



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

The role of media in conflict and humanitarian crises, reflecting on International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law

Vienna, 17-18 March 2025

ANNOTATED AGENDA

BACKGROUND

In the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the participating States have recognized the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for peace, justice and wellbeing. In addition, they have consistently recognized the essential importance of democratic institutions, as highlighted in foundational commitments such as Copenhagen 1990 and Moscow 1991, which underscore the significance of independent media and a vibrant civil society as cornerstones of democracy.

Media can play a key role in promoting human rights, diversity and equality, as well as in enhancing social cohesion and peacebuilding. This was highlighted by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and other international freedom of speech mandate holders in their Joint Declaration on Media Freedom and Democracy in 2023.

In the context of conflict and humanitarian crises, independent media play an essential role in informing the public about events and developments on the ground, in supporting the documentation of possible violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law and in contributing to accountability efforts. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has shown how important the work of journalists is. In addition, the numerous attacks on journalists reporting from the war zones in Ukraine and other conflict affected regions in the OSCE highlight the need to shine a light on the safety risks and dangers journalists face.

This SHDM will serve as a platform for OSCE participating States, civil society, media professionals, state actors, and international organizations to discuss and address these complex challenges. Discussions will focus on strategies to ensure journalists' safety, also in times of crises and in conflict situations, strengthen their role in countering polarization, and ways to support independent media in the AI-driven information landscape to better serve the public interest. Participants will explore pathways to strengthen media literacy, protect groups in vulnerable situations, and support the critical role of media in ensuring accountability and supporting conflict resolution processes.

Through a collaborative approach among panellists and participants, this SHDM seeks to provide actionable recommendations to bolster media freedom, enhance the safety of journalists, reinforce the media's role in conflict and humanitarian crises and in fostering a resilient and informed OSCE region. By underlining the need to respect the principles and commitments related to media freedom and the safety of journalists, by responding to challenges in the information space linked to new technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) and by preparing

for the future and building societal resilience, the SHDM aims to identify good practices and areas for further engagement in order to strengthen the role of media as cornerstone of democracy and security and its important contribution to promoting accountability.

Day 1

14.00 – 15.00

OPENING SESSION

Opening remarks

Introductory addresses

Technical information

15.00 – 17.00

SESSION I: Respect: The role of media in conflict and humanitarian crises, including contribution towards accountability

Free and independent media not only facilitate access to information but also reinforce democracy, accountability, and collective security. During humanitarian crises and armed conflicts, journalists are at the forefront, delivering essential information that empowers society to make informed decisions. Their safety is essential to ensure they can carry out their work freely, independently and without fear of violence or reprisal. Journalists and other media workers carrying out their duties in situations of armed conflict are recognized by international law as civilians and must be protected as such, as underlined by OSCE participating States in MC Decision 3/18. Deliberate attacks on journalists during armed conflict undermines the critical role of the media and constitute war crimes under international law.

Journalists also contribute to documenting violations of international law. The primary role of journalists is to inform the public. In this role, journalists covering conflict zones often also become first-hand witnesses to alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, such as the deliberate targeting of civilians and/or civilian objects. As such, they are in a position to document violations not only for journalistic purposes but also to gather information that might later be submitted to a court. Moreover, journalists play an essential role in informing the public about judicial processes and the work of judges, prosecutors, or defence counsel, promoting accountability for violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law. Their work thus advances the respect for human rights and the principle of the rule of law.

Questions for discussion can include:

- What protections are provided in international humanitarian law and international human rights law for journalists working in situations of armed conflict?
- What are the main threats faced by journalists in times of conflict?
- What can be done to make the work of journalists and their media organizations safer?
- How can journalistic work support judicial processes toward promoting accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law?
- How do courts and media cooperate in informing the public about the results of judicial proceedings concerning accountability for violations of international law?
- How do courts utilize and consider evidence submitted by journalists and reporters, and what legal considerations restrict admissibility?

Day 2

10.30 – 12.30

SESSION II: Respond: Addressing challenges in the media and information landscape, including disinformation

Today's information space is filled with misinformation and disinformation exacerbated by the advancement of artificial intelligence. Especially in times of conflict, mis- and disinformation are being used to mislead the public and sow distrust. Strong investigative journalism, fact checking initiatives and open data investigations are some important tools to respond to these worrying developments. Studies have shown that strengthening free, independent, public interest journalism is the best antidote to the AI-driven amplification of disinformation and misinformation, in combination with a regulatory framework that ensures visibility and accessibility of journalistic content online. Equipping news media and journalists with tools to address these challenges is an urgent priority, alongside the need to identify effective strategies to promote healthy online information spaces. Equally, the importance of media literacy needs to be highlighted in this context, as it provides the basis for critically assessing and sharing online information.

Questions for discussion can include:

- What are the main challenges in the media and information landscape that pose a threat in times of conflict and humanitarian crises?
- What regulatory tools can be established and applied to respond to disinformation?
- What effective strategies are there to promote healthy online information spaces?
- What is the specialized role of public service media in times of crisis?
- What do we need to visibly and effectively promote public interest journalism, in the age of AI?

14.30 – 16.30

SESSION III: Prepare: Building societal resilience through independent journalism and media literacy

In the long term, the unique value of independent journalism extends beyond crisis coverage to actively fostering societal cohesion and countering polarization by creating space for societal dialogue that can improve understanding of differing perspectives. However, there are many barriers and a lack of institutional support, which prevents independent journalists from effectively carrying out their work. Media self-regulation is essential to strengthen independent journalism. In addition, promoting media literacy as a crucial element for equipping the public with the necessary knowledge and capacities to critically access and share information is essential in building resilience and countering these negative trends.

Questions for discussion can include:

- At a time when the media are facing decreasing trust and mis/disinformation is on the rise, how can independent media become more resilient and dependable?
- What are the possibilities for journalism in a polarised world? What role can it play to respond to this polarisation?
- Why are news deserts a problem, and what can we do about them?
- What are some effective tools and methods for media literacy, and is a particular approach needed in times of crises?

16.30 – 17.30

CLOSING SESSION

Reports from the working sessions

Comments from the floor

Closing remarks

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