

“Journalists at Risk: How diplomatic missions can effectively protect journalists and safeguard media freedoms”

Side-event on the margins of the 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council

October 3, 2023

Remarks by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett

Dear Excellencies

Distinguished speakers and participants,

Governing Council Members of the Community of Democracies,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the side-event on **“Journalists at Risk: How diplomatic missions can effectively protect journalists and safeguard media freedoms”** held in the margins of the 54th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The event today is organized by the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I would also like to thank the United States for the financial support provided for this initiative.

The role played by independent journalists and media actors is crucial to informing the public. Journalists promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Principle 4 of the Warsaw Declaration, and their work contributes to the public debate and ensures an informed and engaged citizenry.

With this year’s celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of opinion and expression, and its corollary media freedom, remain crucial for the realization of other human rights.

According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index – which evaluates the environment for journalism in 180 countries and territories and is published on World Press Freedom Day (3 May) – the situation is “very serious” in 31 countries, “difficult” in 42, “problematic” in 55, and “good” or “satisfactory” in 52 countries. In other words, the environment for journalism is “bad” in seven out of ten countries, and satisfactory in only three out of ten.

Attempts to silence journalists and media workers increasingly occur in attacks online and offline, through legal harassment and increasing surveillance, and even in killings and unjust detention.

Diplomatic missions can play a key role in protecting journalists around the world. A Toolkit developed by the Community of Democracies and recently updated with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, aims at raising the awareness and providing guidance to personnel of diplomatic missions.

The Toolkit does not impose new obligations. It is meant to provide an overview of the current situation faced by journalists and suggest actions that – should the context and national legislation allow – could be undertaken by the diplomatic missions’ personnel to ensure the safety of journalists, including how to respond to their needs and what legal instruments are available to ensure journalists protection

Guidelines included in the Toolkit are intended to serve as a checklist, they are not a one-size-fits-all. These should be considered as tailorable options that diplomatic personnel can use based on journalists’ needs and considering the local context and legislation. The updated Toolkit is available in the Community of Democracies website.

I would like to once again thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its support in updating the Toolkit.