



PLATFORM TO PROMOTE THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISM AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Reply by the Government of Finland to the platform alert concerning

Threats against Media Workers during Convoy Protest in Helsinki

22 April 2022

Background of the Convoy Finland 2022 protest

Convoy Finland 2022 was a set of demonstrations arranged in Finland and inspired by similar demonstrations in Canada. The passenger cars and trucks were meant to block the city centre in Helsinki and to hinder traffic to various degrees in order to achieve the goal of the protest. The purpose of Convoy Finland 2022 was to demand that the Government of Finland halve fuel taxes, lift all measures taken against the spread of COVID-19 virus and resign. Originally, the protest event was aimed to continue until the Government would agree to the requirements of the protesters, but this never happened.

It is illustrative of the practical arrangements for Convoy Finland 2022 that the protest arose very quickly, as if on impulse. It was mainly prepared and arranged through social media and especially the Telegram application. The idea to arrange the protest gained thousands of supporters on different social media platforms in a very short time. Very many of these supporters also expressed their intention to take part in the demonstration. As Convoy Finland 2022 was assembled very quickly, it was not organised in a particularly systematic manner. Before the protest event began, it seemed to be unclear who the organiser(s) were. In fact, there seemed to be a number of organisers because, depending on source, the protest had a number of different objectives.

The Convoy Finland 2022 was announced to start on 4 February 2022. The organiser did not inform the police about the protest event until the day before, 3 February 2022. According to the organiser's oral announcement, the event was to start at the *Kansalaistori* square in Helsinki on 4 February 2022 at 6 p.m., and it was meant to continue until 10 p.m. the same day. The organiser announced that after 4 February, from 5 to 9 February 2022, the protest would continue every day from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Right from 4 February 2022, Convoy Finland 2022 prompted the police to take action on several days. Action was needed for such reasons as vehicles impeding traffic, disturbance, deviations from the place of assembly, apprehensions, and towing of vehicles. Protests originating from Convoy Finland 2022 continued under different names at the *Kansalaistori* square in Helsinki.

Legal framework

According to section 22 of the Constitution of Finland (731/1999), public authorities must guarantee the observance of basic rights and liberties and human rights.

Section 12, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Finland provides that everyone has the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone. More detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of expression are laid down by an Act.



Under section 13, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Finland, everyone has the right to arrange meetings and demonstrations without a permit, as well as the right to participate in them. Under paragraph 3 of section 13, more detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of assembly and the freedom of association are laid down by an Act.

Section 4 of the Assembly Act (530/1999) provides that public authorities must promote the exercise of the freedom of assembly by protecting the right to assemble without hindrance and by providing for the necessities in the arrangement of public meetings.

According to section 19, subsection 1 of the Assembly Act, it is the duty of the police to safeguard the exercise of the freedom of assembly. In addition, the police must see to it that the arranger and the chairperson fulfil their duties under the Act and, where necessary, undertake measures for the maintenance of order and security in a public meeting or a public event.

The Government considers that the police promoted and safeguarded the conduct of the quickly arranged protest event in compliance with section 4 and section 19, subsection 1 of the Assembly Act. The Government is firmly of the view that the threats and harassment against journalists by protesters (from within the crowd) is not acceptable under any circumstances. Nevertheless, the Government has not been informed of any report of an offence filed with the police on the basis of the incidents.

Meeting arranged by the Helsinki Police Department

The National Police Board of Finland, jointly with the Helsinki Police Department, has investigated the incidents that took place during the Convoy Finland 2022 protest on 4 February 2022.

The week after the start of Convoy Finland 2022, the Helsinki Police Department contacted representatives of MTV, a Finnish commercial television company; Yle, the public Finnish broadcasting company; the *Ilta-lehti* newspaper; the media company *Sanoma Oyj*; and the Union of Journalists in Finland, concerning journalists' safety at work during protests. On 11 February 2022, the Department arranged a meeting with media representatives, which were received by the Communication Unit of the Department, the leaders of the Response and Control Division, and the head investigator of the Crime Prevention Unit.

The meeting focused on risks encountered by media workers and on the prevention and countering of the risks. Another topic was online targeting and shaming of journalists. The arrangement of the meeting was also discussed with the President of the Union of Journalists in Finland.

In particular, the meeting focused on the question why the protesters in Convoy Finland 2022 had a negative attitude towards journalists. The participants also discussed action that different media and editorial staff themselves could take to improve their safety. The scope for action by the police during large-scale protest events was covered, too.



Threat assessment

For each large-scale protest event, the police conduct a threat assessment, taking account of risks to possible outsiders, too. The police also made a threat assessment concerning Convoy Finland 2022, which had been arranged exceptionally quickly, and did not find any factors threatening for example journalists.

Convoy Finland 2022 was the first protest event where small groups of protesters mingled within a larger group of protesters and thus, shielded by other protesters and under cover of the crowd, were able to harass media and its individual representatives as their assumed opponents. It was not clearly foreseeable from prior knowledge that journalists and other media workers might be harassed because this did not come up in the threat assessment. The harassment and threats against journalists were unforeseeable and unexpected that could not be anticipated and/or prepared for and, thus, the police had not prepared for them despite their threat assessment.

The police continuously update their threat assessment related to large-scale protest events. Besides the safety of protesters, the threat assessment takes into account safety threats caused by the protests to outsiders.

Media considerations in police activities

The Helsinki Police Department has a practice of providing telephone numbers for the media in order that journalists can contact police officers responsible for commanding operations. Journalists can contact the police for information either before or during events. Through the telephone numbers, journalists also get advice as to what they should take into account for the events to ensure their safety at work.

At the meeting arranged by the Helsinki Police, media representatives emphasised that they themselves decide how and from where to report in different situations. In situations other than those involving direct disturbances and offences, the police have an advisory role with the media.

For protest events, the Helsinki Police Department has an established operating model where a commanding police officer leads the police operation at the scene. One special task of the on-scene commander is to be available to different media as a representative of the police and as a contact person for safety arrangements. Similarly, negotiators of the police are present at the scene for preventive action and work in close cooperation with the media following the event.

Ensuring safety in future

During the meeting with media representatives, the Helsinki Police provided information on how journalists and other media workers could better prepare for different risks, perils and disturbances. The Helsinki Police, in particular, is also prepared for taking into account the safety of media in police actions during large-scale protest events.



Ulkoministeriö
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Disclosure of information

Representatives of different media inquired about the organiser of Convoy Finland 2022 from the Helsinki Police Department. The Government observes that it is mentioned separately in the alert that the Helsinki Police Department has declined to disclose any information about the organisers of Convoy Finland 2022.

The Government emphasizes that the matter is about whether the police have the requested information in their possession and whether it can be disclosed. An important detail of the incident is that the organiser announced the protest orally, and therefore, the police never received a written announcement of it.

However, the Helsinki Police Department did disclose the organiser's identity later on, and published [a press release](#) on the matter (in Finnish only) on 18 February 2022.

During the exceptionally quickly arranged Convoy Finland 2022 protest and, despite the threat assessment conducted by the police, unforeseeable incidents *i.e.* in the shape of harassment and threats against media representatives occurred during the protest. It is not acceptable that journalists were harassed and threatened during this event. However, on the above-mentioned grounds, the Government considers that the police acted appropriately in the context of the protest.

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