

Society of Editors

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From the Executive Director

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
King Charles Street
Whitehall
Westminster
London
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24 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

As a membership body representing journalists in all sectors of the UK national, regional and local newspaper and broadcast and online media, I wanted to write to you at this time of crisis.

As you will no doubt agree, freedom of the press is essential in any democratic society and, at this time of national uncertainty, accurate news and information has never been more important. The staggeringly high demand for news and verifiable updates on the covid-19 crisis is unprecedented and newsrooms – both at a national and a regional and local level – continue to work around the clock to keep their audiences informed. We have welcomed your government's acknowledgement of the vital role that the media must play during this crisis and we were pleased to see the designation last week of all journalists as key workers.

As we have previously acknowledged in correspondence with your office, your department's elevation of media freedom to the top of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's agenda and your work, alongside Canada, to promote media freedom globally has been a welcome and timely reminder of the role the media plays in a democracy. The Society was involved in your inaugural Global Conference on Media Freedom last year and we welcomed the report earlier this year by the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom calling for targeted sanctions to protect journalists worldwide.

While many governments and officials continue to recognise the vital role that journalists can play in this crisis, others have chosen to clamp down on the flow of information and attempt to control the narrative around covid-19. We have also seen knee jerk reactions to unfavourable coverage in some countries and attempts to pass legislation that could have a detrimental effect on the public's right to know.

Journalists have a duty to report on behalf of the public without fear or favour. As well as providing news and updates, the media must continue to scrutinise the actions

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of officials in tackling this virus and journalists worldwide have a duty to question the wisdom behind decisions being made. That is their job.

It is essential that all countries continue to provide the media with timely and accurate news and information on the virus and that this situation is not used as a pretext by which governments restrict information on behalf of the public. At this time of crisis, the public interest must be placed at the centre of all responses to the pandemic and the media has a crucial role to play.

We would welcome your assurances that media freedom remains on your department's agenda and that the importance of all governments worldwide to recognise the news industry's role in keeping the public informed during this crisis will continue to be promoted.

Freedom of the press is essential in any democratic society and access to government officials and accurate news and information has never been more essential. Your government's continued focus on providing access and updates to the media during this crisis will no doubt increase public confidence during these uncertain times and help work towards promoting similar actions abroad.

Yours sincerely,



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