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Permanent Mission of the Republic of Estonia
to the OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
23 September to 3 October in Warsaw
Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia, Mrs Mariin Ratnik, on
behalf of the OSCE participating states which are members of the Freedom
Online Coalition (FOC)
25 September 2013

Mr. President, dear colleagues and civil society representatives,

I have the honour of making this statement on behalf of the following OSCE participating States, which are members of the Freedom Online Coalition: Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and the OSCE Mediterranean partner for Co-operation Tunisia.

The Freedom Online Coalition would like to commend Ms Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, for her active and dedicated work on this issue and for having organized a successful conference on internet freedom last February. We found the debate very timely and we consider it extremely necessary to bring such an important issue to the attention of OSCE participating States. The importance of the internet as a tool to receive and share information and otherwise exercise freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms cannot be overestimated; but the internet only fulfills its full potential if it is kept free and secure.

We are pleased to note that an increasing number of countries all over the world are becoming connected online. However, unfortunately, some governments take the decision to restrict or filter access to the internet. Freedom of opinion and expression is a cornerstone of every democratic society and the birthright of every individual, whether it be exercised online or offline. Governments have the obligation to respect and ensure the fundamental freedoms of individuals under their jurisdiction. Internet freedom and media pluralism contribute to rights-based development by increasing media freedom, deepening accountability and tackling corruption. We encourage all participating States to work to ensure that the internet remains open, especially noting the difficulties faced by persons and groups who are subject to discrimination as they usually face higher barriers to Internet access.

We note with concern that the world continues to witness restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression and other fundamental freedoms online, including within social media platforms. The Freedom Online Coalition would like to draw special attention to the practices in some OSCE member states in this regard. We note the occurrence of physical and technological attacks against journalists and bloggers and the existence of legislation that negatively impacts on internet freedom in the OSCE area. The members of the Freedom Online Coalition would like to underline the

importance of safeguarding and supporting media pluralism. We believe that it is time to counter the trend of increased controls over internet content.

Freedom Online Coalition members stand with the journalists, including bloggers and all people whose human rights online are violated. We urge all governments to respect their international human rights obligations and commitments both online and offline and put an end to the persecution of those who exercise their fundamental freedoms to express themselves on the internet and through social media channels. The Freedom Online Coalition calls on the governments responsible for the intimidation or harassment of journalists, including bloggers or people expressing their opinion and otherwise exercising their fundamental freedoms on the internet to desist without conditions. States are responsible for ensuring that human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected online and offline. We reiterate the need to develop and increase access to social media channels, which can play an important role in increasing quality of life, combating poverty and advancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

Following the high level meetings in The Hague in 2011 and in Nairobi in 2012 the Freedom Online Coalition held the third ministerial meeting in Tunis in June 2013, hosted by OSCE Mediterranean partner country Tunisia. The participants, including regional organizations, international institutions, and representatives of civil society and the private sector, committed themselves to working together to voice concern over measures restricting internet freedom and support the individuals whose rights online are curtailed.

As my country will be coordinating the Freedom Online Coalition activities this year, I wish to reaffirm the Coalition's continued strong support for the Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age initiative, and to urge OSCE participating States that have not yet done so to join its now 51 supporters in pressing for its adoption at the Kyiv Ministerial this December.

I am very pleased to announce herewith that the fourth Freedom Online high-level conference will be held from 28 to 29 April, 2014, in Tallinn, Estonia.

The Freedom Online Coalition confirms that it will remain committed to the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms on the Internet through active engagement with civil society and all other relevant stakeholders.

Thank you.