

## International Federation of Journalists AGM – Wed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### Tim Davie, BBC Director General Draft speaking points (8 mins approx.)

- It's a pleasure to be here today. Thank you for inviting me.
- And congratulations to the IFJ on celebrating your 98<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this month – an incredible achievement.
- Back at the start of May, to mark World Press Freedom Day, the BBC World Service held a three-day event to look at the state of media freedom globally and examine the most urgent issues facing news reporting worldwide.
- In the front row were three of our colleagues from BBC Arabic, who until they were evacuated very recently were living and working in Gaza.
- I spoke to them about their experience of documenting the war as they lived it – filing for BBC Arabic nearly every day and bringing important stories to international audiences.
- And doing it all in the most difficult and traumatic personal circumstances – struggling to find safety for their families, struggling to find food, experiencing the loss of friends and colleagues from other news organisations.
- It was a powerful reminder – as if any was needed – that the work you do, day in day out, to stand up for media freedom and the safety of journalists worldwide is as vital as it has ever been.

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- All of us know: this is a **critical moment of challenge** for stability and democracy around the world.
- With growing conflict and uncertainty in the Middle East and Ukraine... In Sudan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere...
- .. With hostile states investing heavily to weaponize technology and deploy AI as a tool for disinformation and disruption...
- ...With around half the world's population going to the polls in 2024, in elections that will set the geopolitical climate for years to come.
- We might hope that the biggest election year in history would represent a high-water mark for freedom of expression and debate.

- Free and fair reporting has never been more essential – for global democracy and for audiences of most need around the world.
- But the reality is that all the **warning lights on media freedom are flashing red.**
- Pretty much every indicator is in decline:
  - Journalism is now either completely or partly blocked in around 75% of the world
  - Only 20% of people now live in what are considered to be free countries
  - In recent months the BBC has seen more of our journalists labelled “foreign agents” by Russia...
  - ...We’ve been suspended, alongside others, from broadcasting in Burkina Faso...
  - ...And more and more we’re seeing reporters evacuated or expelled – with recent crackdowns in countries like Afghanistan and Ethiopia forcing more of our teams to relocate for their own safety, often leaving family and friends behind.
- All in all, more than 300 BBC World Service journalists are now working in exile.
- And reporters all around the world are facing escalating dangers, increased levels of persecution and harassment, and ever more subtle modes of intimidation.
- Nowhere more so than in Iran, where our BBC Persian journalists have been exposed to decades of horrendous threats and harassment.
- The targeting and intimidation of our staff has escalated dramatically in the past couple of years.
- And recently we found out that a number of current and former BBC Persian colleagues had been convicted of ‘propaganda’ by the Iranian authorities simply for doing their job.
- I want to thank the IFJ for all your ongoing support on this issue, working within the UN and Human Rights Council as well as in the UK Government’s National Committee for the Safety of Journalists.

- There can be no more important issue for journalists everywhere than the ability to report without fear of reprisal.
- And increasingly this is as true for reporters working in the newsroom as it is for those operating in conflict zones, under repressive regimes, or in other hostile environments.
- The online harassment and abuse that journalists now face has grown rapidly in recent years – in frequency and intensity.
- We know that women journalists above all face escalating threat levels from coordinated campaigns of online abuse...
- ...With nearly ¾ reporting that they have experienced online violence in connection with their work.

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- But in all this, I believe there are **causes for optimism...**
- ...Reasons to think that together we can take on these forces and stand up for media freedom and democracy worldwide.
- I am inspired every day by the work of our colleagues like those from BBC Arabic, BBC Ukrainian and BBC Persian... Like our Russia service staff in Latvia and our people in Myanmar.
- And I'm proud of what the BBC World Service is doing, even in the face of considerable funding challenges:
  - Bringing independent, trusted reporting to a weekly global audience of nearly 320 million people in 42 languages
  - Looking out for the interests of the 72% of those audiences who are in low-media freedom states.
  - Getting into the incredibly challenging environments we need to report from – like Sudan or Tigray
  - Continuing to be a lifeline for millions living in fear, uncertainty, or captivity worldwide.
- Back in March, the BBC published our **plans to respond more directly to the most pressing needs of society** in the years ahead.

- First and foremost among the priorities we identified was to pursue truth with no agenda, by reporting fearlessly and fairly.
- Some of you will know that last year we launched BBC Verify...
- ...This is a specialist team which sits at the heart of our newsroom and serves all our news output.
- It draws on an incredible pool of talented data journalists, Open-Source Intelligence experts, language specialists and more.
- The focus is on transparency: showing audiences how we go about checking facts, analysing data, and verifying footage using forensic tools, techniques and technologies.
- Because we know that the more we let audiences in behind the scenes of our reporting and show our workings, the better we can earn their trust every day.
- This year we are taking BBC Verify global, to support audiences in countries of most need around the world through the work of the BBC World Service.
- And we want to power this by harnessing the possibilities of AI for good – while never compromising our public service principles or editorial standards.
- We are determined to work harder than ever to support integrity and accuracy in news at a critical moment for democracy around the world.
- And we are determined to collaborate as constructively as possible with the IFJ and its members, with the NUJ here and trade unions elsewhere...
- ...And all those who share our commitment to standing up for media freedom, independent journalism, and the safety of news teams everywhere.
- Thank you.