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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1226th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 May 2019

On World Press Freedom Day

Mr. Chairperson,

Tomorrow is World Press Freedom Day, proclaimed by a decision of the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. The importance of this day is hard to overestimate. A free, independent and pluralistic press is a necessary component of any democratic society.

Unfortunately, the modern information sphere faces threats to security of an unprecedented scale and degree of risk. In that connection, we consider the decision on the safety of journalists adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Milan to be extremely timely and hope that participating States will duly live up to these commitments.

A particularly intolerable situation regarding freedom of speech and the safety of journalists has developed in Ukraine, where media workers continue to experience all kinds of discrimination, including physical violence. The Ukrainian Government is making no attempt to rectify the catastrophic situation and continues to establish a totalitarian system with regard to the press, purging the Ukrainian media space of undesirable sources of information. The highpoint was reached with the arrest of Kirill Vyshinsky, head of the news portal RIA Novosti Ukraine. He has already been detained for over a year on preposterous, false and absurd charges of treason and other violations of criminal statutes. The serious problems with press freedom in that country were also spoken of by Sergey Tomilenko, Chairman of Ukraine's National Union of Journalists, during the conference on the safety of journalists held here on 12 April.

The murders of Anatoly Klyan, Anton Voloshin, Igor Kornelyuk, Andrey Stenin, Andrea Rocchelli, Oles Buzina, Sergey Dolgov, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet and many others remain unsolved. With the complicity of the Ukrainian and United States authorities, the notorious Mirotvorets website continues to operate. Inclusion in the "blacklist" on this site represents a direct threat to the lives of press workers.

The situation with regard to freedom of the media cannot be described as satisfactory in a number of other OSCE States either. Among the recent examples is the operation in the United Kingdom to detain Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks.

The organization US Press Freedom Tracker has noted a rise in the number of crimes committed against media representatives in the United States of America. Furthermore, in the 2018 Reporters Without Borders report, the United States was mentioned for the first time as one of the most deadly countries for press workers on account of the murder of six journalists there.

There are also cases in the United States of discrimination against Russian media. The authorities in Washington censor social media under the pretext of combating disinformation. The British authorities continue to foment an atmosphere of “toxicity” with regard to Russian mass media. There is a large-scale campaign in Germany to discredit Russian media. Politicians in France, including President Macron, do not refrain from politically motivated utterances about our media. Russian journalists accredited there are exposed to overt discrimination. One of the latest outrageous incidents was the demand by the French organizers of the Franco-Russian Trianon Dialogue forum in Versailles on 15 April to exclude Russia Today and Sputnik from taking part. This policy by the French authorities incites hatred and radicalism towards journalists, threatening their physical safety. One consequence of this was a letter threatening the journalists working at the television station Russia Today France, which it received on 19 March.

During the violent dispersal of the “gilets jaunes” demonstration yesterday, RIA Novosti correspondent Victoria Ivanova was hit by the police on the head and arms, although she was clearly wearing a press badge. According to Reporters Without Borders, over 90 journalists have been victims of police brutality since the start of the “gilets jaunes” protest movement in France.

We urge Mr. Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, to carefully monitor all violations of the rights of Russian journalists and to react publicly to them.

We consider the campaign to segregate the press, dividing it into “right” and “wrong” under the pretext of combating propaganda and fake news, to be unacceptable. We agree with the view of Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the former OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and now Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, that propaganda should be countered not through prohibitions but through the dissemination of genuine information. In that regard, the Journalism Trust Indicators and the International Declaration on Information and Democracy by Reporters Without Borders are worrying. We believe that under the guise of concern for democracy and “honest journalism”, such steps could be used to introduce censorship and suppress political dissent.

There are also problems with press freedom and the safety of journalists in Russia. We do not hide this. However, we are doing everything possible to prosecute those responsible for attacks on media workers, monitor violations and work closely with the relevant international institutions, including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Thank you for your attention.