**Contribution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the questionnaire from the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression on “Freedom of Opinion and Expression and Sustainable Development – Why Voice Matters”**

*The Kingdom of The Netherlands has provided responses to the following questions:*

1. **In your view, how does the right to freedom of opinion and expression contribute to the achievement of the SDGs?**

Human rights form a guiding framework for the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which UN member states have enshrined the SDGs, contains as one of its key ambitions the realisation of human rights for all, which is also clearly reflected in the Leave No One Behind principle.. Likewise, human rights also create the conditions for sustainable development. This is also reflected in the SDGs, in particular targets under SDG 16 (promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies), such as ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (SDG 16.7) cannot be achieved without the right to freedom of expression, including the right to information. These rights are essential to be able to form opinions, to vote for representative institutions, and to participate in public debate. Furthermore, in order to protect and realise these rights, it is essential that journalists can carry out their work without undue interference. More information on what the Netherlands has done to achieve these targets can be found in our the sixth National SDG-report[[1]](#footnote-1).

1. **Are there restrictions or other challenges to freedom of expression or access to information that affect the delivery of public services and achievements of economic, social, and cultural rights in your country? Which groups of people are most affected by these restrictions and in what ways? What measures would you recommend to address their problems?**

A Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) online fact-finding mission took place in the Netherlands in February 2022. The mission resulted in a report, “Towards a safer haven: Advancing safety of journalists amidst rising threats in the Netherlands”[[2]](#footnote-2). This report states that although the Netherlands remains a relatively safe haven for independent journalism, there are areas in which the Netherlands can improve policy in order to strengthen journalists’ safety. Aggression against journalists, photographers, and other media workers is increasing, amidst a hardening of the public debate. Freelance journalists have a vulnerable position when it comes to safety. The World Press Freedom Index 2021-report outlines the main challenges for the Netherlands as: increasing rates of aggression against journalists; verbal attacks on journalism from politicians; polarization of public debate leading to verbal and physical attacks and online intimidation, which sometimes leads to self-censorship and reluctance to tackle certain subjects, as well as inhibits news gathering and publication. The Index states that female reporters and journalists of colour are especially vulnerable to such attacks. The Index finds the Netherlands has a solid basis in the areas of a diverse media landscape, legal framework, and economic context.

The Dutch government acknowledges the importance of free press and the increasing threats to journalists in its Action Plan on safety and freedom of the press[[3]](#footnote-3) and outlines the following actions for further improving press freedom and safety:

* Provide support to PersVeilig (a joint initiative of the Dutch Association of Journalists, the Dutch Society of Editors in Chief, the police and the public prosecution, which aims to strengthen the position of journalists against violence and aggression and against legal claims);
* Increase support to the safety of freelancers;
* Improve citizens’ understanding of the role of journalism in a democratic society;
* Tackle online intimidation; and
* Conduct research into and monitoring of specific issues (like aggression against women journalists, online intimidation and strategic lawsuits against public participation).

The Action Plan also aims to share best practices with other countries, especially those that score well on the World Press Freedom Index.

**4. What have digital companies done to promote safe and uninterrupted online access to timely and pluralistic information and communications of women and poor and marginalized communities? How can information and communication technology companies better engage with governments and communities to promote sustainable development?**

Information technology, including the Internet and social media, are integral parts of modern society. The Dutch Sector-Agreement on International Socially Responsible Investment by Pension Funds has identified large technology companies as a sector, which deserves specific attention when it comes to responsible investment. Against this backdrop, the partners of the Pension Funds Agreement (pension funds, civil society and the Dutch government) selected a tech company, in which many pension funds had significant investments, to analyse how the company conducts its environmental, social, and governance due diligence to identify risks in the big tech sector. The aim is to engage with the company in order to engender behavioural changes that should lead to, amongst other, better respect for human rights and an improved human rights policy by the company. More information on this innovative approach can be found in Pension Funds Agreement Big Tech Case[[4]](#footnote-4).

1. <https://open.overheid.nl/repository/ronl-f5ed895d48ec1ea599ac45ad681dd4a58cdff6d6/1/pdf/zesde-nationale-sdg-rapportage-nederland-ontwikkelt-duurzaam.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Towards-a-safer-haven-Advancing-safety-of-journalists-amidst-rising-threats-in-the-Netherlands.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://open.overheid.nl/repository/ronl-e5dc6fd98ea2499f7a868cad7f270b6c7a411174/1/pdf/plan-van-aanpak-persvrijheid-en-persveiligheid.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/nl/pensioenfondsen/convenant/-/media/8E402B1FA687454589E464CEF744BA33.ashx> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)