



Rt Hon Theresa May MP
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

16 March 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of Reporters Without Borders - known internationally as Reporters sans frontières (RSF) - one month ahead of the UK taking Chairmanship of the Commonwealth. We urge the UK to prioritise the promotion of safety of journalists through public diplomacy and effective activities during its two-year mandate, in accordance with the Commonwealth's commitment to freedom of expression as affirmed in the Charter, and with the declared focus of the forthcoming Commonwealth Summit agenda on promoting respect for the rule of law, good governance, and access to justice for all.

In recent years, journalists, citizen journalists, and media workers around the world have faced growing threats to their safety. Over the past decade, more than 700 journalists have been killed in connection with their work, far too often with impunity. In 2017 alone, 65 journalists were killed, with a staggering 60 percent deliberately targeted because their reporting threatened political, economic, or criminal interests. Such attacks have a significant chilling effect and effectively reduce reporting on risky topics that are in the public interest. The shrinking of the independent media and civil society space which the UK government has identified as a priority target of its foreign policy leads to patterns of injustice, cover-ups of abuses of power, and the spread of corruption in public life.

We submit that this alarming trend of violent attacks against journalists is all too present throughout the Commonwealth states and needs to be addressed urgently. In **Malta**, investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was killed by a car bomb in October 2017. She had worked relentlessly to expose corruption of Maltese officials, including through her Panama Papers reporting. Three men have been charged and await trial, but the family of the murdered journalist have raised complaints about the impartiality and effectiveness of the investigation into this crime, and Members of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly have called for international oversight to ensure that due process is observed. RSF continues to emphasise the need for full justice for her murder.

In **India**, journalist Gauri Lankesh was murdered in September 2017 when she was gunned down opening the door to her home. Lankesh was well known for her defence of women and her outspoken criticism of the caste system, conservatism, and Hindu nationalists. Her murder was referenced in a wave of death threats to other journalists by Hindu nationalists in the weeks that followed. In addition to Lankesh, three other journalists - Navin Gupta, Shantanu

Bhowmick, and Sudip Datta Bhaumik - were murdered in India in 2017, and two - Karun Misra and Ranjan Rajdev - in 2016.

In **Pakistan**, journalists Rifaqat Ali Jarar and Kamran Sahito were abducted by security forces in February 2018. Police did not acknowledge holding them for over two weeks, and Jarar remains detained. In January 2018, journalist Taha Siddiqui narrowly escaped an armed kidnapping attempt. Journalists in Balochistan were threatened with attack in October 2017 by two rebel groups if they did not defy the government's ban on covering rebel activities. Five bloggers were abducted in January 2017, one of whom - Samar Abbas - did not resurface for a full 14 months, and journalist Rana Tanveer was deliberately knocked down by a car in June 2017 after being threatened in connection with his reporting on religious minorities. Two journalists, Khan Mehmood and Ahmed Shehzad, were murdered in Pakistan in 2016.

In **Bangladesh**, journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul was killed in February 2017, reportedly shot by an official of the Awami League - the country's ruling party - whilst covering clashes between members of rival Awami League factions. RSF has raised concerns over the ruling party's apparent attempt to cover up the murder. In April 2016, blogger Nazin Umid Samad was stabbed and shot in a suburb of Dhaka. He had criticised Islamists online and used social networks to promote secularism.

In **Uganda**, journalist Charles Etukuri has been missing since his February 2018 abduction by five unidentified armed men. Etukuri is an investigative reporter for *New Vision*, a pro-governmental daily newspaper, who had published a story related to the death in a Kampala hotel of a Finnish businessman who sold security systems. In April 2017, TV reporter Gertrude Uwitware was kidnapped and beaten in connection with her coverage of a dispute between a well-known university academic and Uganda's First Lady, Janet Museveni.

In **Tanzania**, journalist Azori Gwanda has been missing since November 2017. He was abducted by four men whilst investigating a series of suspicious murders of local policemen and local officials in the Pwani region. Gwanda is a reporter with the leading Swahili-language newspaper *Mwananchi* and its English-language version, *The Citizen*.

In **Cameroon**, newspaper reporter Caristan Isseri was attacked by bodyguards at the home of former transport minister Alain Edgard Mebe Ngo'o in March 2018. Isseri reports for *Le Jour* newspaper, and had gone to the newly replaced minister's home in Yaoundé to get his reaction to the cabinet reshuffle.

In **Nigeria**, in September 2017 soldiers in Umuahia stormed into the press centre of the Nigerian Union of Journalists and beat journalists who had just covered Operation Python Dance, a show of strength by the army on the streets of Umuahia with the aim of ending clashes between soldiers and members of a local separatist group.

In **Kenya**, journalist Isaiah Gwengi was beaten by members of a special border police unit in March 2017 in the western town of Usenge, whilst investigating reports of police violence against local residents.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, in September 2017, *Guardian* senior photographer Kristian De Silva and senior reporter Sascha Wilson, *TV6* journalists Phil Britton and Leona Nicholson, and a *Newsday* photographer were physically assaulted, whilst on separate assignments in the town of Penal, where A&V Drilling is implicated in a scandal with state oil company, Petrotrin. De Silva and Wilson learned from police that their attackers were A&V Drilling's owner and CEO Hanif Nazim Baksh and a senior police officer, who claimed the journalists were trespassing.

These examples represent an alarming disregard for the safety of journalists, and the broader commitment to freedom of expression, in far too many Commonwealth states. Your leadership on this important issue as Chair-In-Office would send a strong signal in affirmation of the Commonwealth's commitment to freedom of expression, and provide much-needed protection to journalists reporting information in the public interest throughout the Commonwealth. RSF believes that a clear commitment to promote stronger safeguards for free and independent media in the outcome documents from the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London would do much to pave the way for the Commonwealth to demonstrate the strength of its commitments to Commonwealth values in reality.

Thank you for considering this serious and important matter. We stand ready to answer questions or provide further information as needed.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line and a period.

Christophe Deloire
Secretary General
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)