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Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the OSCE, the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna

1421<sup>st</sup> Permanent Council of the OSCE, 04 May 2023

**OSCE Joint Statement on World Press Freedom Day 2023**

Mr. Chair,

I give this statement on behalf of Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, the United Kingdom and my own country Switzerland.

On the occasion of the thirtieth year of the observance of the World Press Freedom Day, we would like to reiterate our commitment to media freedom as a central pillar for comprehensive security. Media freedom is a pivotal element of free, democratic and just societies and a key driver for the enjoyment of human rights, sustainable development and peace.

It is important to be reminded of the vital work that journalists and other media actors are doing every day and to acknowledge the sacrifices some have had to make.

Media freedom is facing increasing challenges in the OSCE region. Recent years have shown an increase in attacks, harassment and intimidation of journalists and other media actors, aimed at exerting influence over public opinion and silencing critical voices, particularly in Russia and Belarus.

This year's World Press Freedom Day stands against the backdrop of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which has been ongoing for more than a year now. We have seen the devastating effects it has had on freedom of expression and media freedom in several countries in the OSCE region. Independent media outlets are being banned. Journalists and other media actors are threatened, arrested and subjected to arbitrary, politically motivated trials. Several journalists and reporters have been injured and some have paid with their lives for reporting about the war from the ground.

At the same time, the media are used in several countries to disseminate propaganda and to spread disinformation. The war against Ukraine has further exacerbated a trend

that has already been evident for some time. Last year's edition of the World Press Freedom Index highlighted the increasing polarization in the media landscape – both within countries as well as between them. Disinformation and the spread of fake news is having numerous negative effects on security, creating division and leading to more polarized societies. It is harming social cohesion, contributing to the marginalization of members of minority groups and provoking harassment and discrimination. Disinformation also has long-lasting negative effects on democracies as it undermines public trust in democratic processes and institutions.

But, as the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of Media has repeatedly reminded us, censorship cannot be the answer to countering this worrying trend. The silencing of independent media only has one effect: it stirs up distrust towards state institutions and gives even more space to false conclusions.

The best tools we have to fight disinformation are independent media and quality journalism. Through a diverse media landscape, societies can have access to reliable, nuanced and verifiable information that promotes public discourse and transparency.

To conclude, we are convinced that for the promotion of comprehensive security, the protection of media freedom, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression overall, remains as relevant for the OSCE as ever. In this context, we would like to thank the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of Media for her vital work and express our full and ongoing support for her mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.