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**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Conference on “Media freedom in volatile environments”,
Session 1: Opening Plenary
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Mr. Moderator,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan welcomes dedication of this conference to the topic of media freedom in volatile environments, with a special focus on the protection of journalists and conflict and war reporting and thanks the panelists for their thought-provoking presentations.

We expect that such issues as the safety of journalists and impunity for crimes against them, media adherence to professional standards and self-regulation in times of conflict, countering disinformation and propaganda of war and violence, rights and responsibilities of journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in conflict situations will be thoroughly discussed during the conference and concrete recommendations will be elaborated for further possible action by OSCE.

The increased brutality of armed conflicts and the changing nature of warfare give rise to the need for greater measures of protection for journalists. Under international humanitarian law, journalists in armed conflicts are classified as civilians, and as such should be afforded the same protection, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians. Apart from the existing rules, UN Security Council resolutions 1738(2006) and 2222(2015) are of particular importance, as they further strengthen existing international norms and standards on the protection of journalists operating in the situations of armed conflicts.

The exercise of the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information, carries with it special duties and responsibilities, as stipulated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This is particularly important in such a sensitive environment as conflicts. The above-mentioned UNSC resolutions provide useful framework for the journalistic activity and serve as the terms of reference for the media professionals working in and reporting on the situations of armed conflicts. In particular, in these resolutions the Security Council: **a)** reaffirmed the commitment to the principles of the political independence, sovereign equality and territorial integrity of all States, and respect for the sovereignty of all States; **b)** recognized that States bear the primary responsibility to respect and ensure the human rights of their citizens, as well as individuals within their territory as provided by relevant international law; **c)** called on Member States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference in situations of armed conflicts; **d)** recalled that any restrictions on freedom of expression shall only be such as those provided by law and are necessary on the grounds set out in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; **e)** condemned the use of the media to incite violence, genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international

humanitarian law and f) affirmed that it is the work of a free, independent and impartial media that constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society.

Failure by journalists to follow these clear guidelines questions the role of media in protection of civilians and conflict prevention by acting as an early warning mechanism in identifying and reporting potential situations that could result in war crimes, increases the risks of exploitation of media to foment hatred and tensions and promotes situations created through unlawful use of force and accompanied by serious violations of international humanitarian law, thus, contributing to continuation of violence and conflicts. In contrast, objective, impartial and professional media reporting might be instrumental in peaceful resolution of conflicts, promotion of mutual understanding, tolerance and non-discrimination and the culture of co-existence.

We recall the taskings of the Brussels (2006) and Madrid (2007) OSCE Ministerial Councils on adoption of voluntary professional standards by journalists, media self-regulation and other relevant mechanisms to ensure professionalism, accuracy and adherence to ethical standards among journalists.

We again call on the Office of Representative to work on elaboration of OSCE Guidelines on objective and impartial journalist reporting on the conflict situations. We consider today's conference as a step in the right direction and are looking forward to discussions.

Thank you.