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Promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
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Thank you, Mr Chair,

Let me thank on behalf of Slovakia to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression for the very important Report we discuss today. In all parts of the world, we see increase in online and offline attacks, harassment, intimidation or cyberbullying against journalists and other media professionals, including killings that very often are not even prosecuted.

Slovakia has learned its own tragic lesson in 2018 when investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée were shot dead. This horrific act has triggered significant changes in Slovak media legislation and policy. Five years after the murder, the media freedom and safety of journalists are integral part of our foreign policy engagement. In addition to Media Freedom Coalition, Slovakia has joined Freedom Online Coalition in February 2023. Moreover, in close cooperation with the Dutch platform PersVeilig, which provides broad-spectrum support to local journalists, Slovakia has launched the project Safe.Journalism.sk [bezpecna.zurnalistika.sk], to help journalists and media workers when threatened.

Yet the work is not done, as we witness daily. In Slovakia, we see increased activity of various online platforms spreading disinformation and propaganda too often using negative and misogynistic statements against women and stigmatizing language against LGBTI community. The fact that female journalists are targeted not only as journalists but also for being women is even more worrying. They are intimidated in the most disturbing ways: from graphic imagery spread across social media platforms to threats of physical violence, rape and murder. Slovakia is not immune. One especially painful and deplorable example were serious death, rape and torture threats against Slovak journalist Ms. Marta Jančkárová, a presenter at the Slovak public TV broadcaster RTVS, early this year. Slovak Government Officials strongly condemned the attacks and the Slovak Police acted quickly to deal with the incident.

Female journalists face specific challenges. In an effort to address some of these challenges, Slovakia prepared an international conference focused on „*Online violence against women journalists*“. The conference will take place on October 25, 2023, at UNESCO Headquarters and is part of the UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Week.

Mr Chair,

Slovakia appreciates every single effort to address the issue of protection of journalists and media freedom in general and the protection of women journalists in particular. If/when such incidents occur, we must be the first to firmly reject them. Such acts cannot get unpunished. Journalists and other media actors must be able to perform their work freely and independently, without restrictions or fear. It is one of the ways of defending democratic values. This is how we shall keep the Ján Kuciak's legacy alive. We will continue pushing and advocating this agenda, at the national as well as the international level. You can count on our support.

Thank you.