

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP BRIEFING PAPER Responsibility of Heads of State and Government

Governments wield significant power and authority in terms of the media, freedom of expression and the dissemination of information. The government's power comes from national sovereignty and the ability to create and enforce specific rules and laws around how the media operates and what information it is able to report. Some governments choose to restrict the media, afraid of how negative stories, or the proliferation of damaging information may expose weaknesses or lessen the government's power. Other nations choose to allow the media to work in relative freedom, publishing a wide variety of information that is deemed important for citizens to know. A truly free and independent media environment requires the full backing of a stable national government.

The head of state also has significant responsibility when considering the national and global media environment. As the political leader, the head of state has the ability to set the national agenda, and thus, drive national discourse and influence supporters. The attitude of a national leader toward the media has significant repercussions on how journalists are perceived, the validity of reporting and what information may be reported.

Task

You are attending a meeting of international advocates for global free and independent press. The meeting will take place under the backdrop of significant changes to the landscape of global media, including the proliferation of disinformation, the polarization of media and the rise of alternative media and social media. Additional concerns regarding increasing instances of violence, persecution and interference from state actors is also of interest to this meeting. Your task is twofold: **(1)** Identify a minimum of five ongoing issues connected to the topic of the responsibility of heads of state and governments, including specific incidents and broader trends; and **(2)** develop two to three strategies to meet the needs previously identified.

The challenge for this committee group is to assess the needs of different media environments around the world, and to develop strategies and solutions to meet these needs given the various media contexts and cultures found throughout the world.

Key questions to consider from the perspective of your assigned country and region

1. In your mind, what is the responsibility of a government toward the media?
2. How can a government influence the media? What actions can a government take to influence the media?

3. What is the relationship between your assigned country's government and the media?
4. What is the relationship between your assigned country's leader and the media?
5. Is the media protected by rules and laws in your country?
6. What are some recent examples of tension or cooperation between the media and the government or head of state?

Helpful Resources

- Responsibility of Heads of State and Governments
 - [The 'Little Presidents' who Deny Press Freedom by Attacking Journalists](#) – The Guardian (2015)
 - [2017 Report on the Freedom of the Press](#) – Freedom House
 - [The Global Slump in Press Freedom](#) – The Economist