

Official response of the Maltese authorities to the alert submitted to the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists published on 29th November 2019 entitled “Journalists Locked Inside the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta Following a Press Conference”

Absolutely untrue that journalists were locked in the Office of the Prime Minister

Reference is being made to the alert on the ‘Council of Europe Safety for Journalists’ online platform. Immediately the Government makes it clear that no journalists were locked anywhere following a press conference at the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

The facts are as follows:

1. On Thursday 28th November 2019 at around 9pm, an urgent Cabinet meeting was called to discuss a request for a Presidential Pardon by the alleged mastermind in the assassination of Ms Daphne Caruana Galizia. The media was not invited, but journalists turned up spontaneously outside the Office of the Prime Minister;
2. The Cabinet meeting lasted until the early hours of the morning. The Prime Minister, at the end of the meeting, around 2:30am agreed to give a media statement to the journalists;
3. Unfortunately, when the OPM staff went to escort the journalists to the press conference hall, a group of tense protestors who also happened to be outside the Office of the Prime Minister tried to force themselves into the building causing a security breach. Some people managed to get in despite directions by authorities that only authorised people can enter the building;
4. Instead of calling off the media statement, the OPM Communications team waited until the journalists could get in and the press conference was, nonetheless, held without any difficulty. The Prime Minister delivered his media statement and answered a number of questions by local and foreign journalists until around 3:30am. Members of the Cabinet stood in the same room as the Prime Minister;
5. Once the press conference was over, the journalists were asked by OPM officials to wait inside the hall until the cabinet members walk out. This process lasted not more than 2 and a half minutes. This is a normal procedure and is regularly used during press conferences. It stands to reason that such events should be held in an organized way.
6. Admittedly, another two persons who entered the press conference hall in the Office of the Prime Minister without authorisation regrettably took the matters in their own hands and decided to join OPM officials in asking journalists to wait until the members of Cabinet walk out of the room. The necessary steps were immediately taken to remedy the situation.

These facts confirm that any allegation in the sense that journalists were locked in the Office of the Prime Minister are absolutely untrue.

It is very pertinent to note that, during the past weeks, local and foreign journalists had regular opportunities to interview the Prime Minister and other members of cabinet.