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TOPICS: The Protection of Journalists

CHAIRS: Ella Interian, Anthony Padnos

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The Protection of Journalists Update

Index on Censorship, the National Union of Journalists, and other organizations had issues with the new National Security Bill in the United Kingdom. These organizations claim that the current draft of the bill will make it more difficult for journalists to do their jobs and could possibly lead them to be charged with espionage and given a lengthy prison sentence for simply investigating in the name of truth. The bill has also been criticized for giving the state more power and subjecting journalists to being abused by the state to protect their reputation by depriving and restricting the public's right to know. In addition, these organizations believe that the maximum sentencing of espionage of 14 years is far too disproportionate and argue that this may cause journalists to not want to report on certain topics to avoid possible jail time. Nik Williams, Policy and Campaign Officer of Index of Censorship, recently stated, “while the Government has stated its desire to protect journalism, these assurances are no more than words, with no protections to be found in the proposed legislation...”¹ The bill currently lacks any protections or safeguards, placing the UK well below both the standards set by other nations including important intelligence partners and international human rights standards.²

The Coalition of Journalists, which is an independent media outlet that reports and addresses social and political issues, requested a meeting with Tom Tugendhat, the minister responsible for the bill and launched a formal complaint towards the bill, demanding that

¹ Censorship, I. O. (2022, November 10). *Coalition of journalism organisations slams the National Security Bill*. Index on Censorship.

<https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2022/11/coalition-of-journalism-organisations-slam-the-national-security-bill/>

² OHCHR. (n.d.). *OHCHR | UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>

safeguards be implemented for the safety of journalists. Michelle Stanistreet, the head of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), stated, “At no point should journalists ever be conflated with spies, yet Government’s legislation risks setting a damaging precedent for this to occur.” Many other from the coalition of journalists are heavily reluctant towards this bill and

With the current draft of the National Security Bill this can cause issues with journalists and their livelihoods, along with the people’s right to know. This could possibly label journalists as spies, making them subject to arrest and which can pose a serious threat to public interest and freedom of the press.

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