

I serve as one of two deputy chairs to that Panel, and I am delighted to have join us today, my fellow Panel members, Hina Jilani on my right, Dario Milo on my far right, and Karuna Nundy, on my immediate left. I am also extremely pleased that we are joined today by Jeffrey Marder from Global Affairs Canada, to the right of Hina Jilani, and to my very left, David McCraw from *The New York Times*.

I want to start, Jeffrey, with a question to you. Could you tell us a little bit more, please, about this Media Freedom Coalition, why it was created, what it seeks to achieve?

#### **REMARKS BY JEFFREY MARDER**

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I would be happy to, and thanks, Can. You sketched out the beginnings of what I like to call a “multi-stakeholder thematic coalition” focused on media freedom. It was established three years ago almost, in July of 2019, at the initiative of Canada and the United Kingdom and announced its creation in London at the first Global Conference for Media Freedom.

It now comprises, at the state level, fifty-two member countries who have each taken a global pledge on media freedom, which is a commitment to improve media freedom domestically in each of the countries, but also to work together internationally to improve media freedom. It is multi-stakeholder because it is not just an organization of member states. It has a civil society consultative network formed by a number of civil society organizations who work on media freedom issues around the world, and they provide advice on all the activities of the Media Freedom Coalition. One of the most important roles they play is they give the member states advice on specific cases of journalists at risk or media institutions at risk in countries around the globe.

There is the High Level Panel of Legal Experts, many of whom are sitting up here with me today, who are an independent and diverse group of lawyers and judges who provide advice and recommendations to Media Freedom Coalition members with the aim of promoting and protecting a vibrant free press. I will speak more about the specific help that they have given to the Coalition.

And then, finally, UNESCO is a key partner for us, and they have a Global Media Defense Fund, which was set up shortly after the establishment of the Coalition, and it allows for programmatic engagement on cases and situations; for example, offering and paying for legal assistance for journalists, particularly in moments of crisis.

The Coalition itself has just come through a year of consolidation, which was brought to a head two months ago in February when Estonia hosted in Tallinn, the Third Global Conference on Media Freedom. Over this period of consolidation, we have, thanks to a bequeathal from the United Kingdom, set up a secretariat, which will be housed at Thomson Reuters Foundation in London. We have a Web presence, thanks to Estonia, and we have also been putting a lot more focus over this past year on making better use of member-state diplomatic networks on the ground, in particular, in those countries where media freedom is most at risk.

The Coalition, as I said, was founded by Canada and the United Kingdom, and we had served as the co-chairs. Then the United Kingdom finished its co-chair role at the end of last year, and the Dutch have now taken over. As co-chairs, one of our key tasks is to give overall guidance and preside over the meetings and give direction to the Coalition.

What exactly do we do? I think that is an obvious question. Well, one of the things that we do is we issue statements. We have thematic statements, for example, on World Press Freedom Day. We had one recently on International Women’s Day. And then we have country-focused statements that we issue. As some recent examples, we issued statements on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the assault on media freedom by the Russian Federation. We have had a recent

statement late last year on the closure of media outlets in Hong Kong, and we have had a statement on media freedom and safety of journalists in Myanmar.

But, in addition to issuing statements, we also engaged directly on the ground on specific cases or issues of concern. Countries can issue local statements in a country, for example, in reaction to a trial that has taken place, or we can also do *démarches* on our own individual members or collectively as members with governments, and really, we see this can be more productive. It depends on the context, but in certain countries, quiet diplomacy can be more effective, for example, in seeing journalists who are unjustly imprisoned released. It can be more effective than megaphone diplomacy. But we look at both, and as we mature as an organization, we are getting a better sense of when it is good to speak loudly and when it is better to speak softly.

I think the key point that I want to make for this panel is that international law is the foundation on which we engage. On our website, you can look at the statements. I am not going to say that we never resort to emotional or logical appeal, but really, the leverage that we have is because countries need to meet their international legal obligations with regard to media freedom and with regard to human rights writ large, so Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but also other human rights law, for example, on arbitrary detention. If you look at the recent Hong Kong statement, you will see reference to the need for China to respect the basic law and the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Finally, the High Level Panel of Legal Experts has been doing excellent work in supporting the Coalition. They have issued a number of extremely well-researched and comprehensive reports with specific recommendations for states on how to increase protection for media freedom through new tools in the areas of sanctions, special visas, consular assistance, and investigative mechanisms.

To conclude, I would say it is a young coalition, and we do face challenges. But I think we are coming into our own, based on strong partnerships and, sadly, with the proliferation of new phenomena such as disinformation, a growing need for the work that we are trying to do around the world and support media freedom.

## **CAN YEGINSU**

Jeffrey, thank you very much, indeed. I want to pick up on one of the areas: safe refuge for journalists at risk. We identified this as a Panel as a real priority in the context of the safety of a journalist under the leadership of Amal Clooney. It is one of the areas that I have spent a lot of time working on with people, including with Hina Jilani.

Hina, I wondered whether you could just explain the nature of the issue and why it is an important component to protecting media freedom, this issue of safe refuge for journalists at risk.

## **REMARKS BY HINA JILANI**

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Thank you very much, Can. I think it is a very good question that you had and an important issue that you raise. Coming from Pakistan, I have a lot to say on this subject because, obviously, as a human rights defender and a human rights lawyer, I have to deal with individual cases as well as the whole broader concept of safety for journalists in a country that is now declared as one of the most dangerous for journalists and for media to have freedom.

Journalists have been killed, abducted, taken hostage, subjected to torture in forced disappearances, and put under surveillance. They have been attacked in their homes and in their places of work. Their rights have been violated, and confidentiality of their sources has been jeopardized,