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Dear Alicia,

Please find attached the latest annual update on our media freedom work. Unsurprisingly, much of our focus in 2022 involved working with partners to call out Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and its terrible impact on journalist safety, media and the information space.

Since the UK established the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) with Canada in 2019, it has expanded its membership to over 50 countries and kept media freedom on the international agenda through regular ministerial discussions and statements highlighting cases and situations of concern. On 1 January 2022, we formally passed our co-chair role to the Netherlands. We continue to be active working with current co-chairs Canada and the Netherlands to further strengthen the Coalition through the funding of a Coalition Secretariat to help it become more effective. As part of our wider efforts to mainstream media freedom in our international engagement, we are pleased that the Commonwealth Law Ministers reached consensus on Media Principles which set out the role of media and freedom of expression in good governance. This will provide an important basis for future work to improve the situation for the media across the Commonwealth.

At the same time, we recognise media freedom is part of wider work to maintain an open international order and enable the free flow of information that is essential to democracy and the exercise of human rights. The denial of access to information, including in the form of internet shutdowns, censorship and disinformation, is an early warning indicator of democratic values under stress. To encourage action on this, we are leading a Technology for Democracy Cohort, as part of the US Summit for Democracy, to bring countries, civil society and technology companies together to stem the increasing use of internet shutdowns as a tool of online censorship. We have announced, with UNESCO, that the UK will be hosting the International Day for Universal Access to Information in 2023, which will focus on these issues. We are also working to tackle disinformation by providing wide ranging support for independent media in the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe.

This report shows how we continue to use our agency and leverage, with old partners and new, to defend media freedom as a key element of British interests and values.

Yours Sincerely,

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary

This is an updated Government response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee report “Media freedom is under attack”: The FCO’s defence of an endangered liberty

Summaries of the Committee’s recommendations are in bold and the Government’s responses are in plain text. This report covers the period January-December 2022.

Overview of Progress of the Campaign

The global media freedom environment continues to worsen. According to UNESCO, over 80 journalists and media workers were killed in 2022, and impunity for the murders remains high at 86%. Journalists held in detention in connection with their work is also at a record high, at 533 according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF). This is a rise of 13.4% from 2021. Within that figure, the number of women journalists detained rose by nearly 30%. Belarus, China, Iran, Myanmar and Vietnam make up the top five countries for jailing journalists. Together these countries account for more than half of the world’s imprisoned journalists. Even in more democratic countries, threats and sometimes physical attacks against journalists, both offline and online, continue to grow, often leading to self-censorship. Numerous reports and studies show that threats particularly target women journalists and those from minority groups.

Recognising the long-term challenge, we remain committed to this important issue, and media freedom and the free flow of information continue to be integral to our efforts to promote an open international order. This report sets out how we have used a range of diplomatic and development tools to take concrete action to improve the situation, including through the Media Freedom Coalition and the UK’s diplomatic network. Furthermore the report details our work to highlight the increasing risks associated with internet restrictions and shutdowns.

The impact on the media and information space of Russia’s war on Ukraine has been the main focus of our and international partners’ attention this year. In the part of Ukraine temporarily controlled by Russia, journalists have been killed, subjected to unlawful detentions, abducted, and have suffered enforced disappearances and torture. There have also been cyber-attacks on Ukraine’s media and internet infrastructure. The Russian government is isolating the Russian people from credible information in a systemic and repressive war against freedom of expression and access to information. Propaganda, repressive legislation, and violence have created a climate of fear and intimidation. Since February, legislation has suppressed freedom to express dissent and criminalised the “discrediting” of Russia’s Armed Forces. Those reporting accurately on Ukraine face jail. Most independent journalists and media outlets have either left Russia or closed.

The UK helped keep the impact of the war on media freedom and journalist safety at the top of UNESCO’s agenda, helping to combat Russian narratives about the

conflict¹ and support wider efforts to hold Russia to account. At the UN, we have consistently used our position, including on the UN Security Council, to champion media freedom, condemn Russia's attacks on journalists and counter Russian disinformation. We condemned Russia's attacks on freedom of expression at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council, and supported statements criticising Russia by the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists in the OSCE. After Russia blocked the budget for the annual OSCE Human Dimension meeting, the UK helped fund a Chair's conference giving a platform to civil society from the OSCE region, including Russian human rights defenders. The UK also supported several side events including one on the safety of journalists in the areas under temporary Russian control.

The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), co-created by the UK and Canada in 2019, now has 50 members. The Coalition has issued 32 statements on situations of concern and marking key dates and events. In 2022, the UK handed over our co-chair role of the Coalition to the Netherlands. But we continue to be actively involved through our membership of the Executive Group of the Coalition, our co-chair role of the Media Development Working Group, and through the activities of our diplomatic network. We have also provided initial funding for a secretariat to strengthen the MFC, which began work in June. In November, the MFC expelled Afghanistan due to severe media freedom restrictions.

This progression of our role from co-chair of the MFC has allowed us to move off a campaign footing, towards mainstreaming media freedom into our wider democracy and human rights work. This includes looking to reduce politically motivated Internet shutdowns. Internet shutdowns, of which there were 182 instances in 34 countries in 2021, and attacks on media freedom, are used to restrict access to information. They are early warning indicators of democratic values under stress and often go hand in hand with human rights abuses.

The UK has continued to support UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund which has now raised approximately US\$8 million, and has funded more than 80 projects, helping over 3,000 journalists globally. This year the UK pledged an additional £250,000 to the Fund's Crisis Response Mechanism for journalists in Ukraine.

The third global conference on media freedom took place on 9-10 February in Tallinn, Estonia. It brought together governments, civil society, multilateral institutions, academics, legal experts and journalists. Lord Ahmad co-hosted the second Ministerial meeting of the MFC held during the conference, and the UK led sessions on mis- and disinformation, and the future of media development. Opening the Ministerial meeting, Lord Ahmad highlighted the continuing pressures that journalists faced globally and the scale of the work the Coalition still had to do. He

¹ - **28th September 2022:** [International Day for Universal Access to Information](#) (46 co-sponsors).
- **30th September 2022:** [Follow-up session on UNESCO monitoring in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea](#) (44 co-sponsors) – with a strong emphasis on the impact of annexation on journalists.
- **2nd November 2022:** [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#) (39 co-sponsors).
- **24th November 2022:** [International Programme for the Development of Communication conference](#) (41 co-sponsors).

announced UK funding for a secretariat to support the Coalition. In a Ministerial communique,² MFC member-states re-committed themselves to defend media freedom at home and abroad. Lord Ahmad and former Canadian Foreign Minister Joly awarded the UK/Canada Media Freedom prize to Vietnamese author, blogger, journalist, publisher and human rights activist Pham Doan Trang. Ms Trang, co-founder of the unsanctioned online law magazine 'Luat Khoa' and Liberal Publishing House, is serving 9 years in prison, for 'disseminating anti-state propaganda'.

In April 2022, Reporters without Borders (RSF) published its annual report on Media Freedom. The UK's position has improved 9 places, up from 33 to 24. In part this was due to action taken to protect journalists, including the adoption of the UK National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists.

On 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, Lord Ahmad tweeted to commend journalists who risked their lives to do their job, highlighting the MFC statement and congratulating the Belarusian Association of Journalists, who were awarded the UNESCO Guillermo Cano Prize in tribute to their ongoing sacrifices for press freedom. In Nepal, to mark the day, the UK Ambassador gave a platform for the voices of 11 Nepali women writers for a public conversation about their experiences as women journalists, poets and publishers, including Ms Tata Rai who had published a biographical novel about her experiences as a 14-year-old guerrilla in Nepal's Maoist insurgency. The Ambassador underlined the importance of this work and encouraged the writers to keep writing, networking and finding new ways to publicise their work.

Damian Collins, MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Media Freedom, tabled a Westminster Hall Debate to consider World Press Freedom Day. The then FCDO Minister Vicky Ford responded for the Government. She spoke about the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus; some individual cases; the FCDO's international media freedom work, using both public and private diplomacy; and cross-government work to safeguard journalists in the UK.

At the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council in September-October, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to media freedom by co-sponsoring a resolution on the Safety of Journalists alongside main sponsors Austria, Brazil, France, Greece, Morocco, Qatar and Tunisia, and over 70 others. The updated resolution contained new language on strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP), extraterritorial targeting of journalists and gender responsive approaches. The Resolution requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to organise, before the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council in September to October 2023, a one-day expert seminar on legal and economic threats to the safety of journalists in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and to prepare a summary report thereon to be submitted to the Council at its fifty-fifth session in February 2024.

At the UN General Assembly in September, the UK supported side events on Upholding Democracy and Human Rights in the face of rising Disinformation.

² [Global Conference for Media Freedom 2022: joint communiqué - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/global-conference-for-media-freedom-2022-joint-communiqué)

On 2 November 2022, the UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the FCDO highlighted the situation of journalists across the network. The Foreign Secretary tweeted about Russia/Ukraine³ and Lord Ahmad tweeted⁴ highlighting the Media Freedom Coalition's statement⁵, UNESCO's powerful social media video on impunity⁶ and three individual cases in China. UK Human Rights Ambassador Rita French signed a joint statement by European Human Rights Ambassadors, supporting journalists and media professionals under threat, particularly women, and calling for accountability to mark the day. Many of our Embassies also marked the day. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the British Embassy in Bishkek issued a joint statement on 2 November with like-minded Embassies, outlining the importance of a free and diverse media. The statement generated a lot of engagement in-country and, the following day, Ambassadors were invited to meet the Foreign Minister and then the President. They set out the importance of protecting and promoting media freedoms as a form of freedom of expression, a basic human right. In Slovakia, our Ambassador hosted an event, also celebrating 100 years of the BBC. In Minsk, the British Embassy, with other Executive Group members of the Media Freedom Coalition, issued joint posts on social media⁷ reiterating the commitment to highlight violations of media freedom and calling for an end to attacks, and accountability for perpetrators.

On 4 November, Austria, UNESCO and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, hosted a Safety of Journalists Conference to mark the 10 Year Anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists. Lord Ahmad led the UK delegation, highlighting the action we have taken, and joined a high-level panel to discuss best practice, and to elaborate on the UK's National Action Plan.

On 8 November, the UK Mission to the EU, with the European Endowment for Democracy, marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists by organising a panel discussion with leading investigative journalists from Ukraine, Serbia and Egypt, moderated by NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF). FCDO officials highlighted the UK's media freedom work and domestic action on Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP).

In late November, the Commonwealth Law Ministers met in Mauritius. They endorsed a revised set of Commonwealth Media Principles. This is the first time the

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https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1587744824911925248?s=20&t=Y9vqZfYrsI88YXWdUEw_uA

⁴ <https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1587841261561593857>
<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1587772143991140352>

⁵ [Media Freedom Coalition statement on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists 2022 – Media Freedom Coalition](#)

⁶ <https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/1587580494463516678?cxt=HHwWjICyjYyDnlgsAAAA>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/ukinbelarus/posts/pfbid02mEVkBTbZS2y8AN4WY3E4XkUWLsrfPySuyBhe83dMV8JCGeUs8gJk2A7TNX1Kl>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CkdB4mRouJE/>

<https://twitter.com/UKinBelarus/status/1587778080776589312>

Commonwealth has reached consensus on a text about the importance of the role of media and freedom of expression in good governance. The text of the Principles was negotiated and agreed within a Commonwealth Expert Working Group in 2021, in which the FCDO played a leading role. Our network of High Commissions lobbied widely for endorsement ahead of the Law Ministers' meeting.

Following the spotlight we put on media freedom, sustainability and the safety of journalists during our G7 presidency in 2021, we worked with Germany during their presidency in 2022 to ensure momentum was maintained. 2022 saw the first ever meeting of G7 Media Ministers. This Media Ministerial demonstrated G7 ambition to contribute actively to upholding human rights and strengthening democracies by ensuring media pluralism and freedom of expression in the context of globalisation and digital transformation⁸.

The FCDO works closely with domestic departments in our collective defence of media freedom and the safety of journalists. In 2021, we co-established, with the then-Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) a cross-governmental meeting of senior officials from the FCDO, DCMS, Home Office (HO), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and Cabinet Office (CO). In July 2022, they discussed progress on the UK National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists (DCMS lead); action to counter SLAPP (MoJ lead); work on various pieces of legislation, such as the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, Foreign Agenda Registration Action (HO lead), the Online Safety Bill (DCMS lead); and wider media freedom and sustainability work, including digital markets regulation and the BBC Mid Term Review (DCMS lead). The meeting also reviewed the assessment of the UK's domestic media freedom environment contained within RSF's World Press Freedom Index and what further steps can be taken to improve it.

The FCDO continued to coordinate closely with DCMS and the Home Office on the UK National Action Plan (NAP) for the Safety of Journalists, attending meetings of the National Committee, which oversees implementation of the Plan, in January and December. The FCDO committed in the Plan to share UK insights, strategies and best practice on the protection of journalists with other countries, through our international network and in international fora. We have also shared the UK's NAP in recent bilateral human rights dialogues with the governments of Morocco and the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

The FCDO facilitated contacts between the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the MoJ to discuss SLAPP. All parties are now actively sharing information and looking at different practices and approaches. Both international organisations and the EU Commission have welcomed the UK's active engagement.

⁸ [G7 Media Ministers Meeting Communiqué - United States Department of State](#)

The FCO must now demonstrate the impact, and sustainability, of its policies and initiatives. Currently, there are concerns that the FCO has allocated too few resources, given too little detail about how it will fulfil its campaign, and taken too passing an interest in how to make it sustainable. The FCO must move beyond the rhetoric to demonstrate impact in defending media freedom, and beyond assurances to demonstrate working structures that will sustain that impact beyond the current year, and the past tenure of Jeremy Hunt as Foreign Secretary.

The UK has built structures which will last and recognises that media freedom is part of a wider set of issues which concern maintaining and supporting a healthy information ecosystem, in particular ensuring access to online information. The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) continues to develop. The Netherlands assumed the co-chair role this year, and the new MFC secretariat is providing support to the co-chairs and members. The MFC currently has 50 members, with Norway and Sweden joining in 2022. The priority has moved to strengthening its existing membership and reaffirming the commitment of all members to the principles of the Global Pledge. In November, the MFC expelled Afghanistan due to severe restrictions on media freedom in that country, including the exclusion of women from the media, and Sudan's membership has been temporarily suspended, with the co-chairs encouraging the Sudanese de-facto authorities to work on improving their media freedom situation. The Coalition has now issued 32 statements, most recently on situations of concern in Iran, Venezuela, and marking the death of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Coalition statements have also marked key dates and events, for example World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for crimes against journalists.

The local diplomatic networks of the MFC have met to coordinate activity. In the Philippines, our Embassy continues to work with other MFC members, to advocate for media freedom including on cases such as Maria Ressa and her independent news outlet Rappler. The UK joined the MFC chairs' statement on the killing by unidentified gunmen of radio broadcaster and columnist, Percival Mabasa. The British Ambassador discussed Media Freedom with President Marcos during their introductory call in May 2022. In other countries, MFC members have privately lobbied to highlight the Coalition's interest in specific cases of journalists in detention and encourage resolutions.

To help ensure the Coalition's long-term stability, the FCDO has provided initial two year funding for an independent secretariat to support the MFC. The Secretariat was established in June and works directly to the co-chairs. It has recorded information including statistics on MFC activities, put into place core documents including case management and communication strategies and objectives. It is circulating a regular newsletter and keeps the MFC website up to date with information on the Coalition, including its statements and the activities of member states supporting journalists in exile. The Secretariat is working on an online toolkit to support activities by local MFC diplomatic networks.

The UK continues as co-chair, with USAID, of the Working Group (WG) on Media Development. The WG is currently focusing on improving the coordination of

member countries' support to the media in selected pilot countries, as well as organising input on media development to the Summit for Democracy process.

The High Level Panel of Legal Experts comprises distinguished lawyers who provide legal advice and recommendations to the Media Freedom Coalition and others for the purposes of promoting and protecting a vibrant, free and independent media. The Panel is independent of Government, but funded by the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund. It has produced four advisory reports on sanctions, consular, safe refuge and investigations which have been a valuable addition to the suite of material on such topics. In 2022, the Panel continued its bilateral engagement with states, delivering bespoke engagement plans which distil the recommendations contained within its advisory reports. The plans review the domestic legislative and policy environment relating to media freedom and represent a range of easily enforceable advice up to long-term aspirational targets, all aimed at working towards sustainable and concrete change. A number of states have taken up the Panel's recommendations including, on sanctions and strengthening into crimes against journalists. During September's UN General Assembly Ministerial Week, Deputy Chairs of the Panel co-hosted an event with the Czech Republic to encourage member states to offer emergency visas to journalists at risk. They also took part in discussions at the Vienna Conference on the Safety of Journalists, speaking on international legal mechanisms to protect journalists. The Panel is working on new reports which will provide advice on model elements for the drafting and interpretation of legislation in line with international human rights standards. These reports will address laws that are frequently used to target journalists and those undertaking journalistic activity, such as defamation, hate speech, blasphemy and national security.

To date, the Global Media Defence Fund has raised approximately US\$8 million from a growing number of donors, currently 16. Overall, it has supported more than 80 projects, helping 3,000 journalists globally. Projects range from legal clinics, lawyers' networks and other pro-bono media defence mechanisms to fostering strategic litigation against laws and judicial practice curtailing media freedom. As an example of their activity, in FY 21/22, the Fund distributed USD \$1.2 million to nearly 40 projects, which enabled 260 legal assistance cases, 100 peer support actions and 115 capacity building activities. In October 2021, the Fund established a Crisis Response Mechanism to provide time-sensitive emergency support to journalists and media in distress in countries experiencing unforeseen or sudden major crises affecting the media community. Earlier this year, the UK pledged an additional £250,000 to the Fund's Crisis Response Mechanism to help support journalists in Ukraine.

As part of the Summit for Democracy's Year of Action, governments, civil society groups and private sector actors around the world have formed multi-stakeholder platforms, called "Democracy Cohorts," to take concerted action toward commitments in areas of common interest. In recognition of the increasing importance of the Internet and online access to the free flow of information, including media freedom, the UK has led a cohort on Technology for Democracy which has focused on Internet shutdowns. In addition to this, Lord Ahmad announced in November that the UK would host the International Day for Universal Access to Information in 2023.

The UK should support training to the law-enforcement branches of countries so that they are willing and able to protect journalists.

The FCO should give more consideration to supporting an international mechanism for investigating and punishing the abuse of journalists when governments cannot or will not do so.

The Commonwealth Media Principles⁹, which we helped to negotiate, provide Commonwealth member states with a set of guidelines that seeks to uphold the shared values that are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. Important sections include Section 3 on ensuring freedom of expression is not unduly restricted by legislation or criminal sanction; Section 5, on the role of an independent judiciary upholding the right to freedom of expression; Section 7, on the need for states to put effective laws and measures in place for a safe and enabling environment for journalists to work without fear of attack, intimidation or interference; and Section 8, on member states acting decisively to end impunity through impartial, prompt and effective investigations. The Media Principles have still to be adopted by Commonwealth Heads of State, but the fact they have been endorsed by Commonwealth Law Minister gives us material on which to work with Commonwealth countries.

In Mexico, the British Embassy organised a meeting in February with Canada and the incoming co-chair of the MFC, the Netherlands, to discuss what further steps could be taken to support Media Freedom. The FCDO Media Freedom Co-ordinator, Kanbar Hossein-Bor, visited Mexico and met with the Foreign Ministry to explore how the UK could support action both at the federal and local level.

On 7 June, the FCDO Media Freedom Coordinator, participated in a consultation panel to establish a new National Prevention and Protection System for human rights defenders and journalists organised by UNESCO and the Mexican Government. In August, the Embassy discussed an initiative for legislation to prevent and protect against offenses against journalists with the President of the Human Rights Commission at the Chamber of Deputies.

In Malta, following one of the recommendations of the Public Inquiry into the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, and as part of the UK-Malta Policing Partnership, BHC Valletta helped coordinate Threats to Life Training for Maltese authorities (including security services, police and armed forces). The training led to the Malta Police Force drafting Threats to Life Standard Operating Procedures. The policy has been put out to Parliament but has been delayed due to criticism from NGOs, who felt there was insufficient consultation.

The UK supports existing mechanisms within the UN that support media freedom and does not see a need, at this time, to create a new mandate. However, we will

⁹ <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-11/Commonwealth%20Principles%20on%20Freedom%20of%20Expression%20and%20the%20Role%20of%20the%20Media%20in%20Good%20Governance.pdf?VersionId=sq5qmCa8bWpZcGZNnPeF00MxXWZ0YXZu>

continue to keep this under consideration in dialogue with other members of the MFC.

The FCO should do more in public to shame those who persecute the media. We refer to examples raised by our witnesses:

- ***the FCO should publicly press for an independent judicial public inquiry in Malta into the murder of the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.***
- ***the FCO has referred to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi “by Saudi Arabia”. It should build on that acknowledgement, and work with international partners, to achieve accountability through public criticism and sanctions against Saudi perpetrators.***
- ***Severe reductions in media freedom have taken place in Turkey. The FCO should designate Turkey a Human Rights Priority Country. It should criticise the violations taking place there publicly and forcefully.***

16 October 2022 marked 5 years since the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia (DCG) in Malta. Around this anniversary, the Government of Malta presented a series of reform bills before Parliament to address the recommendations of the public inquiry into Daphne’s murder. However, the proposals were criticised by international experts and Maltese civil society as weak, late and lacking in consultation.

The British High Commission in Valletta’s priority has been to support capacity building within the Malta Police Force through the UK-Malta Policing Partnership, and programme-funding to the DCG Foundation (an NGO that advocates for justice and the protection of journalists) to support the establishment of a “Public Interest Litigation Network,” training lawyers to work pro-bono, and to develop knowledge and exchange views with similar groups in the UK. Our High Commission have also funded the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning, focused on digital and media literacy for young Maltese people, including by facilitating meetings and workshops with the BBC, VICE, the Guardian and others.

We regularly encourage Turkey to address human rights concerns, including media freedom, at the most senior Ministerial levels. We regularly monitor trials where we have concerns about individual cases relating to media freedom, such as those relating to cases against journalists, and host media freedom events at our embassy in Ankara. We have encouraged the Turkish government to ensure legislation governing the use of social media is administered in an impartial, transparent and proportionate manner, and continue to monitor implementation. We have observed that the government has penalised media outlets, for infringing social media legislation, by reducing bandwidth and cancelling advertising.

The UK has always been clear that Jamal Khashoggi's murder was a terrible crime, and that Saudi Arabia must ensure such an atrocity can never happen again. We have consistently set out our grave concerns - both publicly and privately. The UK

has sanctioned twenty Saudi nationals involved in the murder under our global human rights regime. We will continue to raise concerns on the restricted media freedoms in the Kingdom, and call for the release of journalists, influencers and those who have been arbitrarily detained for exercising their freedom of expression.

During 2022, FCDO Ministers publicly commented on numerous cases where journalists have been under attack, including Lord Ahmad condemning the attacks on journalists operating in Ukraine and the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh; former Minister Vicky Ford commenting on the release of journalists in Khartoum; and the Foreign Secretary commenting on the threat to journalists in Iran. Statements have also been issued at a local level, supported by our Ambassadors and High Commissioners, in addition to statements issued by the Media Freedom Coalition.

The FCO should use sanctions to punish those who persecute the media, and coordinate with other countries on sanctions, to amplify their impact.

Over the past year, the UK's autonomous sanctions regimes have been a powerful tool in holding those who persecute the media to account. Asset freezes and travel bans have been imposed to target those who commit human rights violations against members of the media and suppress freedom of expression across the world.

Following the Myanmar coup in February 2021, under the Myanmar Sanctions Regulations 2021 the UK, along with Canada, the US and the EU announced sanctions on the nine military members of the military regime's governing body for their role in clamping down on pro-democracy activists, including journalists and civil society. More recently, Dr Thida Oo, Myanmar Attorney General, was designated for building cases against journalists and civil society.

Recent sanctions on Iran, which have been imposed in partnership with the US and EU included designation of the Communications Minister and the Chief of Iran's Cyber Police, who were designated for shutting down the internet in Iran, including disabling WhatsApp and Instagram, and banning the use of the Google Play app and virtual private networks (VPNs).

The UK has put in place unprecedented sanctions in response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. This includes sanctioning propagandists such as Margarita Simonyan and Vladimir Solovyov, and organisations spreading Russian lies and disinformation, sanctioning RT, Sputnik and the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company.

International cooperation is at the heart of UK sanctions policy. The UK will continue to seek opportunities for coordination with international partners on sanctions. This includes close partners such as the US, Canada, Australia and the EU. Sanctions are most effective when multiple countries act together to constrain unacceptable behaviour or coerce a target into changing their behaviour, or to send a political signal that such behaviour is intolerable.

The FCO should coordinate more closely with the Home Office to ensure that visas or asylum are not unduly denied to those journalists, and their associates or families, who are abused in their own countries. The Government should also consider a particular class of visa for journalists, threatened with violence to ensure journalists have the confidence to keep reporting, knowing they can make the judgement to leave when they need, not simply when they have the most chance of securing asylum.

The Home Office have advised that the Home Secretary's existing discretion to grant leave – for example in exceptional humanitarian circumstances – is sufficient to respond to such individuals.

It remains an HMG priority to help those Afghans who are eligible for resettlement to come to the UK. Since April 2021, over 22,800 people have been brought to safety from Afghanistan, including over 1,000 people who included some campaigners for women's rights, human rights defenders, Chevening scholars, journalists, judges and members of the LGBT+ community. This includes a number of journalists from the BBC and other UK media organisations and their immediate families, who have been resettled in the UK under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.

More widely, the UK is supporting independent media by supporting safe havens for those displaced by conflict and persecution; donating personal protective equipment, first aid training and equipment; providing safety training and advice on reporting from the frontlines of conflict; and providing psychological support for journalists.

The FCO should put the online and digital threats to journalists at the heart of their strategy. Journalists must be able to work online and offline, free from surveillance and intimidation, and confident in the security of their sources and data.

The FCO should provide training and/or technical assistance to journalists to counter harassment and intimidation, including online, designed in consultation with them.

The flow of media content into the digital space has increased the threats to, as well as opportunities for journalists and media freedom. For example, in Belarus in 2022 the authorities blocked 3,002 Internet pages, declared the content of over 778 Telegram channels, chats and other Internet resources to be extremist, and closed down over 160 Telegram channels. We have combined our media freedom work with other related work under our work to promote healthy information ecosystems. The Integrated Review commits us to "protect the right for all to share information and communicate freely and safely over the internet". We are working to counter the rise in Internet shutdowns and restrictions as a tool to restrict information flows, both internally and externally.

Over the past year, we have co-led, with Estonia and NGO Access Now, a Summit for Democracy Cohort on Technology for Democracy. A key strand of the Cohort's work is to bring together countries, companies and civil society to highlight the global problem of Internet shutdowns and seek ways in which we can push back against

authoritarian governments' attempts to control this space. The Cohort is working to set up an Internet shutdowns and restrictions portal. This will, for the first time, bring into one space clear and non-technical information about internet shutdowns and restrictions globally, allowing for greater advocacy and lobbying, including by governments. We have provided bespoke support and guidance to Posts, helping them to understand the issues involved, directing them to country specific information and facilitating civil society links, most recently for our Embassy in Tehran. We intend to work closely with Japan as G7 presidents to take forward the commitment we secured during our 2021 G7 Presidency to "improve G7 coordination, together with likeminded countries, civil society and the private sector, to address and respond to Internet shutdowns as they occur."

The FCDO funded a project by the International Centre for Journalists and the University of Sheffield which studied online violence against women journalists and identified key threat indicators to develop an early warning system to detect and predict offline and online violence targeting women journalists.

We have supported training to protect journalists, including online threats. The British Embassy in Mexico collaborated with UNESCO in the implementation of a project to provide training to journalists to develop local protection plans that identify and reduce the threats, including online threats, received by journalists and human rights defenders.

We have worked to highlight the importance of media freedom in response to actions of the government in El Salvador, which has used legislation, paid trolls on media platforms, and spying software to harass, deter, and in some cases prosecute critical voices including journalists. Our Embassy has organised events and initiatives to show public support for journalists and spotlight key issues, including journalists directly criticised by the government, and to involve them in senior visits. This activity has had an impact: for the first time a government representative, the Vice President, participated in an Embassy forum with UNESCO and the Association of Journalists of El Salvador. The Government of El Salvador has been keen to point out to the international community that no journalists have been arrested in recent months, although it should be noted that some have moved abroad during this time.

The Global Media Defence Fund's 2021 Call for Partnerships selected projects for 2022 focused on the threats to women journalists. Examples include:

- Training for at least 400 Chilean women journalists on their rights, and how to report harassment and gather evidence to support prosecutions. The project produced a manual for women journalists detailing their rights and how to defend them, based on international human rights standards;
- Support for a regional federation of African journalists to study existing safety policies for women journalists in Africa, how effective they are and to negotiate country-specific legislation and workplace policies to address the specific risks faced by women journalists;
- Training for women journalists in Thailand and Myanmar to strengthen their capacity to prevent or respond to legal challenges and specific risks, threats, and violence they face.

The FCO should consider further measures to address the financial weakness and vulnerability of media organisations around the world.

The FCO should consider widening the remit the Global Media Defence Fund further to support journalists trying to preserve their work and independence despite their financial vulnerability and malicious efforts to silence them by exploiting it.

In 2019, the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund was established with a specific focus on journalist safety because other pre-existing international funds for journalists were not addressing this.

The FCDO continued its strong focus on media development in 2020-21. The work we started in 2020, establishing the Media Freedom Coalition's Working Group (WG) on Media Development and helping to increase global attention to issues around media sustainability, is starting to bear fruit. The WG aims to develop standards and principles for effective donor support to the media. The principles have the potential to influence the wider prioritisation of media development spend. In 2022, the WG took the decision to route the process of agreeing new principles through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC). In November 2022 the OECD DAC's Governance Network (GovNet) agreed to take this on. It agreed a programme of work for the coming two years, which included a major focus on media development, and part of this was the establishment of a task force which would review and agree the principles. This was an important milestone towards bringing together stakeholders in the media development sector behind a common agenda.

A second focus of the WG on Media Development has been to begin to improve the coordination of MFC members' support to the media in specific countries. Building on the Coalition's 'Diplomatic Networks Initiative' which encourages members' diplomatic missions to work more closely together, the co-chairs and secretariat included media development in discussions with posts in several countries. There are early signs that cooperation is improving on the ground.

In line with our work as co-chairs of the WG, the FCDO has taken on leadership of a strand of work under the US-led Summit for Democracy's Media Freedom Cohort. The Media Freedom Cohort has three working groups to develop actions, initiatives and mechanisms that measurably and systemically advance media freedom. The UK is leading the working group on 'Bolstering Independent and Diverse Media', which will develop ideas in the area of media sustainability and resilience.

In 2022, the UK continued to support a range of programmes which worked to develop media resilience and improve the overall environment for the media sector in particular countries. In the past 5 years, the UK has provided over £500 million in ODA funding to media and to enhance the free flow of information. This includes our support to the BBC World Service, which is reported in the next section. The remainder of this section focuses on other UK support to the media both through ODA and through other programme support.

The UK-supported Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) programme has worked to support individual media outlets to become more resilient and to improve the wider environment in the media sector in three countries: Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Bangladesh. Following sustained work over the past two years with the Sierra Leonean Independent Media Commission, in 2022 the Government of Sierra Leone hosted a major National Conference on Media Viability and Investment. This brought together 300 media industry stakeholders from the private sector, government, the regulator, and civil society. The conference produced a series of recommendations which formed the basis of a 'National Action Plan for the media of Sierra Leone'. The Minister for Communications presented the action plan at UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day in May.

Under its Counter-Disinformation and Media Development programme, the UK is providing wide ranging support for independent media in the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe, including journalists reporting from hostile environments such as Ukraine, and those working from exile. We are supporting organisations from state broadcasters to regional and local media outlets to embed editorial standards, improve production facilities enabling media to broaden their reach on digital and social media platforms as well as engage new audiences, and diversifying revenue income of media organisations to aid their long-term sustainability.

UK posts across the network are providing funding for a range of journalist training and capacity building initiatives. For example, our High Commission in the Solomon Islands is providing capacity strengthening for media and communication practitioners across the Solomon Islands. This includes technical and editorial training to support the development of high-quality, accurate and independent journalism and strengthen public interest media. BBC Media Action will train Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation staff and Media Association of the Solomon Islands outlets in evidence-based, impartial reporting on elections, climate change, key development issues and conflict-sensitive journalism.

Sudan's transitional government signed the media freedom pledge in 2019. The military coup on 25 October 2021 against the civilian-led government reversed many freedoms and led to the suspension of Sudan from the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC). Our Embassy in Khartoum has demonstrated public support for journalists who have faced harassment. Our Embassy has convened a media freedom donor group, has funded the Thomson Foundation to deliver training to 30 journalists on reporting on the economy and the political transition, and to deliver a pioneering WhatsApp digital learning platform explaining misinformation/disinformation and how to counter it. The Embassy also provides funding for Dabanga, a bilingual independent media outlet, to produce programmes on governance, accountability and democracy. Dabanga makes news accessible to diverse audiences through shortwave, satellite TV, a website and social media which reach beyond the capital city Khartoum.

The Government should give a further extension to its funding of the BBC World Service beyond March 2020, to give the World Service greater financial certainty.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) strongly supports the work of the BBC World Service and values its role in bringing trustworthy content to audiences around the world, particularly where free speech is limited. The Integrated Review stated that the BBC's foreign language services are part of what makes the UK a leading source of soft power. BBC Brand Tracker data from 2021 demonstrates that the BBC remains the most trusted and reliable international news provider. The World Service now reaches 365m people weekly, an over 40% increase since the FCDO-funded World2020 programme began in 2016.

The FCDO is providing the BBC World Service with a flat cash three-year (2022-2025) spending review settlement of £94.4m annually. In 2022-23, this includes an additional £1.44m to counter disinformation in Russia and Ukraine. The FCDO has provided over £468m (2016-2022) via the World2020 programme, funding 12 language services and enhancements to services in Arabic, Russian and English. The 12 languages are: Afaan Oromo, Amharic (Ethiopia), Tigrinya (Eritrea/Ethiopia); Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Telugu (India); Igbo, Pidgin, Yoruba (Nigeria); Korean; and Serbian.

The BBC is having to make tough financial decisions in this challenging fiscal environment in which it is operating. On 29 September, the BBC announced their intention to transition to a "digital-first" organisation, including making a number of World Service languages digital-only. Audiences will still have access to the full range of 42 language services, but predominantly through digital platforms, which are fast becoming the most popular form of engagement. The BBC has reassured audiences that the World Service will continue to serve audiences in need ensuring those in countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Afghanistan have access to vital news services.