



Media Freedom Coalition 2022 Activity Report

Prepared by the Media Freedom Coalition Secretariat
March 2023

Introduction

Formed in 2019 the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) now involves over 50 member countries from six continents, and these members have committed to working together to advocate for media freedom and the safety of journalists at home and abroad. MFC member countries act through a combination of advocacy, diplomatic interventions, encouraging and supporting legal reforms, international events, and making funds available for media freedom initiatives.

In July 2022 the MFC Secretariat was established – a dedicated team of staff that supports the Coalition through coordination, administration, communications, facilitating decision-making, and monitoring the activities of the MFC.

This report documents the actions of the Media Freedom Coalition that took place during 2022. These actions include those which are taken jointly by multiple member countries, under the auspices of the MFC, as well as actions taken by individual member countries on media freedom, such as domestic reforms.

It is important to note that **many activities of the Media Freedom Coalition cannot be shared publicly**, due to the sensitive nature of the work concerned. Where this is the case, the MFC Secretariat has aggregated the numbers of activities that have taken place in specific categories.

The MFC actions are presented under five key sections of [advocacy](#), [the diplomatic networks initiative](#), [legal reforms and other domestic actions](#), [Events](#), and [the Global Media Defence Fund](#). There is also a summary of the activities of the [Working Group on Media Development](#).

In an Annex to this report, we include responses and updates on the recommendations outlined in the [report](#) “Reset Required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years”. This evaluation was published in February 2022.

Advocacy

Cases and situations of concern

The MFC acts on specific media freedom cases, based on recommendations by civil society experts in the MFC Consultative Network and member states. These include both individual cases and situations where individuals practicing journalism, as well as media organisations, have come under threat. The MFC takes a range of actions in these cases, which may be public or private.

The number of cases acted on through central governments of the MFC in 2022 was **14**. This does not include cases in which embassies led the response, rather than central government.

Of the 14 cases acted on, **7** involved public actions and **7** involved private actions.

The seven cases that involved public action were:

- The media freedom situation in Hong Kong
- The media freedom situation in Myanmar
- The media freedom situation in Venezuela
- The killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh
- The media freedom situation in Iran
- The harassment of Iranian journalists working outside of Iran
- The detainment of former journalist Larysa Shchyrakova in Belarus

Joint statements

During 2022 the MFC published:

- **6** joint statements on specific cases
- **4** thematic statements
- **1** co-chairs' statement on the removal of Afghanistan from the Coalition

The case-specific statements were signed by **55 percent** of members on average, while the thematic statements were signed by an average of **98 percent** of members.

Media and social media activity

The Secretariat was able to monitor media and social media activity of case-specific statements from July 2022 onwards (when the Secretariat was established). Highlights include:

- **Statement on Iran:** 28k views on Twitter, and shared by accounts including Iran International English (149.5k followers) and actor and comedian Omid Djalili (348.5k followers).
- **Statement on Venezuela:** 9k views on Twitter, the statement was translated into Spanish by the news site [Infobae](#) and was covered by other Spanish-language news sites, including [Runrun.es](#) and [La Patilla](#). Leopoldo Lopez, opposition leader in Venezuela, [tweeted](#) about the statement to his 5.2 million followers. In January 2023 the statement was referenced by the Spanish news outlet [El Diario](#).
- **Statement on Shireen Abu Akleh:** 20k views on Twitter, and shared by Shireen Abu Akleh's niece, Lina Abu Akleh, in a [tweet](#) to her 16.7k followers.

Other feedback on statements

The [statement on Iran](#) included a paragraph on the harassment of Iranian journalists working outside of Iran – an issue highlighted by the Consultative Network (CN). The Public Media Alliance, a CN member, commented that “a number of journalists working outside of Iran expressed that they were very grateful for the inclusion of a paragraph on the harassment of journalists based outside of the country” and that “the statement was also referenced by journalists as important in terms of increasing global awareness of the issues of harassment”.

Speaking about the [statement on Venezuela](#), one journalist (remaining anonymous) told us, “it was quite well received, and I believe that it has added a grain in the effort to defend the work and to make the authorities aware that [journalists] are not alone.” They added that the statement was shared among their networks by the National College of Journalists and the Press Workers’ Union, “as an informative element that will help us members to know that we are protected internationally”. They suggested that the statement could have been more specific about instances of media freedom violations in the country.

The [statement on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh](#) received predominantly negative feedback with reference to the time taken to prepare and publish the statement as well as its content. This feedback contributed to the MFC evolving its approach to issuing public statements in time-sensitive cases, exemplified by the response to the case of **Larysa Shchyrakova in Belarus** in December 2022. Here, the MFC co-chairs issued [tweets](#) from their departmental Twitter channels within 3 working days of the case being raised by the CN, and other members were then able to amplify these. The response was well received by members of the CN who submitted the case.

Removal of Afghanistan from the MFC

The MFC Co-chairs published a [statement](#) on the removal of Afghanistan as a member country of the MFC in November 2022. This news was picked up by multiple media outlets in Afghanistan, including on [TV news](#) and [online](#), as well as more widely in the region, for example by the [Pakistan Observer](#). The removal of Afghanistan from the MFC also prompted a [response](#) from the Taliban.

Speaking to the Afghan news outlet [Hasht e Subh](#), one journalist said, “The removal of Afghanistan ... shows the severity of repression and the free flow of information, and Afghanistan cannot be a member of the assemblies where freedom, especially the freedom of the media, is defended under the rule of the Taliban.”

Diplomatic Networks Initiative

Embassies of MFC members come together as diplomatic networks in a range of countries to monitor the media freedom situation and take a variety of collective actions to protect and advance media freedom. They also collaborate and coordinate their actions with journalists, civil society, and other stakeholders in the countries where they are based.

Due to changes in staff at diplomatic missions, as well as the Secretariat being established only half-way through 2022, the numbers of activities provided here are likely an underestimate. With a full Secretariat team now in place, we expect to provide more comprehensive monitoring in 2023.

The Diplomatic Networks Initiative was originally established in **11** countries in 2021. (The full list of countries is not shared here, because of the sensitive nature of the work in some of these countries.)

Within these countries, in 2022, embassies of the diplomatic networks:

- held at least **22** meetings among themselves, sometimes also involving other in-country stakeholders including civil society and journalists, to share information and plan actions;
- carried out at least **40** actions on media freedom.

29 MFC member countries from **4** continents were involved in these meetings and activities. EU delegations were also involved in some diplomatic network activities.

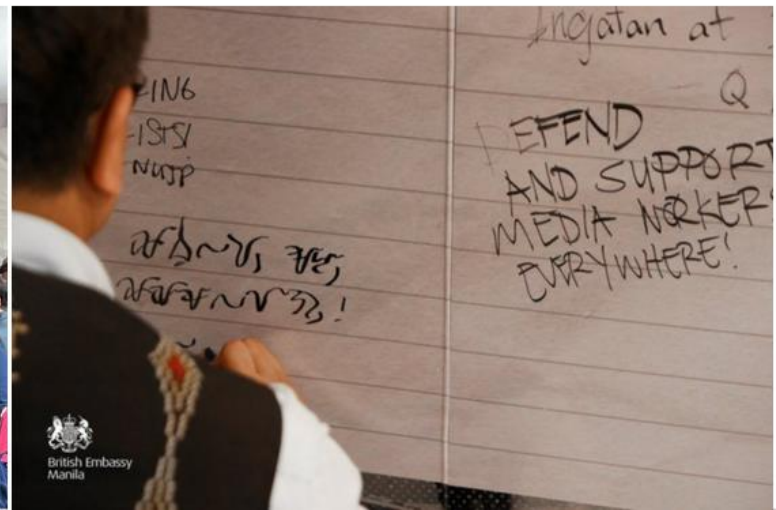
The diplomatic network actions included:

- Joint statements on thematic issues and specific cases of concern, including on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists and on the [killing of journalist Percival Mabasa in the Philippines](#).
- Acting on media freedom cases publicly, for example by meeting the journalists involved in cases of concern or highlighting cases of concern via social media. This was the case in the Philippines where MFC member embassies [met with journalists Maria Ressa and Glenda Gloria](#) of news outlet Rappler, and in Cameroon where embassies issued [tweets](#) in response to the killing of journalist Martinez Zogo.
- Acting on media freedom cases privately, through quiet diplomacy and raising cases during bilateral meetings with host governments.
- Events to highlight media freedom issues and the work of media professionals, such as a [media freedom reception](#) in the Philippines and an [award ceremony](#) to showcase the efforts of human rights advocates, including promoting freedom of expression, in Mexico.

- Meetings between MFC member embassies, journalists and civil society to discuss and share information on different media freedom issues.
- Coordinating between embassies on private responses to cases of concern.
- Political engagement, for example in Bangladesh MFC member missions participated in a [round table discussion on media freedom and human rights](#) with Bangladesh's Minister of Information, hosted by the UN Resident Coordinator's office and the Swiss Embassy.
- Trial observation, whereby embassies have monitored the court cases of detained journalists (details cannot be provided for safety reasons).
- Communications activities on media freedom, for example in Mexico where the Embassies of Canada and the Netherlands organised an [online campaign](#) for the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.
- Capacity building for journalists, for example in the Philippines where [a training for women journalists](#) was organised.
- Referring journalists to support programmes, such as the [Shelter City](#) scheme.
- Facilitating recommendations via the Universal Periodic Review process (UPR), for example this resulted in Canada making [recommendations to the Philippines on decriminalising libel](#) through this process in November 2022.

Embassies of MFC member countries have also, for example, engaged with other MFC member governments to exchange information and support domestic reforms. For more on this, see the section on [legal reforms and domestic actions](#). Embassies of MFC members have also carried out other actions on media freedom beyond those captured in this report, that are not counted within the scope of the MFC's Diplomatic Networks Initiative but that still promote media freedom in the countries where they are based.

Left: Seminar on the Reform of the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, held by the MFC Diplomatic Network in Mexico (led by Canada and the Netherlands), April 2022; Right: From a Media Freedom Reception held by the British Embassy in Manila, Philippines, November 2022



Legal reforms and other domestic actions

The MFC promotes the adoption and reform of policies and legislation that enable media freedom and support journalists under threat. As part of their membership, MFC member states are actively encouraged and supported to review their own legislation and look for ways to improve their domestic media freedom environment.

The work of MFC member countries on legal reforms is guided by the **High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (“High Level Panel”)**, the MFC’s independent advisory body comprised of a diverse group of lawyers and judges in the field of international law with the remit to provide expert advice to MFC member states.

The High Level Panel has produced a series of four [enforcement reports](#) for the MFC that focus on improving international mechanisms to enforce international human rights norms. The reports contain a series of recommendations for MFC member countries on the issues of:

- Providing safe refuge to journalists at risk
- Strengthening consular support to journalists at risk
- Promoting more effective investigations into abuses against journalists
- The use of targeted sanctions to protect journalists

In each of these four areas, the High Level Panel has identified a concrete body of recommendations – a range of easily enforceable advice up to long-term aspirational targets requiring multi-lateral action – all aimed at working towards sustainable and concrete change. The High Level Panel can distil the recommendations from the four advisory reports to produce bespoke engagement plans for MFC states, mapping out an extensive plan of engagement and priority actions for that state in relation to media freedom, categorised into short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. In 2022, the High Level Panel delivered bespoke engagement plans to **4 different MFC countries** and is currently finalising a further **3 engagement plans**, with more to be completed throughout 2023.

The High Level Panel also provides MFC member countries with legal advice in the form of legal opinions on draft legislation or legislation already in force, where media freedoms are engaged. They also provide amicus curiae opinions at the request of international courts or bodies in a media freedom case of general public importance.

In 2022, the High Level Panel established bilateral engagements with **15 member states** of the MFC to provide targeted legal and policy advice.

Implementation of High Level Panel recommendations

In 2022, the actions below were implemented by MFC members in line with the High Level Panel's recommendations from its four enforcement reports.

Providing safe refuge to journalists at risk:

- **Estonia** has committed to providing a number of **residency permits** for journalists at risk every year.
- **Lithuania** has provided over **300 emergency visas** to journalists in 2022.
- **The Czech Republic** has provided **800 emergency visas** to human rights defenders (HRDs), including journalists, between February 2022 – 2023. This effort was showcased at a side event to the 77TH Session of the UN General Assembly, co-hosted between the Czech Republic and the High Level Panel in September 2022. Through collaboration with relevant NGOs, the Czech Republic was able to process some applications within **72 hours**.
- **Canada** launched a dedicated refugee stream for HRDs in 2021, committing to 250 HRDs, as per the High Level Panel's recommendations and in consultation with the Panel. Canada has surpassed this to provide **270 visas** to HRDs in 2022. The High Level Panel is working with Canada to build upon the emergency capacity of these visas.
- **Latvia** has historically provided emergency support to journalists at risk and in 2022, provided **250 emergency visas** to journalists from Russia.
- **Costa Rica** has provided **visas to journalists at risk** from Nicaragua for many years. The High Level Panel hopes this momentum could be built upon to launch a mechanism.
- **Germany** has committed to providing support via the provision of **emergency visas** to journalists at risk from Afghanistan, Russia and Ukraine through the €3.5 million [Hannah Arendt Initiative](#). The High Level Panel hopes that Germany will soon broaden this initiative to accept journalists globally.
- **Kosovo** announced in December 2022 that it will offer shelter to **5 journalists** fleeing persecution in Afghanistan.

Strengthening consular support for journalists at risk:

- The High Level Panel is working with **Canada** on the **2nd anniversary of the Canadian Declaration against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations**.

Strengthening investigations into abuses against journalists:

- As a result of a motion of the **Dutch parliament** on December 8th, 2022, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to carry out a feasibility study into a possible Independent Investigative Task Force on the murder of journalists. This relates to

one of the key recommendations of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, featured in their report on [Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses Against Journalists](#).

- In response to this decision, the High Level Panel is currently producing a guidance document, mapping out how the Independent Investigative Taskforce would work in practice.

Using targeted sanctions to protect journalists:

- **Canada** levied the first use of Magnitsky sanctions to provide accountability in the case of arbitrary detention of a journalist.

Other policy reforms and domestic actions by MFC members

Beyond the implementation of High Level Panel recommendations, in 2022 MFC member states also worked on a range of other reforms and measures to advance media freedom domestically. Such actions “at home” are an important aspect of MFC membership.

We present below some examples to give a sense of the work being done across different countries and geographies. Please note that these do not represent the entirety of domestic actions by all MFC member states, or in any specific member state; this would be beyond the scope of this report.

Australia: The Australian Parliament passed legislation in November 2022 to establish an independent [National Anti-Corruption Commission](#). This contains a range of protections for journalists, including safeguards to protect the identities of journalists’ informants and uphold the public interest associated with a free press; the retention of legal professional privilege for legal advice given and communications made in the course of a person’s work as a journalist; and more stringent tests for issuing a search warrant in relation to a journalist, their employer or premises occupied or controlled by either.

Bulgaria: in 2022 an inter-ministerial working group was formed and met with media and journalists’ organisations to identify measures to overcome the problems they face in the exercise of their duties. The working group is now committed to a plan including trainings for the police, prosecutors, judges and lawyers, among others; establishing contacts points for journalists at Ministry of Interior district offices; compiling data on cases against journalists; and creating a register of lawyers specialising in the media sphere (or a section in the existing register). The working group also identified some legislative measures to continue work on, including a proposal for a unified register of media in which criteria for ownership are clearly spelled out, and developing a mechanism for transparency of allocation of public funds for advertising.

A working group within the Ministry of Interior was also established in 2022 to review the measures in place to ensure the safety of journalists. This has resulted in an action plan which aims to ensure the safety of journalists during protests and demonstrations, online safety and the prevention of online attacks and threats, and effective cooperation between state authorities, the media sector and civil society, etc. A working group on the media environment and access to information was also formed – among its first tasks is to harmonise the definitions and criteria for reporting on cases of crimes against journalists, media and civil society activists.

Chile: the government has sponsored and presented amendment proposals to the draft law for the Protection of Journalists and Communications Workers, which is based on a Model Law developed by UNESCO. Also, as a result of an agreement between the government and three public universities, the universities were requested to establish a working group with different actors (academic, social and trade unions) and to prepare a report to providing recommendations and proposals aimed at strengthening Chile's media system. The report was delivered in January 2023.

The government of Chile has developed a working agenda with the OECD, focussing on fake news and disinformation, and with UNESCO, focussing on issues such as the safety of journalists and diversity and pluralism in the media sector. The government also agreed an MoU with UN Women which contains an initiative to advance the eradication of gender violence against communication professionals, especially women and the LGBTIQ+ population.

Croatia: The Croatian Government allocated 6.5 million euros from its National Recovery and Resilience Plan to establish and strengthen a system of fact-checking and verifying information in public spaces, the media and on online platforms, as well as a system for public disclosure of data. The Croatian Agency for Electronic Media commissioned an independent expert study to inform this work. A public call for the development of the system was published on 31 December 2022.

The Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media also organised targeted workshops across the country for stakeholders in the media, judiciary and academia, aimed at raising awareness and harmonising judicial practice to recognise and counter SLAPPs. Local, regional and national media were also invited to the workshops to provide contributions and report on the discussions.

Greece: In May 2022, multiple government ministries signed an MoU on the safety of journalists, agreeing on a common framework of actions including legislative and non-legislative initiatives. To implement the MoU a Task Force was established comprising representatives from public organisations, the National Broadcast Company, journalist

associations, CSOs and academia. The priorities of the Task Force, which meets regularly, include the safety of journalists at the workplace and in conflict areas, digital security, combatting impunity for crimes committed against journalists and the protection of women journalists.

Maldives: His Excellency Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, President of the Maldives, met with members of the Maldives Journalists Association following their concerns over the Evidence Act ratified in 2022, and has announced his decision to amend the Act in order to address the concerns of journalists.

Sierra Leone: in April 2022 the first ever [National Media Viability and Investment Conference](#) was convened with active participation from a range of stakeholders, including government, regulatory institutes, media outlets, civil society and the commercial sector. It resulted in a 7-point action plan for achieving progress in areas including legislation and regulation, government policies and actions that affect the ability of media to operate freely and addressing gender gaps in the media. The national action plan also called for government and development partners to commit to a National Fund for Public Interest Media, where the government allocates 3% of the annual national budget and engages with development partners to seek complementary support for the fund.

Sierra Leone also launched a national comprehensive framework on the safety of journalists in August 2022, aimed at setting out the various mechanisms to ensure the safety of journalists in the country.

Slovakia: Slovakia's Ministry of Culture collaborated with the Dutch embassy in Slovakia to organise workshops on the safety of journalists, engaging public servants as well as media workers. The aim was to ensure public servants in Slovakia know how journalists work, and are aware of the issues and threats facing them. The Netherlands has specifically been sharing experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of [PersVeilig](#), a platform for journalists in the Netherlands to report threats or violence.

Switzerland: In 2022, Switzerland started its process of drawing up a National Action Plan on the safety of media professionals. The measures of the action plan are developed by the Federal Office of Communications in close cooperation with the media industry. Several meetings were organized with representatives of the media industry over the past year for this purpose. The action plan will address four overall topics: Protection against threats and hate speech on the internet, physical protection, protection against abusive legal actions and better recognition of the role and profession of media professionals.

United Kingdom: In 2022, the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport conducted the Journalist Safety Study with the National Union of Journalists and the Society of Editors to understand the scale and impact of abuse experienced by journalists operating in the UK. UK police forces also worked with the media sector on a public order training event for the police which was attended by media personnel to help improve understanding of their respective roles at public order events. 22 police forces across the UK have appointed journalist safety liaison officers – both one operational role and one communications role. A further 16 have appointed designated safety liaison officers with solely a communications role. The National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) has collaborated with UK police forces and the NUJ to develop training products aimed at developing journalism students' practical understanding of engaging with police forces. In Northern Ireland there are two Journalist Safety Officers and a Journalist Safety Group has been established and in Scotland a single Journalist Safety Liaison Officer has been appointed.

The UK Government also ran a Call for Evidence on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and published its response on 20 July 2022. The Government intends to introduce in legislation key measures to end this abuse of the legal system, including: a new statutory definition of SLAPPs, an early dismissal process, and costs protection for defendants.

Events

The MFC organises and takes part in national, regional and global events on media freedom issues. In 2022, the MFC:

- hosted or co-hosted **2** events on media freedom
- co-hosted **1** session at the annual World Press Freedom Day conference
- was represented in a speaking capacity at **2** further events.

Global Conference for Media Freedom, Tallinn

The [Third Global Conference for Media Freedom](#) was hosted in Tallinn from 9–10 February 2022 by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Estonian Institute of Human Rights. The conference provided a forum for meetings and discussions to strengthen joint efforts in defending media freedom and human rights worldwide. It was attended in person by 350 representatives from governments, civil society, media and academia, with another 400 participating virtually.

An MFC member ministerial meeting was held on the first day of the conference. 44 member states were represented, with 23 participating in person and 21 virtually. Sweden and Norway announced their joining of the MFC during the meeting and a [joint communiqué](#) was released by MFC members highlighting the event and key messages. The conference also included a [pledging event](#) featuring commitments to defend media freedom, where 18 countries made pledges. In addition to the main programme, there were also 15 side events, mainly organised by media and civil society.

Left: Global Conference for Media Freedom, Tallinn, February 2022; Right: UNGA High Level Week event on “Upholding Democracy and Human Rights in the Face of Rising Disinformation”, New York, September 2022



UN General Assembly High-Level Week side-event, New York

In September 2022, Canada and the Netherlands as co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition co-hosted a side event during the UN General Assembly High-Level Week, alongside the [Freedom Online Coalition](#) and [International IDEA](#). The event focused on upholding democracy and human rights in the face of rising disinformation. It featured keynote speeches from Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, and Wopke Hoekstra, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

The expert panel was moderated by Robyn Kaplan of the Data and Society Research Institute and featured Can Yeginsu, Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, Kevin Casas Zamora, Secretary General of International IDEA and Teresa Hutson, Vice President, Technology and Corporate Responsibility at Microsoft.

World Press Freedom Day Global Conference, Punta Del Este

The MFC co-hosted a session as part of the World Press Freedom Day Global Conference held in Uruguay from 2-5 May 2022, alongside the [Freedom Online Coalition](#). The session was titled “Digital Authoritarianism and Technology-facilitated Threats to Journalists and Human Rights Defenders”.

Opening remarks were given by Wopke Hoekstra, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Government of the Netherlands. Speaking at the event were Jeffrey Marder, Executive Director, Human Rights and Indigenous Affairs Policy Division, Global Affairs Canada; Can Yeginsu, Deputy Chair, High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom; Quinn McKew, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19; Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; and Lea Kaspar, Executive Director, Global Partners Digital, Freedom Online Coalition. The event was moderated by Veronica Ferrari, Global Policy Advocacy Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications.

International Journalism Festival, Perugia

The International Journalism Festival is Europe’s biggest media event, with the 2022 festival comprising 252 sessions and 682 speakers over a 5-day programme. The MFC was represented at a panel event titled “[How can news outlets’ editorial independence be safeguarded in an era of declining revenues?](#)”, where Kanbar Hossein Bor, Deputy Director of Democratic Governance and Media Freedom Co-ordinator for the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, spoke as part of the panel.

High-level Conference on the Safety of Journalists: Protecting media to protect democracy, Vienna

The [high-level conference](#) on the "Safety of Journalists: Protecting media to protect democracy" took place in Vienna on 4 November 2022, marking the tenth anniversary of the [UN Plan of Action](#) on the Safety of Journalists. The event was organised by the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs in cooperation with UNESCO and OHCHR. There were over 400 participants in attendance, including Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Media, key stakeholders from international organisations, civil society and academia.

Bahia Tahzib-Lie, Human Rights Ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands - Co-chair of the MFC – spoke on a panel titled “Strengthening the implementation of the UN Plan of Action - Prevent-Protect-Prosecute”, alongside Can Yeginsu, Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom.

High Level Panel Events

The MFC also collaborates on events with the High Level Panel of Experts on Media Freedom. In addition to the events above, the High Level Panel organised or was represented at the following events in particular:

- The European Commission’s **Third European Conference on Democracy and Human Rights** in May 2022, where Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel, Can Yeginsu, spoke on the panel “Protecting the European Order: How can we expect rules to be respected when judgments of breaches of these rules are not properly implemented?”, alongside Thomas Byrne, Minister for European Affairs of Ireland and other speakers.
- **UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2022**, where the High Level Panel hosted the event “SILENCED – Democracy, Journalism and Censorship in the Digital Age: An Interactive Dialogue with the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom”, and Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel, Catherine Amirfar, spoke at an event hosted by Reporters without Borders, “Surveillance out of control: How to put an end to the Pegasus Crisis”.
- **“Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk in an Increasingly Dangerous World”**, a UN General Assembly High-Level Week side event organised by the Czech Republic and the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom on 22 September 2022.

- High Level Panel members, including Deputy Co-Chairs Catherine Amirfar and Can Yeginsu, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Director of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Catherine Anite, Founding Director of the Freedom of Expression Hub and Nadim Houry, Executive Director of the Arab Reform Initiative, also spoke at a number of sessions during the **Third Global Conference for Media Freedom** in Estonia in February 2022.

Global Media Defence Fund

[The Global Media Defence Fund](#) (GMDF), initiated by MFC members and administered by UNESCO, supports not-for-profit organisations around the world in the implementation of local, regional, and global projects that seek to bolster journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom through relevant investigative journalism and strategic litigation.

Since 2020, the GMDF has supported almost **120** projects around the world through financial grants totalling **USD \$4 million** to support relevant stakeholders undertaking or upscaling local, regional, and global initiatives. **USD \$1.3 million** was made available in financial grants for projects selected under the fund's 2022 Call for Partnerships.

To date, over **3,000** journalists, **1,000** lawyers and **120** CSOs have benefitted directly from activities supported by the GMDF. As a result of these activities, there have been:

- Over **1,000** cases of providing legal assistance to journalists
- Over **150** investigations of crimes against journalists
- Over **70** instances of strategic litigation undertaken to contribute to standard-setting precedents on freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

In 2022, the GMDF also rolled out its Emergency Response Mechanism for Afghanistan and Ukraine which, combined with other resources, supported initiatives such as the implementation of [new emergency measures to protect journalists in Ukraine](#).

The Global Media Defence Fund has received funding from **16** countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Working Group on Media Development

The MFC's Working Group on Media Development ensures that the MFC's work on media freedom incorporates issues relating to media development, such as the skills and capacities of media outlets and their financial viability. These issues are strongly linked to the ability of journalists and media outlets to resist restrictions on their freedom to operate. During 2022, the working group's primary activities were:

- Highlighting and contributing to the process to renew the principles on effective support to journalism and media, a set of principles that aim to guide donors in their media assistance strategies. The process is being led by the Global Forum for Media Development with support from the Centre for International Media Assistance. The process to develop the principles has been adopted into the OECD DAC GovNet programme of work for 2023–24.
- Promoting coordination between donors that support independent media and relevant media programming. This has begun by promoting coordination through the existing diplomatic networks of the MFC.
- Leading on one of the three working groups within the Media Freedom Cohort of the Summit for Democracy process. The Media Freedom Cohort is one of a number of cohorts established by the Summit during 2022, and it aims to generate media freedom commitments from government, civil society and the private sector. The MFC's Working Group on Media Development has taken a lead on the Cohort's third working group on "Bolstering Independent and Diverse Media."

Annex

Responses to evaluation recommendations

In February 2022 the [report](#) “Reset Required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years” was published. The evaluation included a series of recommendations for the MFC. Since its establishment in July 2022, the MFC Secretariat has been responsible for responding to these recommendations in line with the MFC’s priorities.

The six recommendations are below, together with responses and updates from the MFC Secretariat.

Recommendation 1: The MFC should formally agree and implement a clear and transparent process for determining which ‘situations of concern’ it chooses to highlight in its joint statements.

This case management policy should clarify: (a) the criteria and timeline for selecting cases; (b) the process for providing feedback to the CN (Consultative Network), when the cases they suggest are not adopted; (c) an obligation for states and their embassies to nominate cases, rather than only the CN; (d) that all cases highlighted by the CN are shared with the entire MFC, even if no action is taken; and (e) the process to be adopted for highlighting systemic abuses of media freedom.

Response: This recommendation covers two distinct, though related issues: (1) the process for managing cases that are submitted to the MFC, and (2) how decisions are made on whether to issue a joint statement on a particular case.

On point (1), the MFC Secretariat has worked with the CN and MFC co-chairs to develop an agreed process for managing cases. The process is likely to develop further over the coming months as lessons continue to be learned. The CN has its own criteria for case submission, and the Secretariat is working on the criteria for MFC members to submit cases. In any case, MFC members have already been submitting cases as well as the CN. The case process also includes a step for providing feedback to the CN, e.g. on recommended actions. The mechanism for case submission allows for situations to be highlighted in which there are systemic abuses of media freedom. Some submitted cases are shared with the entire MFC, however due to sensitivities it is not always possible, or recommended, to do so.

On point (2), the decision to issue a joint statement is made based on a number of factors including whether a joint statement has been requested, the potential for a joint statement to positively influence the case while doing no harm, and the current capacity of the MFC to draft and consult on a joint statement. This means there is no simple “threshold of severity” above which the MFC would issue a joint statement, although the severity of a case is another key factor that is considered.

Due to the time taken to prepare joint statements, the MFC is now taking a more flexible approach to raising its voice. For example, MFC members may coordinate raising their voice on official social media accounts. This report features more detail on this in the “Advocacy” section.

Recommendation 2: The MFC should provide a substantive response to each of the advisory reports published by the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, detailing how and when MFC members intend to implement their recommendations.

Response: Individual states of the MFC have been responding to, and implementing, some of the recommendations of the High Level Panel, and this work is continuing. The High Level Panel has distilled the recommendations to produce bespoke engagement plans for MFC states, mapping out an extensive plan of engagement and priority actions in relation to media freedom, categorised into short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. The status of this work is provided elsewhere in this report.

Recommendation 3: The minimum requirement for retaining membership of the MFC should be strengthened to include, for example: adopting a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, contributing to the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund, adopting a certain number of recommendations from the High Level Panel, and signing a significant proportion of the MFC’s joint statements. Members that do not respect the principles contained in the Global Pledge should be monitored closely leading to swift suspension or expulsion.

Response: Since the MFC Secretariat began, the focus has been on ensuring that processes are fit for purpose in cases where the Global Pledge is not being respected. Afghanistan was ejected on these grounds in November 2022. The Secretariat is currently working with the MFC’s leadership to review these processes and ensure they are carried out in a more timely manner if needed in the future, and ensure that there are multiple options available that can fit the context (for example, consultation or assistance to address media freedom issues).

Regarding the requirements for retaining membership, it is important to be mindful of the need for an inclusive Coalition that can accommodate countries with different levels of capacity to engage in different ways. The Global Pledge does currently

provide a framework for the inclusion of a broad range of countries, as well as the removal of a country when needed.

Recommendation 4: The MFC should implement a communications strategy which improves its online presence and pro-actively raises the profile of the Coalition and its work (especially its joint statements and the work of the High Level Panel), and facilitate more frequent communications with the Consultative Network and other relevant stakeholders.

Response: The MFC Secretariat has prepared and now implements a communications strategy which covers both external communications (including raising the profile of the Coalition and its work) and internal communications (including regular communications with MFC members and key stakeholders). There are now more frequent communications with MFC stakeholders, including weekly updates to the Consultative Network on cases of concern. The MFC's communications also highlight the work of the High Level Panel.

Recommendation 5: The MFC's current 'diplomacy-heavy, grant-light' approach should be re-set to include a much stronger emphasis on providing financial support for media sustainability.

Response: In 2019 the MFC established the Global Media Defence Fund, which is administered by UNESCO, and consistently encourages its members to provide financial contributions to this fund. However, it is important to note that not all MFC member countries are in a position to do so. Furthermore, the MFC believes in the importance of an inclusive coalition, comprising countries with different levels of capacity to engage. The MFC will continue to seek to maximise support for the Global Media Defence Fund, but at the same time will emphasise the range of ways in which member countries can take action to promote media freedom, not only through the provision of financial support.

Recommendation 6: The MFC should clarify the theory of change underpinning its activities and institute a system of monitoring, evaluation and learning to improve the coherence and effectiveness of its work. In particular, the MFC must ensure that its actions are informed by an understanding of the complex, dynamic and diverse priorities of the journalists and media workers around the world.

Response: The MFC Secretariat has worked with the MFC and its various stakeholders to update the [objectives](#) of the MFC to ensure that they describe the Coalition's desired changes with respect to media freedom. The Secretariat has also set up a basic system of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) to ensure key activities, outcomes and feedback related to these objectives are gathered and used. This has

already resulted in lessons learned, such as the MFC's evolving approach to speaking out on cases of concern. The MEL system will be further refined in the coming months.

Measures taken to ensure the MFC's work is informed by the realities faced by journalists and media workers include: (1) the Consultative Network provides monthly recommendations of research, reports and other important resources, which the Secretariat then shares with MFC members via its monthly network newsletter; (2) the MFC Secretariat shares resources from UNESCO and other organisations with members, as well as information on events where such information and insights are shared; (3) as part of the diplomatic networks initiative, MFC member embassies consult with media workers and civil society on their actions – they have also been provided with a toolkit with guidance on how to do this. Furthermore, many MFC members' domestic actions are informed through consultation with journalists and media workers – some examples are featured in this report in the "Legal reforms and other domestic actions" section.