

Urgent call for governments, multilateral institutions, and philanthropies to support independent media and journalism

Recent events—including ongoing regional conflicts, economic downturns, changes in the policies of major tech companies, and the suspension of critical development assistance programmes—have severely destabilised the already precarious financial, distribution, and safety conditions of many independent journalism organisations and journalism support and freedom of expression initiatives worldwide.

The recent U.S. government decision to suspend foreign assistance has abruptly halted key grants and programmes that have been essential in sustaining global development, cooperation, and supporting international peace and security and human rights efforts worldwide, putting in jeopardy the ability of civil society organisations, NGOs, and governments to uphold the commitments agreed in the [Pact for the Future](#) and the [Global Digital Compact](#) and achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

At a time when the protection of civic space and human rights is more vital than ever, the withdrawal of critical funding threatens media and journalism organisations' role in ensuring access to reliable information. [Quoting UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#): “Without press freedom, we won’t have any freedom”.

Journalism and independent media are essential pillars of democratic societies, yet they have **been consistently underfunded and chronically undervalued**. This has left the sector particularly vulnerable to shocks, making it difficult to recover from disruptions like the current funding crisis. Media development fosters transparency, accountability, and civic engagement, yet without sustained support, its role in global development and human rights is at risk.

The funding gap exacerbates an already fragile situation, weakening media organisations' ability to respond to crises and fulfil their vital role in society.

In line with [the OECD Development Co-operation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment](#), we urge governments, donors, and stakeholders to take immediate action to address this crisis. We specifically urge stakeholders to:

1. **Unrestrict existing grants** to allow greater flexibility in how funds are used, enabling media and journalism support and policy organisations to adapt to changing circumstances and prioritise urgent needs to ensure their operations can continue.
2. **Establish emergency budget lines** to support public-interest media through this and future crises and emergencies, to ensure their short-term survival, prioritising small national organisations in fragile environments.
3. **Increase the volume of funding and its flexibility**, to scale up support for journalism organisations and independent media, particularly in countries with scarce resources. Streamline administrative requirements for support to lower transaction costs for actors and providers and incorporate adaptive and flexible processes into results management of funding.
4. Build on existing good practices and **enhance donor coordination** among private foundations, donor agencies and governments to ensure efficient and effective use of resources.
5. **Address structural long-term needs to build resilience:** Allocate substantial resources to journalism and media support in your programmes and budgets for the coming years. The crisis is immediate but also part of a longer-term challenge. Increase core and flexible long-term funding, capacity-building assistance, and financial support for independent media. Expand support for existing grantees and policy organisations, and extend it to those able to scale up sub-granting to media outlets.

Journalism is a public good, essential to democracy and informed societies. Millions rely on independent, fact-based reporting to navigate complex challenges and make informed decisions. Independent journalism organisations hold power to account, foster transparency, and ensure diverse voices are heard. However, declining financial support threatens its survival, leaving space for misinformation and disinformation that fuel conflicts, erode trust in institutions, and accelerate democratic backsliding. At a time of rising global instability and autocratisation, ensuring a well-informed public is critical to safeguarding human rights, democracy and global stability.

As donor governments and multilateral agencies face increasing pressure to address gaps in humanitarian funding, independent journalism is essential in humanitarian crises and natural disasters, where firsthand reporting provides vital, real-time information that shapes public understanding and informs governmental and humanitarian responses.

Sustainable development, human rights, and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The publication and misinterpretation of information about media support programmes and their beneficiaries are now putting at risk thousands of journalists and human rights defenders who have been involved in U.S.-funded projects over the past decades. In addition to fuelling narratives against independent journalism organisations, the misuse of funding data is now leading to cyberattacks, legal threats, and other forms of harassment.

In light of these alarming developments, we ask you to:

- Uphold your obligations under international human rights law and the commitments you have made to the free expression, media freedom, journalism, media, and digital rights communities.
- Take urgent steps to mitigate the risks of journalists and independent media being persecuted using data from U.S.-funded media support programmes.

Your support—whether through direct funding, convening stakeholders, offering strategic guidance, or advocating for policy change—will be instrumental in preserving and strengthening independent media and journalism and freedom of expression.

We would be happy to provide further details on the affected initiatives and discuss potential collaboration strategies. If you are available for a brief call in the coming days, please let us know a convenient time.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your thoughts and any guidance you can offer.

Signatories:

This letter has so far been endorsed by 103 press freedom, journalism support, free expression, and media development organisations. Due to security concerns, we are taking the precautionary step to not disclose which organisations signed the letter.

- Organisations who wish to endorse the letter can do so using this short encrypted form: <https://form.jotform.com/243331594373357>

Relevant resources:

GFMD has also prepared a briefing and an accompanying presentation which provide an overview of data on the U.S. portion of aid compared to overall aid amounts, as well as regionally relevant data and contextual information on the situation. If you would like to access them, please send a request via email to helpdesk-impact@gfmd.info.

This letter is being sent to philanthropies, governments, and multilateral institutions that fund journalism and media support. Other organisations are welcome to republish and quote from this letter in their own advocacy efforts.