

**JOINT STATEMENT: MOSCOW MECHANISM INVOCATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS AND ABUSES IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS**

**As delivered by Ambassador Jocelyn Kinnear,
Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE,
to the Permanent Council**

Vienna, 23 March 2023

I take the floor also on behalf of the participating States that on 28 July of last year invoked the Moscow (Human Dimension) Mechanism on the Threats to the Fulfilment of the Provisions of the Human Dimension Posed by Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Russian Federation.

We thank the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia, the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for providing this platform to discuss with members of civil society the principles of media freedom as a central pillar of comprehensive security.

The report under the Moscow Mechanism revealed a clear link between internal repression of human rights and fundamental freedoms and external aggression. The report also disclosed that targeting independent media and freedom of expression played a significant part in preparing the ground for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Restrictions on media freedom by all branches of the Russian Federation's government have continuously increased over the last two decades, reaching new peaks since Russia began its full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022. According to the rapporteur, this crackdown brought about a "State monopoly on information in the Russian Federation". Russia's censorship laws, restrictions to access to information, the legislation on so-called "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" are used as tools to suppress civil society and to abolish press freedom and any form of dissent within Russia.

Any media outlet labelled as "undesirable" is effectively banned from operating on Russian territory under threat of criminal and administrative prosecution. The designation of the independent online media outlet Meduza as "undesirable" on January 26, is one of the most recent cases. We strongly condemn these practices of the Russian government to outlaw investigative media portals, as well as the continued wide-scale designation of media outlets, journalists and other media actors as "foreign agents".

The rapporteur further notes that “the increased pressure against independent media was triggered in particular by the fear of criminal prosecution after the introduction of the “fake news” and discreditation legislation in regard to the Armed Forces which made coverage of the war impossible.” The list of journalists tried and sentenced under these charges, some of them in absentia, is too long to list here, but let me name a few: Marina Ovsyannikova who managed to flee the country, but is facing a ten-year prison sentence in Russia; Maria Ponomarenko, facing a six-year prison sentence along with a five-year ban on journalistic activities; Andrey Novashov, according to credible media reports, sentenced to 8 months of correctional labor and banned from journalistic activities for one year. Other journalists are prosecuted under politically motivated charges of treason, spying, terrorist or extremist activities, such as Ivan Safronov who was sentenced to 22 years in a penal colony with aggravated conditions. We reiterate our call to the Russian authorities to release all arbitrarily arrested journalists and media actors, and to stop their relentless attacks on dissidents and ordinary citizens for expressing their opinions.

Media freedom is vital for the comprehensive security of the OSCE region. It is of utmost importance to protect the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including by members of the media, with all the means at our disposal and to clearly denounce violations of these rights.