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IBAHRI Showcase session

The attack on media freedom - a growing phenomenon

THE HONOURABLE FRANÇOIS-PHILIPPE CHAMPAGNE

Remarks

Thank you very much for this opportunity today to speak to you by video. I am pleased to see media freedom permanently featured on the agenda at this series of the International Bar Association's Conference. Members of the international legal community can be powerful allies in our efforts to protect journalists and preserve media freedom.

As with an independent judiciary, a vibrant and free media is a cornerstone of democracy and human rights. Journalists do essential work. They provide facts to the public. They hold governments to account. They speak truth to power. But increasingly, journalists are under attack and unable to do their important work. This is particularly true in the time of Covid.

As a week ago, Canada and the Republic of Botswana co-hosted the second Global Conference for Media Freedom. Our theme was 'Media Freedom in the time of Covid-19'. As we have witnessed, the media is facing emerging threats and the list of countries where journalists can work safely is sadly getting shorter. It is therefore critical that we take action, individually and collectively, to respond to these challenges. Our action must be grounded in human rights and leverage the multi-lateral system pulling our strengths and expertise to maximise our effectiveness. We must especially lend our unequivocal support to journalists who face hardships to champion media freedom in their countries.

At our Conference last week, I was very pleased that we recognised the Belarusian Association of Journalists with the very first UK-Canada Media Freedom Award. Their commitment to the cause of democracy and media freedom is nothing short of extraordinary. Since its creation at the inaugural Global Conference on Media Freedom in London last year, the Coalition has expanded its membership of coordinated its diplomatic activity in the field and spoken out on several issues of key concern. It provides us with a unique mechanism by which we can coordinate our action and reinforce our efforts.

Canada is honoured to Co-Chair the Coalition together with our friends from the UK, with whom we also established the Global Media Defence Fund, which is being capably administered by UNESCO. The Coalition is guided in its work by an Advisory Network, which has provided critical counsel for the protection of journalists. We also benefit from the expertise of the High Level Panel and I know that today, our friend Amal Clooney will speak to the work of this Panel, sharing an overview of its advise and recommendations to governments to prevent and reverse abuses of media freedom.

I urge you all to consider how you can help counter the attack on media freedom to unique roles as members of the legal profession. As states around the world, including members of the Coalition, consider various approaches to strengthen the promotion and protection of media freedom, the work of the High Level Legal Panel must remain front and centre. The defence of media freedom is nothing less than the defence of our democratic values. Thank you all for your focus on this important challenge I wish you a great conference.