- Q51 **Chair:** That may be so, but we are overseeing the Foreign Office, rather than any other Government Department, so forgive me if we focus on its work.

Catherine West: Sometimes in Committee it is easy to think about other places and not reflect on our own.

Michelle Stanistreet: There is a connection. Our standing in the world, when we are talking about these issues, is informed by how we treat journalists and journalism at home as well. I think it is relevant.

- Q52 **Ian Murray:** You have all explained quite a wide array of things that the UK should be doing, but a very small pot of money has been announced; hopefully some more may be on the way. What is the best way to allocate and use the funding that is available, and what are the areas that the UK should be allocating priority and more funding to?



Rosie Parkyn: From our perspective, Internews is seeing some great results in two areas that absolutely fold into the media's ability to act independently, which are financial sustainability and physical and digital security. As we know, journalists across the world are increasingly working online. That is the way they engage with audiences. At one point, that was considered to be fantastically liberating and was a great means of evading censorship. We now see the numerous ways that journalists are coming under attack when conducting their business, developing stories and putting stuff online. I will not say that this is an easy issue to solve, but there are methodologies and tactics out there that we can deploy on a much greater scale than we currently do.

At the moment there is a gap in the ability of a journalist at the most grassroots level to access some of the technologies that are available to keep them safe, and to have those technologies adapted for the way they use them for their businesses. Historically, it has been the practice to give people tools to use but not to think about their workflow and the way they develop stories. There is a possibility of mapping digital security stuff on to people's existing workflows. There is lots of potential there, and much more potential to engage with cyber-security companies to ensure that their products reflect the current threats faced by journalists, which change all the time. Those cyber-security companies themselves do not necessarily have access to information about those threats, and there is a massive opportunity to build a cadre of digital security specialists across the world who can ensure that the communities, journalists and media outlets with which they work can keep themselves secure. We think that would be deeply helpful, eminently doable and eminently scalable—that is kind of happening at the moment.

We have started to see some exciting interest around media sustainability in DfID. This year it announced a small amount of funding to look at developing and trialling new models of production and business sustainability, designed specifically to work and reach those media individuals and outlets that work in the hardest-to-reach places, that are most censored and most challenged, and where freedom of information is most squeezed. There is a great opportunity to consider different ways of ensuring that those media outlets can make money and continue to produce output as media business models fall away elsewhere.

Those are two exciting and interesting opportunities, and without overplaying DfID's role in all this, it is experimenting with some great stuff. It is also bringing different organisations together, including media organisations and those who work with freedom of expression legislation and civil society actors, to consider how we might resist closing space in a particular context. Lots of interesting, exciting and potentially extremely impactful programmatic stuff is happening, and we would like the Foreign Office to take more notice of that, and to consider scaling up and scaling out, or at least pulling that into the strategy around media freedom.

Q53 Ian Murray: Do you have any indication of what level of support that requires? Is it about co-ordination, or is it about hard cash in this case?

Rosie Parkyn: I would say a combination of both. Co-ordination is absolutely needed—that is very important. The consultation thus far has been helpful in giving different organisations working in this space the opportunity to come together with the Foreign Office and lay out their stall, and to draw attention to the different things that could be done in that space. We need to ensure that that is built into something concrete.

Scott Griffen: There is definitely a role for funding civil society organisations that are monitoring attacks on press freedom, and especially the systematic or systemic developments related to the media. As I said at the beginning, in many cases attacks on media freedom are taking place in a way that includes a lot of deniability for states, or a veneer of legitimacy. We need strong civil society organisations that are able to follow developments in different states, explain them and reveal what is happening. Hungary is a great example, because everything there is clouded in different constructions that give a lot of plausible deniability to the state. We need strong organisations that cut through that fog.

I also think there is a role in many states when it comes to attacks on journalists—perhaps not cash but more resource support in terms of training or assistance with police investigations and technical support. That can play a role, especially when the state is willing; that is not always the case, but when it is willing, it is important to consider that.

Finally, to the extent that support for independent journalism itself is to be considered, it can be legitimate as long as it is done in a very independent way. Some of our members did raise in their submissions that there is an opportunity, at least at the local level, for support for independent media platforms so long as there is a clear, independent intermediary, because the risks in direct support for journalism are, I think, too high.

Michelle Stanistreet: We would absolutely support initiatives that could invest in training and skills development in the areas of safety and creating sustainable business models for independent journalism. There are lots of interesting things that could be looked at there, but fundamentally, something that would require more leadership than cash would be the Foreign Office's support for a new international piece of legislation—a convention—to protect journalists and journalism. The IFJ has been working really hard on that.

We would hugely welcome leadership on that. It could form a really important pillar of the work that would also have sustainability and longevity and fill the gap between different pieces of existing legislation, pulling it all together in a single, comprehensive instrument. That would be genuinely be world-leading and tackle meaningfully the crisis of impunity that we have.

Q54 **Ian Murray:** Ms Parkyn, you said in your submission that the UK Government's approach was somewhat fragmented. You explained why you thought that a little in response to previous questions, but what can the Foreign Office do to make the new Foreign Secretary's initiative a reality so that organisations such as Internews see it not as somewhat



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fragmented but as a real case being made for media freedom?

Rosie Parkyn: It is really a reflection of the fact that primarily DfID and the Foreign Office do not appear to be collaborating as much as we would like to see on this issue. That is fundamentally just about reflecting each other's expertise and saying, "Okay, DfID has been supporting independent media through programmatic work for a decade or more and has some significant experience." We would like to see acknowledgment of that and, for example, greater co-ordination at country level, where people are looking at which media outlets you are supporting, what support you are providing to them and how we might make more sense of this and make it more than the sum of its parts. It is simply that. We sometimes see that representatives are not talking to each other and are not aware of what each other is funding.

Q55 **Chair:** We are about a month off halfway through 2019, and quite a lot of the priorities that the FCO should have set out seem to be somewhat vague. That is certainly what you have been saying so far this afternoon and what we have seen elsewhere. What should those priorities be?

Rosie Parkyn: Priorities in terms of?

Chair: The FCO's priorities. After all, we are talking about media freedom not in an isolated sense but in the context of liberal democracy and other civic freedoms. It is not a stand-alone freedom; it is one that fits in with a whole series of others. How would you see the FCO's priorities?

Rosie Parkyn: To be frank, I do not feel able to answer that question. Perhaps the others would like to respond?

Chair: Sure.

Scott Griffen: From what I understand, one of the FCO's priorities is linked to promoting a legal framework that is more "permissive"—I think that is one of the terms used. We think this is a good priority. This is one of the areas in which the FCO should be active from now on—ensuring that media laws are balanced, in terms of ensuring that media and journalists can play their role without fearing consequences and without resorting to self-censorship.

I have given a couple of examples of states in which there are highly problematic media laws, but it needs to be understood that these laws are only part of the problem. We also have a serious crisis in the rule of law in a number of countries, which means that, regardless of how well drafted legislation is, it is only as good as the implementation. So we see, again to come back to Turkey, an enormous crisis of the rule of law, in which journalists are denied basic rights in court—in some cases even denied the right to appear in court and give statements, or cross-examine witnesses.

This, I think, needs to be understood in a much broader context. Many pieces of legislation talk about public interest. How are courts interpreting this term, for example? This has enormous implications for the work of journalists and whether they can trust that their rights will actually be



upheld in court. I think we need to make sure that this focus is not too narrow—that it really captures the problems that we see at the moment, which is not just the letter of the law, which is an issue in many countries, but also the way in which laws are simply being arbitrarily used in a number of cases, including in Turkey, Egypt and Tanzania. This would be, for us, one clear priority.

- Q56 **Chair:** Given your points about the difference between the letter and the implementation of the law, are there areas where you think the Foreign Office could assist with cultural change, possibly with assisting in training or running events? As you correctly pointed out, there are many countries where the laws or the constitutions of the state guarantee any number of freedoms that are frankly irrelevant, because they are not worth more than the paper they are written on.

Scott Griffen: It depends on the concrete situation. You will have some states where there is no political will to ensure proper implementation or interpretation of the law—where the judiciary is under the control of the Executive, as in Turkey. In those cases, the approach needs to be calling for independence of the judiciary. In Turkey there are lots of skilled judges; they are perfectly capable of interpreting the law but they are not able to. In other countries there may be, indeed, a role for training or sharing of experiences or techniques. I think we first need to differentiate—to understand exactly what the problem is, and use that to define the approach.

I also think that there is an important role to be played in terms of supporting regional or international bodies that uphold fundamental rights, whether that is the European Court of Human Rights, which plays an important role in a number of countries in the Council of Europe region where the rule of law is weak, or where courts are unable to uphold journalists' rights. I think the FCO should be a strong voice backing these types of institutions. We saw recently the East African Court of Justice now saying that major parts of media legislation in Tanzania violate fundamental rights. This was a crucial ruling and I think that voices such as the FCO can play a very important role in saying these types of ruling need to be respected, and we want to see an implementation now, for example, from the side of the Tanzanian Government—respect for these types of institutions, and now the necessary reforms that need to be made.

Michelle Stanistreet: There is probably no shortage of really worthwhile actions and initiatives that could flow as part of this work, whether it is on cultural change—I think I mentioned that women journalists in a lot of the countries that we have mentioned are facing particular difficulties and attacks—or whether it is on training, equipping women journalists, or equipping the unions to be able to represent those individuals better. There are lots of different practical things that could be done. Similarly, with the goal that the Foreign Office have of trying to reform domestic law around the world, that is a laudable goal.



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I do not profess to be an expert on journalism in Turkey right now, or in Yemen, but we know our sister unions are. It is that voice, expertise and knowledge of what would make the critical difference that could change the balance of how journalism is allowed to flourish in that country. That could turn a worthwhile laudable aspiration into something that is a meaningful reality that has real results that everyone can be proud of. For me, that is the missing link at the moment, because we all know what the top-level problems are, but I am not sure that the voices of the people who know best are being listened to or sought out.

- Q57 Jo Stevens:** Michelle, to pick up on what you were just talking about, the priority for the FCO, they say, is to reform laws abroad to support media freedom, but is protection of journalist safety not at the absolute heart of that?

Michelle Stanistreet: Absolutely. Without that, it is very hard to see how that work can have a meaningful impact. That is why we have been frustrated that there has not been immediate full support for the IFJ's work on a convention of safety. That would be a way of pulling all of that together, making it much more of a high-profile priority, enabling the UK Government to lead and put pressure on different states to get behind that. That element of peer pressure and of shoving that up the political agenda cannot be overstated. I hope there is a change in attitude on that, because that could have a long-lasting legacy if it was achieved.

- Q58 Jo Stevens:** It seems odd to me—that reluctance around the convention you describe or around an international treaty that would tackle those issues of impunity, but the fact that the NUJ and the IFJ have not been brought in as stakeholders for discussion with the FCO. Why do you think that is? What do you think is behind that strategy?

Michelle Stanistreet: Sometimes there is reluctance to engage meaningfully with trade unions. Perhaps that is at the heart of this. The International Federation of Journalists has such expertise—unparalleled, frankly—has that relationship and engagement with grassroots journalists, so it seems a daft oversight or decision. It is not too late to rectify that. These are more important issues than anyone's perspective on the role that a trade union might play. For us, unless you have the voice of the practitioners, you are not going to get results that have a long-lasting outcome and have the sustainability that all of us are saying is vital to achieve any success.

There is an international desire to see a convention put in place. UNESCO is very supportive. It would be a continuation of the important work that is being done on the international scene. Again, I do not understand why there has not been support already, and I hope that is something this Committee could look at, because it would be a brilliant achievement if that came from the work that the Foreign Office is committed to. It has the capacity to make a meaningful practical difference and have a positive impact on how journalists go about their work, because this issue of safety or lack of hangs over everyone who is engaged in this work domestically or in hostile environments. It really needs to be got to grips with.

Q59 **Jo Stevens:** I am assuming that the other witnesses both agree with that. Please tell me if you don't.

Scott Griffen: We absolutely agree in the sense that it is always valuable, any time that any additional mechanisms or forms can be put forward or standards and values can be restated, or if we can build consensus around those types of issues. There is no question about that. Our view is that at the same time, these things need to be implemented. It has to be more than just states signing up to statements. We need to see results.

That has been the biggest problem over the past few decades when it comes to impunity and physical attacks on journalists. We have had certain international conventions and declarations. This one would be a very important one, adding to them, but there is clearly a problem with implementation on the ground. There is clearly a delay. Nearly every case of the killing of journalists around the world—sometimes they are investigated, but the perpetrators nearly always go unpunished. There is clearly something missing there in terms of pressure being placed on Governments. That can partly come from these types of conventions, but it still needs to come from direct pressure from Governments that have the ability to do so. That is what we are concerned about.

Q60 **Chair:** Can I build on that? You make an interesting point—that effectively the rules are pretty much agreed already and the laws are usually in place already, and the problem is enforcement. Where would you put your effort if you were in the Foreign Office? Would you put your effort in looking for a new international treaty or would you put your effort in trying to get existing laws applied? You don't have unlimited time or unlimited people.

Scott Griffen: Again, these types of conventions are very useful because they restate and put forward standards that we need. They are tools that we can use to enforce laws.

Q61 **Chair:** Are they different from existing laws?

Scott Griffen: If I had to choose, my view is that the primary focus should be on ensuring that there is a cost for states. We know that impunity exists and we know that it is a problem, so we can already start working on that, if you know what I mean. We do not need to wait for another convention to start saying that it is not right that states like Saudi Arabia are able to essentially get away with the murder of a journalist, or that a year and a half later there is no credible investigation into the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia. We don't need to wait for more international instruments. The UK is in a position to take action together with like-minded states. My view would be: let's not wait on that. Let's start now to put pressure where it can be put on these types of states. That is my view.

Q62 **Chair:** Ms Stanistreet, it is just a question of resources and prioritisation. If you are the Foreign Secretary, you do not have unlimited resources, so where should you put your efforts? Would you put it on a treaty that sounds to me like it repeats many of the existing laws or would you put

in into enforcement of the existing laws to ensure the liberties that we all value?

Michelle Stanistreet: I completely agree that nobody needs to wait. Waiting for anything is not what is required. We are in a crisis and action needs to be taken, but the scale and the reality of the problem and the scale of impunity demonstrates that the current legislative frameworks are not happening, so something else needs to happen.

The international laws that address the situation of journalists are largely related to soft law instruments that are declarative or recommendatory in nature. That is why we are arguing for a new binding international instrument that is dedicated to the safety of journalists, which also includes a specific enforcement mechanism. We think that would improve the effectiveness of the international response. It certainly cannot make it worse than it currently stands. It would bring together the different elements of those soft instruments that are in existence at the moment. They are largely in case law of various international bodies rather than in the treaties, and in multiple texts rather than in one single comprehensive instrument.

It is something that a lot of work has been done on. If the Committee had time and would care to find out more about it, Dr Carmen Draghici from City, University of London has developed this with the International Federation of Journalists and I am sure she would be able to answer any questions or concerns you would have. She would be able to talk you through it much more effectively than I can. This is one thing that could be a really meaningful outcome from all of this work, which does not preclude all the other practical efforts that we have talked about on training, sustainability and resourcing different types of training and support for journalists and journalism.

Q63 **Ann Clwyd:** Why do you think the FCO has not yet expressed its support for the convention, or have I missed something?

Michelle Stanistreet: We are not quite sure. I would hope that that is maybe something that the Committee could take up. It would be great to get them on board. I don't understand why there would be a lack of willingness to support what is a very principled and well-intentioned and necessary initiative.

The IFJ and the NUJ are not coming to a campaign against impunity now. We have been pushing so hard and campaigning against this and the treatment of journalists and the killings of journalists and media workers for so many years. The level of attacks and the climate against journalists at the moment is unparalleled. This is something that not just we but the worldwide community of journalists think will make a difference. For that reason alone, it is important that it is engaged with and considered in a meaningful way.

Q64 **Jo Stevens:** I should have asked this before, and I think you touched on it, Michelle. What is the UK's reputation in terms of domestic media freedom? We are going out and saying to the world, "This is what we



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think you should do,” but how about our home turf? How does that stand up to scrutiny?

Michelle Stanistreet: There are lots of concerns that our sister journalists¹ around the world would express about legislation that has been brought into force in the UK. I mentioned surveillance, and there are things that compromise the ability of journalists to protect their sources. The misuse of RIPA is an example of that.

As things stand at the moment, the NUJ is supporting two of our members in action that has been taken against them by the police in Northern Ireland for their investigative journalism on the “No Stone Unturned” documentary. That is a very high-profile example of us having to fight to protect the interests of journalism. We see that very much as a collective blow against investigative journalists and their ability to do their jobs properly. That has absolutely got the attention of journalists around the world, who are pretty horrified to see what is happening in Belfast right now. We are focused on the international community and the rest of the world, but in doing that and in assuming a leadership position on media freedom and press freedom, it is really important that the UK can stand up to scrutiny on those issues in its own back yard.

- Q65 **Ian Murray:** Would you expand on that a little? Obviously, there are the recent issues in Northern Ireland, which are pretty catastrophic and at the extreme end, but there is also an attack on media freedom in this country from, for want of a better term, those who would like to do down the mainstream media, those who question legitimate media sources, social media, and people who pretend they are journalists putting information in the public domain without any verifiable sources. How should we protect that kind of media freedom in this country? Obviously, at some point that will start to percolate the other countries we are working in to try to help media freedom from the extreme ends—oppression from the state and so on. What should we be doing here?

Michelle Stanistreet: Both at home and abroad—we touched on online harassment and abuse of journalists—these are very febrile times, and journalists are coming under the cosh from lots of different sources. I know you have spoken about disinformation and all the challenges that presents to journalists and journalism. There is obviously the impact of individual abuse and harassment. A lot of employers have been pretty slow to deal with that effectively and collectively, to protect their employees and to put measures in place to ensure they are not abused and harassed. There are issues there, but there is also the broader question of trust in journalism, which is important. It makes the role of the BBC as a public service broadcaster ever more critical, yet we see the BBC undermined financially in so many different ways at the moment.

These are very difficult times for journalism in many ways. We talk about the economic instability and precariousness around the world. That is absolutely being felt here by journalists—particularly freelance journalists.

¹ Note from witness: should read as ‘sister unions’



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Journalists' ability to make a decent living is an ever-present challenge here too. Ensuring that journalists are drawn from a broad and diverse community is also important, so journalism engages the public, is trusted by the public and seems to them to be relevant.

There are lots of different challenges, which require a whole range of solutions, not least in the economic models of journalism. They have to be proactively addressed, because here, as in everywhere else, a flourishing journalism, right down to the ability of local reporters to report on their communities effectively and to hold politicians and businesses to account. Doing that with ever-dwindling resources is a terrible challenge for people who are passionate about the role of public interest journalism right now. We are seeing it ebb away and reduce in effectiveness, which has a huge impact on any democratic society, here as well as abroad. There is lots to be learned from things happening here and elsewhere in the world and joining those up.

- Q66 **Ian Murray:** It seems to me that, if you don't agree with a journalist's questioning or approach, you just ban them, both here and America. We would frown upon that if it was happening elsewhere.

Michelle Stanistreet: The rhetoric of journalists being the enemies of the people is incredibly dangerous and should be condemned in the round. Journalists are there to do their jobs well and effectively and need to ask questions. That is their remit. To ban, to abuse, to insult or to suggest that they have some other agenda only demeans the people who make those accusations, and in doing so—it is a cheap trick in any case—they demean democracy and the very important role that journalism plays in our society. They do that at their peril, because it has consequences.

- Q67 **Ann Clwyd:** If states cannot or will not investigate and punish the targeting of journalists, do you think we need a stronger international mechanism to do so?

Michelle Stanistreet: Absolutely. That is why I am very supportive of the IFJ's convention on safety for journalism. I hope that the Committee, and in turn the Foreign Office, extends its support to that important project.

- Q68 **Ann Clwyd:** Do you think the UK can set up its own mechanisms to protect journalists abroad? How would it define who is eligible for protection?

Michelle Stanistreet: The NUJ's position is that we seek the broadest possible support for the convention on the safety of media workers, as outlined by the IFJ. We think the UK should play a leadership role in establishing that and gaining buy-in and support from other states.

- Q69 **Chair:** Forgive me; may I ask what may sound like a really stupid question? What is a journalist? Is a citizen with a camera a journalist?

Rosie Parkyn: You are not the first person to ask that question. That was the opening question when we sat together and discussed this in January at the first Foreign Office consultation. We couldn't hit upon a single agreed definition, because of course it is entirely possible for everyone to



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practice journalism of some sort. That is why we need to think about particular standards that are applied to the classification of journalism; about having a degree of training or maybe some kind of accreditation. Michelle, you may want to pick up on this, because you have probably thought about it in greater depth than I have.

Michelle Stanistreet: We don't support any kind of accreditation or list, as for lawyers or anything like that. Journalists who join the NUJ sign up to our code of conduct. It is the oldest code of conduct in the world, we claim. The ethics of how you go about creating content—

- Q70 **Chair:** I accept all of that, and I am perfectly happy to accept that all your members are, by definition, journalists. However, I do not think you would claim that only your members are journalists; you would accept that some people who are not your members are also journalists. One of the most heroic journalists of the last decade is the Twitter site Mosul Eye, whose reporting from inside ISIS-controlled Mosul was not only immensely courageous but enormously powerful journalism. They are not trained; they have no official representation; they are not accredited to anybody; and they are not with any authorised, licensed, or indeed organised group. They are one person with a smartphone, with a camera, with a Twitter feed. Forgive me—maybe I am wrong—but I do not think any of us would challenge the idea that he was a journalist, would we?

Scott Griffen: No. Maybe it depends on why we are asking the question, in the sense that, for example, IPI also promotes quality journalism. Our members are journalists who practise the profession following a certain ethical standard, if you want, but that does not mean that journalists who are not members of IFJ or IPI are not doing journalistic work. In terms of protecting media freedom or the basic value, which is the free flow of information for the public, I do not know how relevant that question even is, because we are looking at the act itself; we are looking at protecting a type of activity.

- Q71 **Chair:** I accept that, and I accept that the defence of democracy—that is really one of the aspects we are talking about with media freedom—is about defending the freedom to discover and publish information in the interests of a free and open society. I accept that to a large extent, particularly in a country like ours, that is often—not exclusively, but often—done by journalists.

The reason I raise this as a question is because I understand that the request for the convention effectively singles out, and gives extra protection to, people classified as journalists. If one is looking at drafting a law, whether a domestic law or an international treaty, then having some idea as to who this special status of people are would be rather useful. I would argue that I am not a journalist, although I once was. I write weekly in my local paper, but I do not think that makes me a journalist; it makes me a politician making a point. However, should I therefore enjoy the same protections under this convention as someone who is a journalist?



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Michelle Stanistreet: It is less about whether it is somebody on a phone or publishing their work on Twitter, or any other platform. It is about the nature of the content that they are creating; whether that is journalistic content that is created according to those ethical frameworks. There is a difference between user-generated content and content that is produced professionally and ethically, in adherence to those journalistic principles that are not about a training course, a qualification or anything else.

- Q72 **Chair:** I understand that. When, for example, did Mosul Eye go from being user-generated content behind the lines in ISIS-controlled Mosul and become a journalist?

Michelle Stanistreet: I am not familiar with the work in the same way, so—

- Q73 **Chair:** All right. We have all seen in recent months incidents that have been covered by citizen journalism—not just around the world, actually, but in the UK as well. How many films do you have to shoot as a citizen-generated content provider to become a journalist?

Michelle Stanistreet: I do not think it is a question of how many, or a tally or anything like that. It is the nature of that content, and as you are describing it—you described Mosul Eye as journalism. That sounds to me like it is journalistic content.

Chair: No, I accept that.

Michelle Stanistreet: There are countless journalists who have not gone through formal school training, or anything like that.

- Q74 **Chair:** Forgive me; I am not trying to be difficult. I am trying to understand—

Michelle Stanistreet: Who would be captured by that kind of—

Chair: Exactly. If you are seeking to give particular rights to a particular group of people, what is the qualification—in the vaguest sense; I do not mean what degree, or whatever. What do you have to do that qualifies you for protection under the rights that this treaty affords?

Michelle Stanistreet: It is something that you know when you see it. People can obsess about the definitions of things.

- Q75 **Chair:** The trouble is that lawyers do obsess about definitions of things.

Rosie Parkyn: You are protecting their right to produce information, whether as an eyewitness, an information provider or a fully-fledged journalist. If you want to consider it in that way, you are protecting their right to provide information in the public interest without harm coming to them in the course of doing so.

- Q76 **Chair:** Ms Parkyn, you have explained—forgive me for putting it differently—that you are looking to protect freedom of speech, expression and, to a certain extent, discovery. You are trying to protect the expression of that freedom, rather than the individual who does it.



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Rosie Parkyn: I think the two are completely interlinked. If the individual is not safe to perform their role—

- Q77 **Chair:** I accept that, but you are not looking to give any special privileges or protections to an individual. Rather, you are looking to protect what that individual produces, because—from the way that you just expressed it—you find it as hard as I do to define what a journalist is.

Rosie Parkyn: It is really difficult.

- Q78 **Chair:** When is an opposition politician a journalist?

Rosie Parkyn: We support journalists in all sorts of contexts whom we would refer to as information providers, because they do not fit the classic definition of journalist, which might be more common to use. We support them because they provide information in the public interest. It is about what they are producing. We might provide funding to them or technical support. We might even seek to remove them from a dangerous situation, if that were necessary. I guess that we do not have a clear definition of who that person is.

Chair: I accept that that is very difficult.

- Q79 **Jo Stevens:** I just wonder whether you might look at a similar example from a different area, such as medics. There is enhanced protection for medics under international human rights law for doing the job that they do. "Medic" would cover a whole range of different healthcare tasks in different situations. Could that be used in a similar way for journalists and the work that they do?

Chair: The Geneva convention stipulates what you have to do in order to enjoy that protection—for example the wearing of insignia. The Geneva convention and the protocols that follow it are pretty clear about what you have to do to enjoy the protection of being a medic.

- Q80 **Jo Stevens:** All I am saying is that you might look at that if you were preparing a convention—I am sure the academic from City University has looked at this—as an example of another area, which you could look at to help you solve those problems.

Scott Griffen: From our point of view, we would be cautious about saying that the idea is to protect a certain class or type of person. That is not how we approach the issue, because for us it is about the activity, as I said before. We advocate on behalf of journalists all the time whose methods we might not agree with or who do not have a journalistic background, but they are playing some kind of journalistic role by revealing information that is relevant for the public. That is how we approach the issue.

It is important to promote good journalism. We do that through training and exchange of knowledge across our network, for example. It is important to support media outlets that adhere to a certain type of behaviour and work to certain values. That is clear. For us, the idea would not be to say that certain types of people deserve certain types of

protection because they have a certain type of licence. That is clearly not the case.

Jo Stevens: That is not what I meant. I don't think we disagree.

Scott Griffen: I agree. With journalism and free expression we have to be very careful about any definitions or licences, because it is an activity that is so closely connected to the very core of democratic government. Any time you begin to restrict, license or give special status to anyone, you risk opening that up to abuse.

- Q81 **Chair:** The problem is also removing that status from others. If you class journalists as having certain rights and freedoms, you are actually saying that other citizens do not have those rights and freedoms.

Scott Griffen: Everyone has the right to freedom of expression.

Chair: Exactly. I don't think you would argue that only journalists have it.

Scott Griffen: I am not talking about the declaration. I am just speaking in general, not about the convention.

Michelle Stanistreet: The convention is not intended to provide them with special additional importance in that regard, or a different level of protection from other citizens. It's about acknowledging the particular challenges and threats they face because of their work. It would be great if you got Dr Draghici here to talk about this in more detail—I am sure she would relish the questions. It is also a convention on the safety and independence of journalists and other media professionals; it is not looking at journalists in a narrow sense. There are teams of people who work in journalism and in these areas, and they are targeted as a result. It is a really important that it is enacted in a fulsome way.

- Q82 **Chair:** Forgive me; I appreciate all that. If it is journalists and media professionals it is people who are profiting—I don't mean that in a negative sense—from their work in the discovery and publication of information. Were a doctor to do it, they are not a media professional—they are a medical professional—and they may be doing it pro bono or for any number of different reasons. I am absolutely certain that you are not suggesting that they shouldn't enjoy the same rights of freedom of speech and expression, and the same ability to publish, as a journalist.

Michelle Stanistreet: Of course I am not saying that. It's the case that people engaged in journalistic work—as I said, there are lots of journalists who are doing it—are not being paid; they are not being recompensed as they should and their wages are not being paid. They face particular challenges and attacks, which is acknowledged in different pieces of international legislation. The convention is a way of bringing that together in a much more cohesive and hopefully effective way. That is its purpose.

- Q83 **Ann Clwyd:** It is important to make a distinction. If you are a doctor you need a professional qualification. I became a journalist by ringing a national newspaper every day for a week and then for the following 15



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years I was a journalist. You have to be able to write, you have to have an interest in the subject and you have to have an urge to campaign on issues. It is important to make a distinction between a doctor, who has to have professional qualifications, and a journalist who can be almost anybody.

Scott Griffen: I could not agree more. I have a good example of how this type of distinction has not functioned. Last month I was in Tanzania, where the Government are planning to introduce a requirement that all journalists have journalistic education and a journalistic diploma. You can imagine what this is going to create. An enormous percentage of working journalists in Tanzania will be removed from the profession because they don't have a degree in journalism. They are just people with different backgrounds—lawyers, doctors, whatever—but they have a talent for writing or analysing events. That is what matters. In this case we can see how problematic it is. Governments do this and take advantage of licensing or diploma requirements, and they use them to shut out critical journalists and only allow those which—

Q84 **Chair:** That is a really interesting point. Is there not a danger when one singles out journalists as a class, rather than freedom of expression as a right, that you challenge Governments to do things like that? We would reject that immediately.

Scott Griffen: For me, it is not a discussion about the convention.

Chair: Forgive me; I am asking general questions.

Scott Griffen: "Journalist" is probably something we use as a shorthand to indicate people who are engaging in a certain type of activity. When I use the word "journalist" I am not talking about journalists who are members of a certain organisation, who are licensed or who have some accreditation. I am speaking about people who have a certain type of function; generally, most of them are working for a newspaper or some kind of media outlet. It becomes a problem when you restrict the ability to conduct a certain type of activity and tie it to a certain requirement, because we see all the time that this is abused. There is becomes a problem.

I don't think it is necessarily a problem to speak about journalists or journalism in an abstract way, because in most cases what we are talking about is understood. I don't know if I completely share that.

Michelle Stanistreet: We are all quite comfortable talking about journalism and journalists, the challenges we face internationally, and the number of journalists and media workers who are being targeted and murdered because of the work they carry out. We should be equally comfortable talking about them, and using that definition when talking about solutions and ways to address those challenges. That to me is the spirit and purpose of the work that the IFJ is doing to create the safety convention—it is to address the problems that exist, and we are proud of that fact.



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Journalism is a trade, it is not a profession. It is not like being a lawyer or a medic; it is something distinct, and of course you don't need formal training. Issues of accreditation or some sort of licensing for journalists were floated by members of the industry at the time of Leveson, and there was talk about different types of regulation. The NUJ is vehemently opposed to any such licensing or a database of journalists, or any gatekeeper to what would allow somebody to ply their trade as a journalist. It would be easy to get lost in that cul-de-sac, when the real issue is the dangers that journalists and media workers face on a daily basis. We should be looking at ways to improve their lot.

- Q85 **Chair:** I accept that, and many of us who believe in freedom of expression were very against the ideas of licensing that were around in the Leveson period. The convention does not have an enforcement mechanism, as far as I understand. It just reports back to the United Nations General Assembly—is that correct?

Michelle Stanistreet: I would urge you to bring in Dr Draghici to talk about this because I am not an expert. The Committee is clearly interested, and that would be a useful way of developing your thinking on the issue.

Chair: Okay, we will look at that.

- Q86 **Catherine West:** We know that some independent media struggle for revenue or market share, and in other countries the media are mainly owned by vested interests. What should the UK do in terms of support? Should it do something financially? Are there risks in doing that? You might look as though you are trying to control or make a particular message as a Government. What impact does the BBC's broadcasting abroad have on independent media? Is there a sense that independent media might be squeezed out if the international bit of the BBC is there?

Scott Griffen: We are talking about independent media and ownership issues, but we must also differentiate between patterns of oligarchic ownership of the media—those have to do with the interests of the owners in promoting their economic activity—and ownership problems that are part of a plan driven by the state or by political officials to take over the media landscape. That is something different, and I think we need to differentiate there. For example, when we are talking about what has happened in Hungary—it is not an organic situation where different media owners decided to come together, and it just so happened that they are all friends of Orbán. It is not like that; it is the other way round. This was planned. You may know that there is a big political crisis in Austria at the moment. The Government have collapsed, in part because of a video in which the far-right Vice-Chancellor was plotting that kind of media takeover. In those cases we must be clear that this is part of an attack on media freedom that needs to be addressed in such a way.

When it comes to supporting independent media, as I was saying, I think financing is a possibility. I don't know if you are aware that the European Commission has started to provide funds for investigative journalism, for



example. There are risks involved, and one way to mitigate those is to ensure that whatever funds are provided by Governments are handled in an independent way by an independent intermediary. For the Commission, for example, the IPI distributed those funds, and we did that by adding a third step of an independent jury to decide the projects. We were not involved in selecting the projects, and we had no involvement in the editorial aspect of the media. It was a way of providing much-needed funding to investigative projects. It is a legitimate conversation to have, but we need to look at the models that exist and the best practices for ensuring that no one can try to delegitimise media products by saying, "Well, this Government is funding this investigation, therefore it is somehow biased." We can also look at coming together with other funders, whether they are state funders or not, and creating a bigger pool of donors who are interested in supporting independent journalism, and thereby also reduce the possibility of delegitimising media in that way.

Q87 Catherine West: And the BBC question?

Rosie Parkyn: Can I take the first question first and add a bit to that? Yes, I can quite understand the issue about funding content directly. Actually, that has sometimes been problematic in terms of disrupting the existing media economy within a given country. It can be done, but it comes with risks.

It is entirely possible to fund, for example, training for an independent media outlet that meets certain criteria that you might wish to apply to understand the extent to which that outlet is worth supporting and is trying to do something good and have an independent voice within society, and to support that entity to develop business models that will eventually enable it to be self-sustaining. Those tend to be techniques and practices, and types of training and access to expertise, that lots of media outlets simply do not have access to, so there is some enormous growth potential in terms of support for that, and perhaps even seed funding being provided to those outlets, so they can get some business ideas off the ground and start to flourish and diversify their income. They may have historically been reliant on donor funding, so it is great to try to move them away from that, and there is a real possibility and many opportunities to do that.

There is also a real issue for local media outlets in lots of places about understanding the different political and economic pressures that are coming to bear on them. I have been involved in conversations in various countries with journalists who know that stuff is happening and that their business models are under pressure for various reasons, but who do not have access, for example, to some of the conversations that an international organisation might have and to the platforms to understand how the platforms' activities are affecting local business models. There is also a role for the international community to play in terms of convening networks whereby local and regional-level media can gain a better understanding of the current threats and trends that are moving so quickly and affecting their ability to do business.



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As far as the BBC is concerned, we have been told by journalists that it can be a positive thing when the World Service, in particular, is there and able to address issues that they are too fearful to pick up. There is definitely a role to be played there. I worked in Sierra Leone some years back, and there was a great appreciation for the BBC and for the convening power of the BBC and its ability to bring elected officials into a room and on to a microphone to answer questions that they may have been less inclined to answer from the local media. Of course, that benefit also serves to undermine.

The ideal scenario is obviously a combination of those two things, where the BBC is able to provide that broadcasting immediately to enable people to understand what is happening in their country, and to hear their elected officials held to account, but simultaneously to build local independent media to be able to do that. Because, of course, the BBC is also not able to go as deep as the local media, if you imagine a country in which multiple languages are spoken. The BBC has done a great job in recent years of building additional language services, but there will still be multiple languages that people would like to access information in that they are not getting, so local media matters from that perspective too.

Michelle Stanistreet: The BBC plays an enormously important role. I agree about the benefits that the role of the BBC in different countries can provide. As far as we are concerned, it certainly does not do any detriment to local journalism—quite the opposite. It is obviously not a replacement, either. The BBC should act as a spur for other journalistic content to proliferate.

I am sure that lots of countries and regimes would love to see the back of the BBC and its reporting in their backyard, but that is what makes its journalism all the more important. It is also one of the few broadcasters and media outlets that has such a broad range of foreign reporting on its airwaves for listeners and viewers back home as well. The BBC is certainly not the bogeyman in this regard. It does a huge amount of positive work in shining lights on parts of the world that we do not get to hear about on a day-to-day basis from many other news outlets here in the UK.

Scott Griffen: Maybe it is worth just adding one thing on the issue of independent media—something that I think is missing from the FCO's submission. Yes, there needs to be more promoting of sustainable business models for media outlets. Let's see how we can exchange successful examples. At the same time, we also need to pay attention to the ways in which states are abusing their power and taking advantage of a difficult business and economic environment for the media, to further weaken the independent press.

That can be done, for example, by withholding state advertisement from critical media. To give one example, the Pakistani Government announced a few weeks ago that it would stop advertisements in Dawn, which is one of the most important English language media outlets. That is an arbitrary use of state authority. We see this in a number of countries.



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We also see, for example, arbitrary tax penalties assessed to media outlets that in some cases have led to media closures—Cambodia or Zambia. That also has to be part of the conversation. It is not just about structural problems in the media industry; it is also about deliberate and systematic attempts to weaken independent media and stop them playing their role.

- Q88 **Catherine West:** The last question from me is about the harassment of journalists online, which you have already said is a problem. How do we get the balance between the risk of electronic surveillance and what is the FCO's role in that, as part of our study here?

Rosie Parkyn: Support training to ensure that the journalist in question is able to navigate and protect themselves. That is going to look very different for them depending on the kind of work that they are doing and how they are engaging online. That seems to be the most obvious way of addressing that. Of course, it does not address the problem in its entirety, but it helps.

- Q89 **Catherine West:** Maybe technical expertise as well around different, new forms. Media has changed so much in the last 10 years, hasn't it? Maybe the FCO has a role in terms of that technical side.

Michelle Stanistreet: I think that's right. Types of training in digital security, both for individual journalists and about the protection of sources, is really worth while. That could be rolled out in different ways—relatively cost-effective ways, such as “train the trainer” programmes.

Some of that work has happened with some of our sister unions abroad. Building people's own capacity is also a way of ensuring sustainability. If you give them the tools to enable them to roll out those kinds of training programmes around their organisations in a way that has proper regional geographic spread, that could be very practical and worth while, equipping journalists to protect their safety and security.

Doxxing is becoming an increasing issue, and journalists generally being treated as if they are terrorists or accused of criminal activity, with their details put online as a means to compromise their safety. Lots of basic ways of educating journalists about securing their own safety on and offline could be developed.

Rosie Parkyn: Just to add, the primary concern of the journalist, or the information provider, is to get the story and to convey the information. They are not necessarily thinking about the numerous risks that they are exposing themselves to, so embedding the digital security training and the physical security training within any kind of programme of support to a journalist in the places that we are talking about is immensely beneficial. We would love to see more of that and we think that it is something that the Foreign Office could absolutely champion.

Mr Seely: I'm happy to come in, Chair; if you want me to come in on a question, I will be delighted to do so, but otherwise, because I was late, I'm just listening.



Q90 Chair: Okay. We are on the final straight, so I will just close this off, if I may, with a simple question on the regions or countries that the FCO should prioritise. You have highlighted some already, and there are other obvious examples that we have heard. Bob, you may want to jump in on this. There have been numerous murders of journalists in places like Russia, which appears to be using violence and murder as a form of censorship. We have heard about this in countries like Iran as well, and we certainly know of incidents in other countries around the world. Are there particular countries on which you think the FCO should place its emphasis? I don't just mean the most egregious ones, but the ones in which the FCO could effect most change—perhaps countries like Malta, where a difference could be achieved.

Scott Griffen: That's a very difficult question to answer, because there are a lot of problems and I would not want to suggest that any problem was more important than another. But as I was saying at the beginning, when we were talking about impunity, if you let it go, it's very difficult to stop. That's why we have endemic violence against the media in places like Mexico and Afghanistan, where the task is enormous. We need to dedicate resources to that. On the other hand, there are places like Malta, where we have a first incidence of a murder of a journalist and we have an opportunity to stop that cycle of violence gaining any momentum. So for me, that would be an example of a place where a concrete impact can be made, where you can say, "It's not going any further than this. We are going to contribute." This is a country that is part of a community of values; it should be very easy to say, "This is not acceptable within this community." So I think there is an opportunity there for that as well.

The same goes, to a certain extent, for Slovakia, which has been much more successful. In fact, it's one of the only examples I am aware of in which the mastermind of a journalist's killing has even been charged with a crime. So that's very good.

We can pick out individual examples, but it's difficult. There are so many places that we could mention. Again, I was recently in Tanzania, where we have an opening because a regional body, a court, has said, "Look, there's a problem." It has given us an opportunity to say, "Let's go back to the drawing board on this law," and actually that was the reaction of the Government when we spoke to them after this court had rendered its decision. So cases in which we have international bodies giving decisions, handing out decisions, also provide us with opportunities to do advocacy.

I could give a list of countries that are important to us. Turkey is another critical example. Having an impact in Turkey is difficult. I think no one would argue with that. At the same time, we are talking about a NATO ally, which is ignoring so many fundamental principles of human rights and media freedom. Again, in terms of setting the right example for other countries, we would also see it that way: let's also work with allies of the UK to improve the situation.

Q91 Mr Seely: Just on that, it is almost quite traditional intimidation that you are talking about. It's states beating up journalists, literally or



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metaphorically. Do any of you have an opinion, thought or position for the groups and unions that you represent about, for example, what China is doing? Russia is a sort of halfway house. Its hybrid war is very cyber-orientated, but its hostility to journalists is quite old-fashioned, in many ways. But if you look at a very advanced state like China, it uses AI. It's trying to use AI, trying to use big data, to control people and to control outliers. Journalists are not always outliers, but sometimes a lot of journalists fit into that outlier area, as do human rights workers and lawyers as well. Do you think that there is a new threat that will in future be caused by a combination of authoritarian states and the growth of AI and big data?

Rosie Parkyn: You go first.

Mr Seely: Is the silence good or bad?

Michelle Stanistreet: I think the threats are probably evolving and morphing all the time and taking different forms, with the common theme seeing quality journalism as something that should be attacked. In the past, China would have headed some of the lists of the biggest jailers of journalists, but now it is Turkey. I think Turkey has to be a focus, but it has to be determined by what is the strategy, what are the resources available and what can be meaningfully achieved, because there is no point in posturing on any of these things. If there is going to be work that happens, it has to be on issues that have a chance of making an impact.

Q92 **Mr Seely:** What is the difference between Turkey and China? Why are you focusing on Turkey and not on China?

Michelle Stanistreet: As things stand at the moment, Turkey is the biggest jailer of journalists, so I am focusing on our sister colleagues in unions in Turkey who are banged up in prison as we speak. Earlier I said that I think it is really important to work with the grassroots organisations and unions of journalists. They are part of this process. There is the benefit of having those people, those structures and those unions in Turkey in a way that is not there in such a meaningful way in China, so there is not the ability to meaningfully engage in all of the countries where there is a terrible problem with attacks on journalists, deaths of journalists, killings of journalists and intimidation on a daily basis. The goals and the countries, if they were set in that way, would have to be really well thought through.

I mentioned India and Pakistan earlier as maybe countries where it is less obvious than in Mexico, Yemen and Turkey at the moment, but there have been big spikes of late, particularly in online harassment and abuse of journalists, particularly women. If some of the work was focused on women, there might be countries where some effort and initiative might help. Again, where there is the infrastructure of journalists' unions and associations, it might help facilitate that work and give it a chance of success.

Scott Griffen: I very much agree with that. In Turkey there is already an infrastructure not only in terms of journalism. There are many great



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journalists there who are being prevented from doing their jobs. There is also infrastructure in terms of the judiciary. They can protect journalists' rights. There is a constitutional framework that can protect journalists' rights. It is paralysed at the moment because of the control of the Executive over the country, but that can change and we do not need to build a new structure from the beginning. In the short term, those are places where we can have more impact. In response to the previous question about where we can focus, it is also places where this infrastructure exists on the ground and the chances of short-term success are better.

Q93 Ann Clwyd: Specifically on Turkey, I agree with you. I have friends who are in prison, friends who are threatened with prison, and friends about to come over to this country to escape intimidation there. What would you ask the British Government to do specifically in the case of Mr Khashoggi? What should they do?

Scott Griffen: In the case of Khashoggi, I want to say for the record that Khashoggi has nothing to do with Turkey's crackdown on its own media. Just to be clear, the fact that the murder occurred on Turkish soil has nothing to do with Turkey's own crackdown.

It is not really for me to say. Again, I think what we need are some concrete steps to show that the UK Government is willing to punish Saudi Arabia for what happened. I am not aware of any sanctions. The US Government has applied the Magnitsky Act already on a number of individuals who I believe participated in the killing. I am not aware that that has occurred in the UK, although legislation now exists. Correct me if I'm wrong. I don't know if that is the case, but these are the types of steps that can be taken. Germany has already announced the suspension of most arms sales.

I do not know exactly what the situation here in the UK is, but we do not see any momentum on justice for Jamal Khashoggi. The UK is one of the countries that is in a position to push for that momentum. It seems to me that the momentum is going in the opposite direction—we are normalising one of the most brutal murders of a journalist that we have seen. Any step would be a positive step, in terms of holding Saudi Arabia accountable.

Michelle Stanistreet: I agree. It is incredibly important that the UK takes a very strong, robust and punitive approach to that murder and is seen to be doing so. The fact that it has not, absolutely does normalise the sense that journalists are fair game and that they are legitimate targets in that way. It normalises it in the most disgusting way, by the world seeing that states are willing to look the other way and treat it like some unseemly incident—the sooner we forget about this and move on to business as usual, the better. A very inadequate international response has been the outcome, but it is not too late to turn that around. When measures are taken, it is important that they are taken with transparency in an up-front way, because the very act of taking action sends its own message to other potential killers of journalists—states and other organisations around the



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world. That has to happen in a bold and principled way, and we have not seen that so far.

Chair: May I thank the three of you very much indeed for attending this afternoon's session and engaging in the debate on many areas? We are extremely grateful for your time and look forward to taking up some of your recommendations.