

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

March 20, 2023

Mr. Ali Ehsassi
Chair
House of Commons Standing Committee
on Foreign Affairs and International Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ehsassi:

Pursuant to the Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the recommendations made in the seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) entitled: “*The Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Organizations*”, resulting from the study conducted by the FAAE’s subcommittee on International Human Rights. Thank you for pursuing such an important study.

Advancing respect for human rights is a top priority for the Government of Canada, both at home and abroad. We recognize and applaud the key role played by human rights defenders (HRDs), including journalists and media organizations, in protecting and promoting human rights and strengthening the rule of law, often at great risk to themselves, their families and communities, and to the organizations and movements they may represent. The Government of Canada remains steadfast in its support for these brave people as they hold state and non-state actors to account, and advance respect for human rights.

Canada employs several foreign policy tools to respond to human rights violations and abuses, and to support the critical work of HRDs, including journalists and media organizations. This includes, but is not limited to: developing and implementing Voices at Risk, Canada’s Guidelines to Supporting Human Rights Defenders; establishing and co-chairing the Media Freedom Coalition; imposing sanctions on entities and individuals who are complicit in gross and systematic human rights violations; creating new legislation; implementing program funding; promoting and supporting the development of international principles and standards; consulting with civil society organizations; participating in the international rules-based system through global forums such as the United Nations; communicating with states through diplomatic networks; and engaging directly with HRDs and their communities.

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The Government of Canada has carefully considered the recommendations presented in the report, and has assessed initiatives that are ongoing or have been completed in the Government's Response. To this end, Global Affairs Canada consulted partner government departments, including Canadian Heritage and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, to develop a comprehensive response. Together, we continue to monitor initiatives to identify where there is room for improvement, and look for additional opportunities to work with HRDs, as well as state and non-state actors, to advance human rights.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Government Response to the Report's 12 recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Joly', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Government Response to the Seventh Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development: *The Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Organizations*

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada attempt to compel online platforms to collect and make data publicly available about instances of harassment and promoting violence against journalists and other human rights defenders and information regarding how those cases have been addressed.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The November 2021 Speech from the Throne stated that the Government would continue to fight harmful content online. This was reiterated in the December 2021 Minister of Canadian Heritage Mandate Letter where the Minister was provided with a commitment to:

continue efforts with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to develop and introduce legislation as soon as possible to combat serious forms of harmful online content to protect Canadians and hold social media platforms and other online services accountable for the content they host. This legislation should be reflective of the feedback received during the recent consultations.

The Government of Canada is in the process of designing a new legislative and regulatory framework for online services, including social media platforms. Consequently, it struck an Expert Panel that convened weekly between April and June 2022. The Government of Canada also conducted several roundtables with stakeholders across the country, engaged Indigenous organizations, and consulted like-minded jurisdictions. While the introduction date for this legislation has not been determined, the Department of Canadian Heritage is working with other government departments to deliver on this important initiative.

Following the advice received through consultations, the Government of Canada is considering a risk-based approach to platform regulation, whereby online services would be compelled to identify, assess, and mitigate risks on their platforms through their own internal systems and processes. The risks to be identified, assessed, and measured would be set out in legislation. Furthermore, a new legislative and regulatory framework would likely include the use of metrics to monitor whether platforms are meeting their obligations to assess and manage risk on their services. These metrics could be informed and measured through regular transparency reporting and auditing to ensure effective enforcement. The Government of Canada is committed to developing new rules for platforms that are backed up by strong enforcement mechanisms.

To administer and enforce this new regulatory structure, the Government of Canada is considering the creation of a new Digital Safety Commission. The Commission could be provided with strong audit and enforcement powers to hold platforms accountable to new legislation, including the power to compel information and data from platforms and levy administrative monetary penalties for non-compliance. A key element of the new legislative and regulatory framework for Online Safety could also include transparency requirements, such as those pertaining to instances of harassment, the promotion of violence, and how regulated services address these issues. The Digital Safety Commission could be

provided with broad powers to compel data and information from online services pertaining to these transparency requirements.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada grant Raif Badawi Canadian citizenship and reunite him with his family in Canada.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation. Mr. Badawi's unfortunate circumstances are regularly raised with Saudi officials at the highest levels, while ensuring his continued well-being and that there is no increased risk of negative consequences stemming from Canadian engagement.

Mr. Badawi was released from prison on March 11, 2022, following the completion of a 10-year prison sentence in Saudi Arabia. As per the conditions of his sentence and release, Mr. Badawi remains subject to a 10-year travel ban, a 10-year media ban and a fine, therefore, preventing him from reuniting with his family outside of Saudi Arabia.

Canada's commitment to supporting HRDs is based on key principles such as do no harm – the safety and privacy of HRDs is paramount in all our advocacy efforts. The Government of Canada believes Mr. Badawi should be able to reunite with his family in Canada. However, Saudi Arabia does not recognize dual citizenship, meaning that granting Mr. Badawi Canadian citizenship would not compel or oblige Saudi authorities to engage further with Canadian officials on his behalf, or improve the ability of Canada to advocate on his behalf.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada call on the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Media Freedom Coalition to investigate Dawit Isaak's case and mount an international pressure campaign calling for his immediate release.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation, recognizing the seriousness of Dawit Isaak's situation.

It is important to note that neither the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC), nor the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), have a mandated investigatory capacity. UN-mandated investigative bodies, such as Commissions of Inquiry or Fact-Finding Missions, can be established by the HRC to respond to cases of serious human rights violations and/or abuses. Such mechanisms focus primarily on particular countries rather than individual cases,¹ and require significant political will by HRC member states to secure votes in favour of their establishment and renewal. As of January 2023, Canada is not a member of the HRC.

Nevertheless, Canada regularly raises its concerns over Eritrea's human rights record at the HRC. During the 47th session of the HRC, Canada co-sponsored and was an active participant in negotiating the resolution entitled "Situation of human rights in Eritrea," which extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. As a special procedure mandate holder, the Special Rapporteur brings to light the hardships experienced by human rights defenders, including journalists, in Eritrea through reports and oral updates to the HRC. The report published 6 May 2022 called for the release of those individuals detained unlawfully, including journalists like Dawit Isaak.

¹ Investigative bodies typically investigate alleged violations in specific countries. One – the Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement – is thematic in nature.

Furthermore, when the HRC conducted its most recent Universal Periodic Review of Eritrea in 2019, Canada expressed its concern about restrictions on human rights, specifically noting the right to freedom of expression. As part of its recommendations, Canada urged Eritrea to immediately end its practice of arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention, torture and the mistreatment of detainees.

The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) is currently co-chaired by Canada and the Netherlands. It raises specific cases of concern based on recommendations from the Consultative Network and members of the MFC, encouraging respect for fair trials, among other measures, to reduce impunity for crimes against journalists, media workers and media organizations. Proposed actions draw on the advice of member states, civil society, and networks of practitioners and multilateral organizations. While the MFC is committed to speaking out about violations and abuses experienced by journalists, it must balance this intention with a do no harm principle for those involved. In some cases, mounting an international pressure campaign could cause the situation to further deteriorate, and expose the journalist or media organizations to additional harm. The risk of harm could also be posed to their organizations, communities and families.

In light of this recommendation, Canada will raise the case of Dawit Isaak with MFC partners, including the Consultative Network, for consideration of potential actions that could benefit his situation. Additionally, in March 2023, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, will visit Canada to support the preparation of his upcoming report. During this visit, he will meet with government officials, United Nations agencies, Eritrean refugees, and members of the diaspora. This visit presents an additional opportunity for Canada to engage on Dawit Isaak's case and to advocate on behalf of journalists and other human rights defenders in Eritrea.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada engage its international partners to impose coordinated Magnitsky sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* on senior Eritrean officials involved in rights violations against Dawit Isaak and his colleagues.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

Canada's engagement with Eritrea centers on urging Eritrea to promote and protect human rights, including ending practices such as arbitrary detention. Canada has been very vocal on the international stage in calling for an end to all forms of human rights violations and abuses in Eritrea, including restrictions on freedom of expression, opinion and faith, and forced life-long conscription.

Sanctions are just one element of Canada's broader foreign policy toolkit. We will closely consider and continue to be judicious in imposing autonomous sanctions under both the *Special Economic Measures Act (SEMA)* and the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (JVCFOA)*. The Government tailors its responses to the specifics of each unique situation and, wherever possible, coordinates closely with international partners to maximize the effectiveness of sanctions. We will continue to enhance existing collaboration and engagement with international partners on the use of sanctions to this end.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada form an international coalition of like-minded countries to raise awareness and secure the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders around the globe. The Government of Canada should also mandate its diplomatic personnel to work with families and civil society organizations to coordinate advocacy efforts for the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders. Where possible, the Government of Canada should also direct diplomatic personnel to insist on meeting with imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders to amplify their voices.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

An international coalition of like-minded countries can indeed raise awareness and encourage the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders around the globe. Freedom of expression is at the centre of human individuality, and is critical to ensuring a safe and prosperous society. To this end, Canada co-founded (with the United Kingdom) the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), which was launched on September 25, 2019. As a co-chair, Canada works with 50 member states to advocate for media freedom and the protection of journalists and other media workers at home and abroad, and to hold to account those who harm or severely inhibit journalists from doing their job. Member states also work closely with the MFC's Consultative Network, comprised of leading civil society organizations in the media freedom space, UNESCO (which administers the Global Media Defence Fund), the High Level Panel of Legal Experts of the Media Freedom Coalition, as well as journalists and media workers themselves. Canada has instructed its diplomatic missions abroad to collaborate within the diplomatic networks of MFC to enhance information sharing and coordination among members and civil society organizations. The diplomatic networks typically meet on a quarterly basis to coordinate advocacy efforts and discuss media freedom issues and cases of particular concern. These networks also have the capacity to engage directly with governments, especially in countries where they may be more hesitant to speak directly with journalists and with civil society.

In addition, Voices at Risk, Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders (the Guidelines or Voices at Risk), is a clear statement of Canada's commitment to supporting the vital work of human rights defenders (HRDs). The Guidelines are informed by the work and advice of civil society organizations, and integrate Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy to recognize that approaches to support will vary based on the real, lived experiences of HRDs that belong to identifiable groups facing discrimination in various contexts, including but not limited to: women, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, Indigenous Peoples, land or environmental defenders, persons with disabilities, youth, individuals who defend freedom of religion or belief, journalists, and defenders in online and digital contexts. The Guidelines offer practical advice for Canadian diplomats working around the world and in Canada to support human rights defenders. They also include specific guidance for supporting journalists and other media workers, such as identifying key risks they face, best practices for engagement and available resources that Canadian diplomats and HRDs can access. Canadian diplomats are strongly encouraged, wherever possible, to meet with HRDs and human rights organizations to aid advocacy efforts.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada increase efforts to support journalists and other human rights defenders by taking concrete measures against governments that violate their rights. This includes working with like-minded nations to impose coordinated sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* on responsible officials and, in the most serious cases, referring violations to the International Criminal Court. The Government of Canada should use every opportunity in international fora to condemn countries violating the rights of journalists and other human rights defenders—whether or not they are allies.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation, recognizing that there are several ways to take concrete action in response to countries that violate the human rights of human rights defenders, including the imposition of sanctions and referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

To give one example, in response to the brutal crackdown by the Iranian regime against its citizens in the aftermath of the arbitrary arrest and killing of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish-Iranian woman who allegedly failed to wear her hijab correctly, Canada took several measures, including the following:

- In October 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a meeting of women foreign ministers to discuss the deterioration of human rights in Iran, highlighting Canada’s commitment to working with the international community to address ongoing human rights violations by the regime against the people of Iran, in particular women and children. This meeting also provided space for Iranian women to share their insights into the situation and influence Canada’s response.
- On November 14th, 2022, Iran was designated under Canada’s *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* as a regime that has engaged in terrorism and gross and systematic human rights violations, rendering tens of thousands of senior members of the Iranian regime inadmissible to Canada.
- On November 24th, 2022, during a Special Session on Iran, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to create an independent, international Fact-Finding Mission to examine persistent human rights violations in Iran, specifically as it is experienced by women and children. Canada was a co-sponsor of this critical resolution and delivered a strong statement in support of the Fact-Finding Mission. The resolution is an important step in advancing to greater accountability by the Iranian regime.
- On December 14th, 2022, Canada, alongside other member states of the United National Economic and Social Council, voted to remove Iran from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for the remainder of its 2022-2026 term, effective immediately. Canada co-sponsored this resolution and delivered a strong statement supporting the calls by Iranian women to remove Iran from the Commission.
- On December 15th, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Canada-led resolution on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the 20th consecutive year. This resolution is an important component of meaningful international efforts to support human rights in Iran, and specifically noted the current unrest and violations against human rights defenders. The text is developed in close consultation with civil society organizations and member states.

- Since October 2022, Canada has implemented several rounds of sanctions on prominent Iranian entities and individuals who are complicit in gross and systematic human rights violations, and/or pose a threat to international peace and security.

As an international champion of human rights, Canada advocates for the advancement of human rights and the protection of those most vulnerable through a variety of different mechanisms, including quiet diplomacy. Such efforts are exemplified through the Government's response to the Iranian regime's ongoing human rights violations perpetuated against its own citizens, including the violent crackdown on protestors and human rights defenders since the fall of 2022.

Canada was also instrumental in the creation of the Universal Period Review (UPR) and remains an active participant in the process, regularly raising freedom of expression and media freedom in its recommendations to other countries under review. For example, Canada raised these issues during Eritrea's review in 2019, as is noted in the response to recommendation three. The UPR is a critical process for UN member states to provide each other with honest and constructive recommendations on their respective human rights situations.

Furthermore, as recognized in the response to recommendation four, Canada will continue to coordinate with like-minded governments on sanctions and employ a rigorous due diligence process to consider and evaluate possible cases of human rights violations that may warrant the use of sanctions. Amongst the breadth of response options in Canada's foreign policy toolkit, we closely consider and continue to be judicious in imposing autonomous sanctions under both the SEMA and the JVCFOA.

In 2018, Canada and others referred the situation in Venezuela to the International Criminal Court (ICC), for, inter alia, alleged human rights violations against human rights defenders, including journalists. Canada continues to closely follow developments on this case. In December 2022, at the 21st session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC, Canada also highlighted in its national statement the critical role of civil society organizations in raising awareness of the ICC's role, and the importance of supporting the ICC in achieving accountability and promoting and protecting universal human rights. Canada has also imposed sanctions against individuals in Venezuela who have committed human rights abuses, attacks on democratic institutions, and/or significant acts of corruption. Targeted sanctions are used to increase pressure on the Maduro regime, encourage behaviour change, and end impunity for some of the key players in Venezuela.

Recommendation 7: The Government of Canada impose sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* against Hong Kong officials responsible for violating the human rights of Hong Kong journalists and other human rights defenders through the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation. Canada stands with the people of Hong Kong in defence of their universal human rights and freedoms, as guaranteed under Hong Kong's *Basic Law* which incorporates provisions of human rights law, and also includes media freedom and freedom of speech. Amongst the breadth of response options in Canada's foreign policy toolkit, we will closely consider and continue to be judicious in imposing autonomous sanctions under both SEMA and the JVCFOA. Canada will augment existing collaboration and engagement with international partners on the use of sanctions in this regard.

Canada also continues to be a vocal advocate in the defense of human rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, including voicing strong opposition to the closure of media outlets and subsequent arrests:

1. In August 2020, following the arrest of Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai and others, including democracy activist Agnes Chow Ting, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs François-Philippe Champagne expressed serious concern over the use of the National Security Law (NSL) to curtail the freedom of expression, and stated that “All human rights and fundamental freedoms, including media freedom and freedom of speech, must be upheld.”
2. On June 23, 2021, the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau released a statement on the forced closure of Apple Daily by Hong Kong authorities, calling out the degradation of media and basic freedoms.
3. In December 2021, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mélanie Joly, issued a series of tweets in solidarity with independent media, highlighting the importance of freedom of the press.
4. Finally, on June 30, 2022, Minister Joly referenced the abhorrent circumstance concerning Apple Daily and Jimmy Lai in a statement on the 25th anniversary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and called on local authorities to uphold fundamental freedoms guaranteed in Hong Kong’s Basic Law, including media freedom.

Furthermore, the Media Freedom Coalition, under Canada’s co-chairship, released a joint statement on February 7th 2022 that expressed grave concern at attacks on freedom of the press in Hong Kong. The Coalition has also issued two statements in the past concerning the closure of Apple Daily and other media outlets in Hong Kong. In the statement on the closure of Apple Daily, the Coalition explicitly indicated that the use of the NSL represented a serious and negative step in suppressing journalism. MFC statements are co-signed by the Coalition’s member states, hence they bring together the international community on media freedom issues and send a strong message to states committing human rights violations that their actions are unacceptable under international human rights law and that they are accountable for violations of freedom of expression. Such statements also raise awareness of media freedom issues and often elicit a response from perpetrator states.

Recommendation 8: That the Government of Canada work with international allies and support international efforts to establish and train independent judiciaries to better handle cases concerning journalists and other human rights defenders. In doing so, the Government of Canada should also advocate for greater transparency of judicial proceedings concerning journalists and other human rights defenders.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

Under the Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada has committed to fostering equitable access to fair and independent justice systems that protect the rights of the most marginalized. The Media Freedom Coalition partnered with the Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF), administered by UNESCO, which supports local, regional and global not-for-profit organizations to bolster journalists’ legal protection and enhance media freedom through relevant investigative journalism and strategic litigation.

Since 2020, the GMDF has funded over 80 projects around the globe to foster international legal cooperation and best practices to promote the defense of journalists under attack. The GMDF provides training and capacity building to lawyers and organizations on media law and other activities complementary to those implemented by UNESCO, including UNESCO's initiative to support the role of security forces and the judiciary in protecting and promoting an environment conducive to freedom of expression. In addition, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers are provided with practical and theoretical tools to carry out their work of maintaining public order and upholding the rule of law, while respecting human rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, and the safety of journalists. As of February 2022, Canada has invested \$3 million in the GMDF through its Promoting and Protecting Democracy Fund, which is one of two funding envelopes within Global Affairs Canada's Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion.

For over 25 years, the Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs (FJA) has provided assistance to various countries seeking to improve their judicial and legal systems. In close collaboration with Canadian federal judges, FJA's technical assistance consistently focuses on building independent and accountable judiciaries, which make decisions based strictly on the law and free of external influence. Additionally, enhancing the capacity of the courts to ensure greater transparency of all proceedings, including cases involving human rights defenders, is a priority. This work includes training judges on social context; controlling courtrooms during high profile cases; managing access to court proceedings and case records by the public, media and other. These projects often facilitate the creation of court-media liaison committees, introduce court press secretary positions, including, where relevant, designating and training judge-speakers and setting up mechanisms to assist media in timely and accurate coverage of cases. Many of these initiatives are currently under way in Mongolia and Colombia. Similar initiatives in Ukraine are temporarily suspended given the current circumstances.

Canada will continue to consider opportunities to establish and strengthen independent judiciaries to better handle cases concerning journalists and other human rights defenders, and advocate for greater transparency in judicial proceedings.

Recommendation 9: That the Government of Canada support media literacy efforts in Canada and across the globe. Additionally, the Government of Canada should increase its international development budget towards supporting media development, part of which should include training for journalists to expose disinformation campaigns and human rights violations.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

Confronting disinformation requires strong media literacy skills and therefore the Government has made it a priority to help equip citizens with the tools and skills needed to critically assess online information through the Digital Citizen Contribution Program (DCCP). Created in 2019, the DCCP has funded 46 projects with \$7 million to date to better understand the online media ecosystem and build media literacy across Canada through workshops, resources for educators, awareness activities, training tools, learning materials, and community outreach. Research and digital literacy projects funded through the DCCP have resulted in 170 unique events and have reached an average of 1.5 million Canadians.

The Government of Canada is steadfast in its support for human rights defenders, including journalists and media organizations, whose work is critical to the preservation of democratic values and the promotion and protection of human rights, both in Canada and abroad. The Government also agrees that strong media literacy in the general population is necessary for HRDs to reach their respective audiences.

As a result, the DCCP has funded several activities to better understand how Canadians access reliable news and information in Canada, and to empower citizens to detect and counter disinformation.

In line with Rachel Pulfer's testimony that journalists and media professionals should be empowered to "safely call out and debunk" disinformation campaigns and expose them to the public, the DCCP has funded multiple workshops and training sessions, which includes material for journalists, to help navigate and confront disinformation in their communities. The Government also agrees that social media platforms are increasingly hindered by disinformation and fake news that discredit and complicate the work of journalists in delivering facts. Consequently, the DCCP supported several research activities that aim to delineate the relationship between algorithms and exposing disinformation/accessing reliable, fact-based information. The Government also shares Maria Ressa's concerns that geopolitical actors' exploitation of technologies, such as using algorithms to privilege content that evokes an emotional reaction over information that is factually sound, can reach and possibly influence Canadian audiences despite the information being inaccurate and or not factual. This is why the DCCP launched a special call for proposals in 2022 to build media literacy in the context of Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. Projects funded under the call aim to help identify misinformation and disinformation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In total, 11 projects received more than \$2.4 million in funding for a wide array of activities, including educational workshops, podcast documentaries, the development of learning materials for educational opportunities, and countering mis/disinformation.

Similarly, the Government shares the concern of the Committee that digital violence against HRDs, including journalists, and in particular women HRDs and journalists, is a growing trend. Reflecting this concern, the DCCP funded a project by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights to increase understanding of the root causes of gendered disinformation and online abuse against women in politics and journalists in Canada, and its impact on democratic participation. The DCCP has funded multiple projects that seek to better understand how disinformation disproportionately affects communities that are traditionally more vulnerable, including women.

Furthermore, in 2021, Canada launched the Digital Inclusion Fund (DIF) to support mission initiatives to promote human rights and democracy online. The DIF supports small-scale initiatives organized by Canada's diplomatic missions abroad, and advances the four pillars of Canada's digital inclusion policy framework, namely connectivity, digital literacy, civic participation and safety. In 2022, the DIF supported 15 cross-regional projects ranging from digital literacy awareness ahead of elections to national anti-disinformation campaigns, and combatting gendered violence in online and digital contexts.

From January to December 2022, Canada also served as a co-chair of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), which is a coalition of likeminded governments committed to supporting Internet freedom and protecting fundamental human rights. In this role, Canada advocated for digital literacy as a baseline condition for digital inclusion and meaningful civic participation online. Moreover, Canada co-led with the Netherlands the United Nations Human Rights Council biannual resolution on Freedom of Expression, adopted at the 50th session of the Human Rights Council in July 2022. This resolution focused on the importance of digital literacy for the right to freedom of opinion and expression and built on existing Council resolutions, including on the Internet and human rights, violence against women and girls in digital contexts, and others.

Digital technologies are invaluable to advancing respect for human rights. Canada recognizes the significance of media literacy and development to democratic governance.

Recommendation 10: That the Government of Canada ensure that the freedom press centre in Ukraine is well-equipped with bulletproof vests, flak jackets, helmets, tourniquets and first aid kits to help protect journalists working in the conflict.

The Government of Canada agrees with the objective of this recommendation, recognizing that journalists and other media workers have been targets of human rights violations and victims of collateral damage. Canada often works with international organizations and civil society to respond to smaller funding requests, which in turn ensures that support reaches those most in need.

UNESCO's Canada-supported Global Media Defence Fund channelled funding to support journalists and media organizations affected by the conflict in Ukraine through the Fund's Crisis Response Mechanism (CRM). At the beginning of the war, through the CRM, UNESCO supported the relocation of the offices of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and the Independent Media Trade Union of Ukraine to safe areas and the procurement and distribution of 125 sets of Personal Protective Equipment as well as the provision of safety training, legal assistance and psychological support to journalists.

The Government of Canada has also taken action to address the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns in an effort to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, specifically freedom of expression and media freedom. Since January 2021, the Government of Canada has committed over \$5 billion in multifaceted support for Ukraine. This includes \$13.4 million over five years to support the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, as part of its efforts to counter disinformation. Canada has also scaled up security and stabilization programming in Ukraine, and has committed over \$68 million in new programming, including: targeted support to Ukrainian civil society and human rights organizations; providing critical aid to Ukraine's security sector; scaling up mine action efforts; advancing accountability for human rights violations; and countering disinformation. An enabling and safe environment is critical to countering disinformation, and ensuring accuracy in information dissemination.

Recommendation 11: That the Government of Canada increase the number of spaces available in its dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders at risk, including for journalists and other media professionals.

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation.

The new refugee stream for human rights defenders was launched in July 2021, adding 250 refugee spaces annually for HRDs, over and above its existing refugee resettlement commitments. This new stream was designed in close consultation with experts on the protection of HRDs, including civil society groups, to ensure it reaches the HRDs most at risk. Canada is one of the first countries to have an immigration program designed specifically to offer a dedicated, permanent safe haven to HRDs, including journalists.

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship's mandate letter, dated December 2021, includes a commitment to expand the new immigration stream for HRDs and work with civil society groups to provide resettlement opportunities for people under threat; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is currently working with HRD stakeholders on options to this end.

Canada's protection of HRDs who are refugees is not limited to the spaces specifically reserved for them under the stream for HRDs. They may also access Canada's protection through the broader

Refugee Resettlement Program, through which Canada plans to provide protection to over 51,000 refugees in 2023. Moreover, the Government included HRDs in its commitment to resettle at least 40,000 Afghans. As of December 31, 2022, Canada has resettled over 300 HRDs through its referral partners, Frontline Defenders and ProtectDefenders.eu.

Recommendation 12: That the Government of Canada appoint a special envoy for human rights defenders detained abroad who will work to raise awareness and advocate for their freedom.

The Government of Canada takes note of this recommendation.

Human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated. While the creation of a thematic high-level position can serve to focus efforts in specific areas, it could risk weakening efforts to advance human rights more broadly. For example, it could limit the Government's ability to react effectively and efficiently to emerging challenges, and create the impression that there is a vested interest in the promotion and protection of particular rights and/or rights holders over others. Canada is committed to advancing respect for all human rights and freedoms at home and abroad, and continues to advance the principle that no one be left behind.