

Council of Europe
The Secretary General

Strasbourg, 8 April 2020

Dear members of the Council of Europe Platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists,

I acknowledge receipt of your joint statement of 31 March and thank you for your commitment and constructive proposals.

The Council of Europe is alert to the risks that crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic carry for our fundamental values. It continues working with its member states to ensure full respect for human rights, rule of law requirements and democratic principles, also in a time of crisis.

Council of Europe standards, including in particular the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention) as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights constitute solid points of reference for our member states in this context. This is why I have taken the initiative of providing them with a document (copy appended) recalling the most pertinent standards and principles to deal with the current, unprecedented, and massive scale sanitary crisis in a way that respects the fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Freedom of expression and the timely provision of accurate and reliable information to the public are of course particularly important in the current context (see the Council of Europe [Guidelines](#) on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis). Extraordinary measures may introduce restrictions to a number of rights, including freedom of expression, but these must remain lawful, proportional to the threat posed by the spread of the virus and limited in time. The Council of Europe and its relevant bodies, as well as I personally, will continue all efforts to ensure that Article 10 of the Convention is respected and to address issues of concern as and when they arise.

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Association of European Journalists (AEJ)
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
Index on Censorship
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
International Press Institute (IPI)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

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Our Organisation is also continuing its efforts to ensure that the tenets of responsible journalism prevail even in an emergency situation (the Committee of Ministers is currently examining the [draft Recommendation](#) on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age (see also the conference “[\(Last\) call for quality journalism](#)”), as well as the due implementation of the Committee of Ministers’ recommendations to member states on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors and on internet freedom.

In this context, the Platform for the protection of journalism and safety of journalists is an essential mechanism for co-operation between civil society and governments in protecting journalists. The Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have on many occasions highlighted the importance of enhanced co-operation and dialogue with the Platform. The alerts published on the Platform provide us with crucial information on the implementation of Council of Europe standards and are valuable indicators of worrying developments.

In the spirit of our meeting in December last, I assure you that we will continue to take steps to give due prominence and weight to the work of the Platform. I will inform the Committee of Ministers on a regular basis about Platform developments, including our co-operation with you and I will urge member states to react constructively to the alerts published. I look forward to further substantial discussion on the challenges in the area of freedom of expression and I count on your continued co-operation and support.

Yours sincerely,



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