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UNPRECEDENTED ATTACK ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Statement

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The organization MEMO 98 expresses sympathy and extends its deepest condolences to the families of the Aktuality.sk reporter Ján Kuciak and his girlfriend. Learning of a premeditated murder is always terrible, however, it is all the more atrocious news when it concerns young people freshly starting their independent life. Sadly, the monstrosity of the moment is only amplified by the signs suggesting that the crime was related to Ján Kuciak's work of a journalist.

"We condemn the long-standing atmosphere of mistrust, animosity and confrontation with the media; the haughty contempt or even aggressive vulgarity several representatives of the government have shown towards the critical media," said Ivan Godársky of MEMO 98. *"Alas, it is a sad sign of the times that several representatives of the state have been persistently undermining journalists in the eyes of the society, instead of empowering them."*

As a consequence, the society becomes benumbed, passive, and vulnerable to extremist tendencies or even degeneration towards negative patterns of behavior that are increasingly becoming a norm in ever broader strata of the society.

We would like to urge the bearers of these dangerous tendencies, namely Prime Minister Fico, Interior Minister Kaliňák, and the leading officials of the Slovak National Party party, to stop attacking the media, publicly doubting their merit and weakening the public character of the publicly-funded broadcaster Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS).

In the same breath, we hereby endorse the statement issued by the chief editors of the Slovak media urging the state to take all the necessary steps and measures to track down the criminals, while creating conditions guaranteeing security for journalist work.

The freedom of speech, the right to information, independent and free media (especially public service media), investigative journalism, the search for truth and critical thinking shaping the coverage of social issues – these are the essence, which must be nurtured and respected if a democratic society is to flourish and grow.

The best ways to answer and address the issue include not only genuine understanding and embracing the true role of the media (i.e. not merely setting up the microphones), but also offering the broadest possible support to high quality journalism by securing conditions guaranteeing it can be freely pursued, while wholeheartedly condemning and punishing all manifestations which would impede or oppose such freedoms. Let the shocking death of Ján Kuciak become a memento of the dangers of lingering era of Mečiarism and a constant reminder that media need to be protected, rather than attacked.