

## **Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

Every year, the commemoration of International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists highlights the grim reality in which many media workers operate, often facing threats and intimidation for their reporting. This year has brought a new set of challenges related to covering news in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While press freedom is critical to developing effective responses to the pandemic, some governments are using the global health crisis as an excuse to crack down on independent media, including crucial reporting on how governments are addressing the problem. When journalists are at risk, the right of citizens to access information is jeopardized. In crises such as COVID-19, access to accurate, reliable, and timely released information can save lives.

As highlighted at the Community of Democracies' recent event on Countering Malign Foreign Influence on Democracy, media freedom and fact-based reporting are vital to safeguard democracy against disinformation on COVID-19. The Bucharest Statement adopted on the Community of Democracies' 20th anniversary (June 2020) called on governments to end restrictions on journalists and media workers from reporting on the COVID-19 crisis and address disinformation by providing reliable information. They also stated that democracies should respond to the pandemic by renewed adherence to democratic principles of the CoD Warsaw Declaration. These principles include the press's right to report and disseminate information as well as the right of every person to freedom of opinion and expression.

The challenging times of the global health crisis may require extraordinary measures. But these must always be proportionate and compatible with fundamental human rights. Commemorating today's International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, I call on governments to uphold their duty to protect the press freedom and address the safety of journalists as a matter of urgency.