



Independent Evaluation of the Media Freedom Coalition



Final Report

May 2025



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Acronyms

Aleph	Aleph Strategies
CN	Consultative Network
CPJ	Community to Protect Journalists
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CTAs	Call to Actions
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FOC	Freedom Online Coalition
GMDF	Global Media Defence Fund
HLP	High Level Panel of Legal Experts in Media Freedom
HRDs	Human Rights Defenders
IBAHRI	International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
IPDC	International Programme for the Development of Communication
MDC	Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists
MFC	Media Freedom Coalition
OGP	Open Government Partnership
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SLAPPs	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an independent evaluation of the [Media Freedom Coalition](#) (MFC), conducted by [Aleph Strategies](#) between October 2024 and March 2025. The evaluation assessed the MFC's performance over its first five years, from its formation in July 2019 to late 2024.

About the MFC

The Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) is a global network of 51 Member States which works with civil society organisations (CSOs), legal experts, and international bodies committed to advancing media freedom and the safety of journalists. It was launched by the UK and Canada at the first Global Conference for Media Freedom in 2019. It is anchored in the Global Pledge on Media Freedom, signed by all members. The MFC works to strengthen conditions for media freedom, influence government action, protect journalists, and coordinate advocacy among its members.

Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation aimed to:

- Assess the MFC's contribution to media freedom and journalist safety;
- Examine coordination and collaboration among stakeholders and related initiatives;
- Evaluate the sustainability of the MFC's outcomes;
- Offer recommendations to enhance its impact and operational effectiveness.

It builds on the 2022 *Reset Required*¹ evaluation, which focused on early implementation.

Methodology Summary

Using a rights-based approach aligned with OECD-DAC criteria (effectiveness, sustainability, and coherence), the evaluation categorised stakeholders as:

- **Duty-Bearers:** Governments, embassies, policymakers;
- **Responsibility-Holders:** CSOs, legal experts;
- **Rights-Holders:** Journalists and media workers.

¹ Reset Required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years: <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/reset-required-evaluating-the-media-freedom-coalition-after-its-first-two-years/>



Stakeholder engagement was central to the process. The evaluation followed four phases - **inception, data collection, report drafting, and co-creation** - and used a mixed-methods approach, including a desk review, an online quantitative survey, remote interviews, field visits, and three co-creation workshops with key stakeholders.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The evaluation found that the MFC has made **notable contributions** to media freedom and journalist safety over the past five years. It has played a role in encouraging some Member States to strengthen their media freedom policies and legislation. The MFC has also influenced state actors through diplomatic and advocacy efforts, maintaining high-level political attention on media freedom. Direct interventions, legal guidance, and engagement with embassy networks have contributed to journalist protection efforts at the local level. Furthermore, the MFC has strengthened multi-stakeholder coordination, bringing together governments, civil society, and legal experts.

However, the evaluation also identified several areas for improvement. While the MFC provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation, its engagement with members on domestic media freedom policies is voluntary and lacks a structured approach for supporting and tracking commitments. Joint advocacy statements have a greater impact locally than internationally and are often perceived as lacking boldness and clear outcomes. While the MFC has addressed high-profile cases, its focus has sometimes overshadowed broader, systemic media freedom challenges. Engagement with Rights-Holders and organisations working on the ground has been limited, impacting the relevance and sustainability of its strategies.

Coordination and collaboration within the MFC are foundational, particularly through diplomatic networks and the development of emergency visa schemes. However, decision-making is often reactive, affecting stakeholder trust. The MFC's membership is perceived as predominantly Northern-led, and there is potential to leverage its diverse membership more effectively.

Knowledge management and information-sharing need strengthening to ensure a deeper understanding of media freedom issues among Member States. The high-level legal expertise of the HLP is underutilised. Clarity around decision-making processes among Member States varies, influencing trust-based collaboration. While engagement at the local level through embassies is



effective, it requires more structured guidance and support. Coordination between Member States, the CN, and the HLP remains limited in some areas.

In terms of **sustainability**, the current governance model, particularly the annual rotation of Executive Group co-chairs, can present challenges for knowledge retention and continuity. Funding modalities are complex, leading to perceptions of uneven distribution and impacting trust and coordination. While the MFC has developed working relationships with similar coalitions, more formalised collaboration could maximise resource efficiency. The limited engagement with Rights-Holders influences the visibility and perceived effectiveness of the MFC's work.

Recommendations

The evaluation recommends the following key actions to strengthen the MFC's performance, operations, and governance. They reflect recurring themes and priorities identified throughout the evaluation. These recommendations are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to support the MFC's internal reflections and inform its next stages of development:

1. Reaffirm the MFC's mandate and shared purpose.

The MFC could convene a dedicated space for all stakeholder groups to come together and reflect on the MFC's vision. The next in-person meeting could serve as a pivotal opportunity to review the mandate and outline a strategic action plan informed by this evaluation's findings. In preparation, the Secretariat - working with an external learning partner - should facilitate consultations with Member States, civil society actors, and legal experts to co-develop a roadmap for implementing the evaluation's recommendations. The roadmap could be presented during the convening and then used as a living document to steer the Coalition's priorities over the coming years.

2. Strengthen Member State understanding and accountability around the Global Pledge.

The MFC could initiate a series of exploratory discussions among Member States to reflect on how their national commitments have evolved since 2019. These dialogues should examine both successes and setbacks, aiming to identify practical lessons and challenges. Based on this process, the Secretariat could facilitate the development of a set of standardised yet adaptable criteria to guide Member States in fulfilling their pledge commitments. As such, Member States would be invited to self-assess and provide input into the evolving framework.



The Executive Group would validate and oversee the integration of this framework into future MFC planning and onboarding. These criteria could also serve as a benchmark for assessing new member applications, creating a transparent and values-driven membership process.

3. Enhance the MFC’s visibility and strategic communications.

The MFC could adopt a more strategic and coordinated communication approach that reaches stakeholders at national, regional, and global levels. This could begin with reaffirming the Coalition’s presence at international forums such as UNESCO’s World Press Freedom Day and the International Journalism Festival, while also developing a proactive media engagement plan that includes op-eds, expert commentary, and accessible content on social media. Parallel to these efforts, each stakeholder group should be encouraged to develop their own targeted communication strategies—tailored to their audiences and regional contexts—which can be coordinated through a centralised Secretariat-led plan. This integrated approach would allow the MFC to amplify its messages consistently, improve stakeholder engagement, and enhance its role as a reference point in the global media freedom landscape.

4. Improve knowledge-sharing and resource accessibility across the MFC.

The MFC could expand its internal resource hub and proactively disseminating existing tools - such as HLP reports and the *Why Media Freedom Matters* publication - to a wider audience, including those operating at the local level. The Secretariat could consult with Member States, the CN, and HLP to identify gaps in available guidance and develop new materials where needed. These could include simplified toolkits, legal briefings, embassy checklists, and curated good practice case studies. To ensure effective uptake, the MFC could also explore low-barrier dissemination channels—such as embassy briefings and CN webinars - and track usage and feedback to inform updates.

5. Strengthen localisation through embassy networks.

The MFC could enhance its localisation strategy by establishing new embassy networks in countries where demand is high or existing human rights structures—such as EU embassy networks—could be leveraged. These embassy groups could receive clearer guidance on their roles within the MFC, including how to collaborate with local CN chapters, engage with HLP expertise, and access financial support tools. The MFC Secretariat could support this process by issuing orientation packages and convening regional coordination calls to ensure



coherence. Additionally, embassies could be encouraged to coordinate pooled funding efforts to support grassroots media freedom initiatives, improving the Coalition's reach and local legitimacy.

6. Leverage the HLP and CN to support local action.

The HLP and CN could adopt a proactive approach to engagement at country level. The HLP could offer bespoke legal advice and technical assistance to Member States and local actors seeking to develop or reform media legislation. Meanwhile, CN chapters could be encouraged - through targeted resourcing and direct engagement opportunities - to work more closely with embassy networks and HLP experts. This would require stronger coordination mechanisms facilitated by the MFC Secretariat, the HLP Secretariat and the CN Co-Chairs (with the support of the CN Coordinator, when hired), including matchmaking between local CN chapters, embassies, and legal experts, and potentially piloting joint missions or thematic working groups to address priority issues.

7. Increase direct engagement with Rights-Holders.

The MFC could initiate the design of a dedicated mechanism to incorporate Rights-Holder voices into its strategic and operational work. One option could be the creation of a non-executive council made up of journalists, media workers, and representatives of marginalised communities across different regions. Alternatively, a rotating panel of media experts with lived experience could be established to serve as an advisory body to the Member States. The CN, in coordination with the MFC Secretariat, could lead on developing the terms of reference and participation framework for this initiative. This structure could also ensure feedback loops between Rights-Holders and MFC decision-makers, enabling their perspectives to inform both public-facing advocacy and behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

8. Ensure transparency of processes and decision-making.

The MFC could make a commitment to process transparency by establishing clear protocols for decision-making and regularly sharing relevant information with stakeholders. This could include publishing policies and procedures, providing updates on statement endorsements, and clarifying how cases of concern are prioritised. Where confidentiality is necessary - such as in contexts of high risk or ongoing negotiations - communications should adhere to a 'do no harm' approach while still keeping stakeholders informed through secure internal channels. The MFC Secretariat could also explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated



internal communications platform to facilitate secure, real-time collaboration between stakeholders, reducing reliance on ad hoc exchanges.

9. Explore basket funding as a sustainable financial modality.

The MFC could explore the adoption of a basket funding model. This would involve pooled contributions from Member States and other donors, managed through a common framework with transparent allocation criteria. Such a model would enable more predictable, flexible, and equitable resourcing of cross-cutting initiatives and support functions. The Secretariat could initiate a feasibility study, drawing on lessons from similar multi-donor mechanisms, and convene interested donors and stakeholders to co-design the model. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that funding decisions are driven by the Coalition's strategic priorities and guided by principles of fairness, transparency, and impact. Thus, the Executive Group could provide oversight to ensure alignment with the MFC's strategic priorities.

10. Expand the role and capacity of the MFC Secretariat.

The MFC could launch an internal review process of the Secretariat to map existing responsibilities, identify areas of overlap or underperformance, and clarify the division of tasks between its various governance and implementation structures. This process should be inclusive, drawing on the perspectives of Member States, CN and HLP members, and Secretariat staff. Based on the findings, a revised roles and responsibilities framework could be developed and shared across the Coalition, potentially annexed to a refreshed Terms of Reference document. The MFC Secretariat could also facilitate capacity-strengthening sessions to help stakeholders adapt to any changes and ensure consistent understanding moving forward. Clear documentation and communication will be key to embedding this clarity into daily practice.



1. Introduction

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Aleph Strategies (Aleph) has been commissioned by the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) to conduct an independent evaluation of its work. The evaluation began in October 2024 and concluded in March 2025. This is the final evaluation report, containing the main findings of the exercise along with recommendations for the future.

1.1. Context of the Evaluation

1.1.1. About the Media Freedom Coalition

The **Media Freedom Coalition (MFC)** is a global network to support freedom of the media worldwide through collaboration between **51 Member States, 22 civil-society organisations, legal experts, and international bodies such as UNESCO**. The Coalition was formed in **July 2019** at the first annual **Global Conference for Media Freedom** in London as an initiative of the governments of the **United Kingdom and Canada**. All Member States signed the **Global Pledge on Media Freedom**, and each **Member State** made the commitment to work together in taking action to improve the media freedom environment and the safety of journalists both at home and abroad.²

1.1.2. MFC's Objectives & Purpose

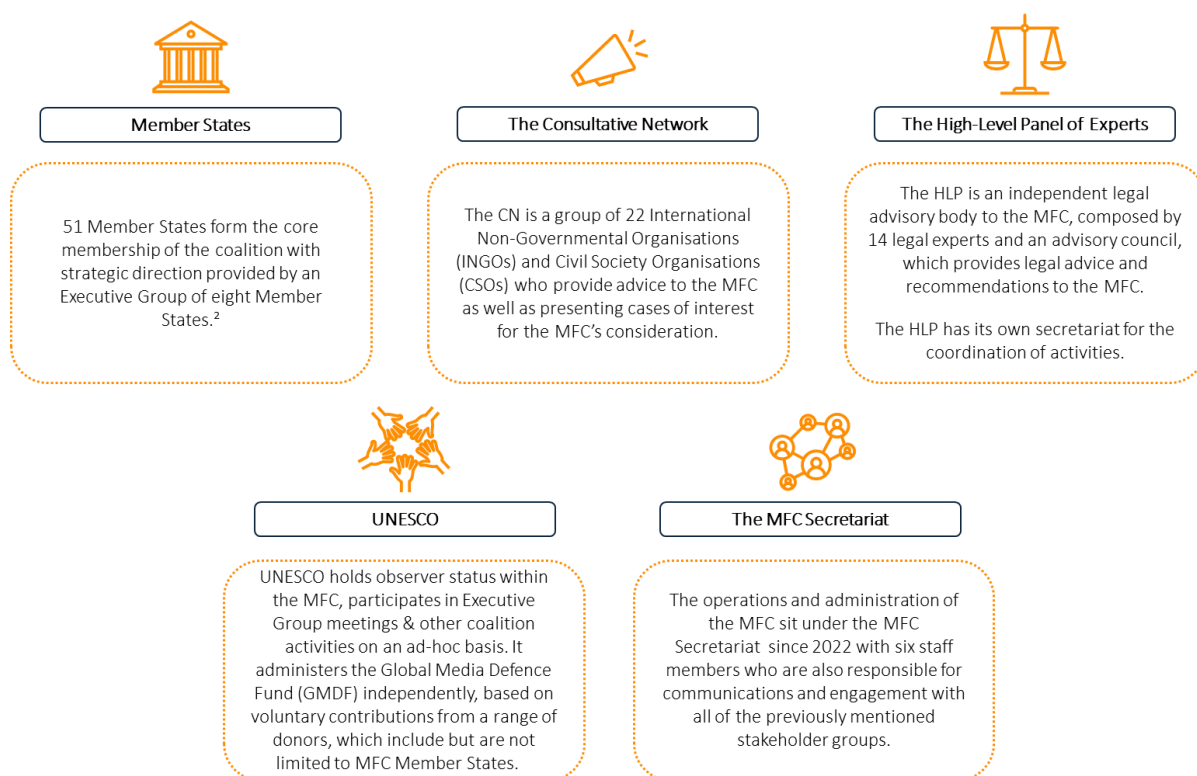
The MFC describes itself as:

a partnership of countries working together proactively to advocate for media freedom at home and abroad...for the safety of journalists and media workers, and hold to account those that harm journalists and severely restrict them from doing their job.

In this regard, there are a number of stakeholder groups who are invested in the work of the MFC:

² Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. (2019). [Global Pledge on Media Freedom](#).

Figure 1: MFC Stakeholder Groups



Its goal is to improve the media freedom environment and the safety of journalists globally, recognising that the media freedom environment is influenced by factors such as legislative frameworks and institutions, political and social norms, and the economic environment which might enable independent public interest journalism and a pluralistic media sector. The MFC also recognises that protecting the safety of journalists includes physical, digital, legal and psychosocial safety aspects.

The MFC's objectives are to:⁴

1. Improve the enabling environment for media freedom, by strengthening laws, policies, and the economic climate for independent media;
2. Influence governments, state actors and other powerful individuals to uphold media freedom and hold to account the perpetrators of crimes against journalists;

³ Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, United States of America.

⁴ Media Freedom Coalition. *MFC's Terms of Reference*.



3. Ensure journalists and news organisations are better protected and better able to protect themselves from threats and intimidation;
4. Energise and mobilise the MFC’s member countries to ensure a diverse, informed, engaged and coordinated Coalition.

Actions/outcomes to deliver these objectives which are supported by the MFC include advocacy and ‘cases of concern’ interventions, diplomatic intervention via the embassy networks mechanism, legal reforms, events, the support to UNESCO’s GMDF, and a cross-sector Working Group on Media Development which shares learning and coordination support for independent media.

A previous evaluation of the MFC, *Reset Required*, which was published in February 2022, examined the work of the MFC in the first two years of its operation.⁵ It argued that in spite of some notable achievements, the actions of the MFC had been slow, lacked transparency and impact, and should be more noticeable and even bold, for which a ‘reset’ was deemed necessary.⁶

1.1.3. The last five years of media freedom, where does the MFC stand at?

Coalitions such as the MFC are needed now more than ever. Yet its value proposition needs to be refreshed to meet the needs of today’s rapidly changing media freedom context.

This urgency was first underscored on the 10th July 2019 at the Global Conference for Media Freedom, when then United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt delivered the following in his keynote speech, “*the strongest safeguard against the dark side of power is accountability and scrutiny – and few institutions fulfil that role more effectively than a free media.*” His ambition to support the cause of media freedom over five years ago was spurred on by the high profile killing of journalists, from Saudi Arabian Jamal Khashoggi to Mexican journalist Francisco Romero Diaz, as well as the increasing threats of imprisonment and violence levelled against journalists in an effort to silence them.

⁵ Dr. Mary Myers, Dr, Martin Scott, Dr Mel Bunce, Lina Yassin, Maria Carmen (Ica) Fernandez and Dr. Rachel Khan. (2022). *Reset required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years.*

⁶ Media Freedom Coalition. (2024). *High-Level Panel of Legal Experts Reports - Report on the Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists; A Pressing Concern: Protecting and Promoting Press Freedom by Strengthening Consular Support to Journalists at Risk; Report on Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk; Advice on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses Against Journalists.*



Five years later, these threats to media freedom and the safety of journalists have not diminished; rather, they have deepened and become more widespread. While the 2019 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index focused on violence as the main obstacle to press freedom, the RSF Press Freedom Index 2024 revealed that the most ominous danger to journalists comes from political authorities, those who should be its guarantors according to the report.⁷ In its 2024 Index, RSF describes disinformation as a burgeoning threat to press freedom and democracy. The Community to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Global Impunity Index 2024 reveals that over 80% of journalist killings remain unresolved while UNESCO reported 1,750 killings since 1993, with 478 registered over the past five years alone.⁸ **Conflict and war combine with crime and corruption to make the terrain for journalists more dangerous in 2025 than has ever been recorded.**

The worsening story does not stop at physical and online violence. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in efforts to maintain control of narratives around the pandemic, authorities used a number of strategies to suppress press freedom, including arrests and legal repression. **In many cases, laws were passed which criminalised the spreading of ‘fake news’ and “disinformation” while censorship and website blocking were also used to silence criticism.**⁹ At the same time, disinformation and online harassment

⁷ Reporters Without Borders. (2019). *2019 World Press Freedom Index: A cycle of fear* – “The 2019 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) shows how hatred of journalists has degenerated into violence, contributing to an increase in fear. The number of countries regarded as safe, where journalists can work in complete security, continues to decline, while authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on the media”.; Reporters Without Borders. (2024). *2024 World Press Freedom Index: Journalism under political pressure*.

⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists. (2024). *CPJ 2024 Impunity Index: Haiti and Israel top list of countries where journalist murders go unpunished*; UNESCO. (2024). *Observatory of Killed Journalists: Statistics on attacks against journalists*.

⁹ International Press Institute. (2020). *WPDF 2020: COVID-19 accelerating a global decline in media freedom*; In today's media landscape, the terms ‘fake news’ and ‘disinformation’ have become increasingly relevant, particularly in discussions on media integrity, public trust, and the impact of misinformation on democratic processes. The term fake news refers to deliberately fabricated information presented as legitimate news. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, fake news is defined as “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Similarly, the Collins English Dictionary describes it as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting” (Collins English Dictionary, 2024). Unlike fake news, which can include both intentional and unintentional falsehoods, disinformation is specifically created with the intent to mislead. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines disinformation as “false information deliberately and often covertly spread (as by the planting of rumours) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth” (Merriam-Webster, 2024). The Oxford English Dictionary further clarifies that disinformation involves “deliberately misleading or biased information, manipulated narrative or facts, or propaganda spread with the intent to deceive” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024).



campaigns against journalists, in particular women and those from marginalised groups, became rife as a form of suppression and undermining credibility.¹⁰ The use of spyware against journalists and increased use of media surveillance tactics during Covid-19 culminated in the July 2021 Pegasus Project investigation which revealed that more than 200 journalists had been targeted using spyware in their personal smartphones, largely by governments some of whom are considered to be democratic.¹¹ **These tactics have continued to inform the nature of press freedom restrictions beyond the pandemic.** Threats in the form of SLAPPS - strategic lawsuits against public participation - **the use of defamation and libel laws to silence critics, and other forms of abusive litigation continue to increase, again largely targeting journalists and media workers particularly in Europe.**¹² In November 2024, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote a piece in the Guardian: *“Journalism is the lifeblood of British democracy. My government will protect it.”* where he underscored the growing exploitation of the legal system to silence journalists and public debate.¹³ **Beyond Europe, these tactics have also intensified in Latin America. That same year, a report by RSF analysing protection mechanisms in the region found that institutional weaknesses and judicial intimidation continue to threaten journalist safety.** The report also noted that legal and administrative harassment—including the misuse of defamation laws—remains a persistent tactic to suppress critical reporting and restrict press freedom in the region.”¹⁴ Additionally, a UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development brief published in 2024 highlighted the growing misuse of financial laws to crackdown further on press freedom.¹⁵

In all cases, these threats are not only serving to undermine the credibility of media and journalists but can also be financially damaging. Public interest media, which is free from political or commercial interference, has never been in greater financial peril with little option for diverse independent funding options. **Recent global shifts in funding priorities and reductions in international support exacerbated an already dire situation for the journalism industry, which relies on significant funding from international, multilateral and philanthropic organisations for survival, many of whom are withdrawing and cutting funding to independent media globally.** Without funding for public interest

¹⁰ UNESCO. (2024). *Threats to freedom of press: Violence, disinformation, censorship*.

¹¹ Kelion, L. (2021, July 19). *Pegasus: Spyware sold to governments 'targets activists'*. BBC News.

¹² The Case. (2024). *A 2024 report on SLAPPS in Europe: Mapping trends and cases*.

¹³ Starmer, K. (2024, October 28). *Journalism is the lifeblood of British democracy. My government will protect it*. The Guardian.

¹⁴ Reporters Without Borders (2024, December 10). *Protection Mechanisms: RSF report analyses journalist safety programs in five Latin American countries*.

¹⁵ UNESCO. (2024). *World trends in freedom of expression and media development*.



media, the argument for supporting media freedom becomes moot. There needs to exist a free public interest media for accountability to be possible. And without accountability, democracy will continue to be threatened.

When the MFC was created, out of the 2019 Global Conference on Media Freedom, its aim was to address and raise awareness of issues related to media freedom and freedom of expression, namely through collaboration. **The MFC's first five years have included supporting actions such as advocacy, diplomatic intervention, legal reform, events and enabling the provision of funding to support media freedom.** During this time, the Coalition has been able to consolidate and professionalise, in particular with the introduction of the MFC Secretariat in 2022.

The MFC now operates in a markedly different context from 2019. While still relatively young, it should build on the learning and experience gained to adapt and begin establishing processes that are **distinct, relevant, and effective.** It needs to consider how it can continue to address the needs of journalists in the increasingly challenging and evolving terrain that governs the media freedom ecosystem. It brings together a unique blend of diplomacy—through the involvement of ostensibly committed Member States—and accountability—through the involvement of the CN of local and international CSOs and INGOS—and international humanitarian law and legal expertise—through the HLP. In the face of renewed challenges to multilateralism and shifting global dynamics, **it is more critical than ever that the MFC refine its proposition to function effectively and coherently in this rapidly changing context.**

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation assessed the effectiveness, coherence, and sustainability of the MFC over its first five years. It offers recommendations and lessons learned to help strengthen the MFC's impact, operations, and governance in the years ahead.

This evaluation builds on the 2021 MFC evaluation, *Reset Required*, which focused on the programme's early implementation phase. **While the previous evaluation offered foundational**



insights on strategic positioning, operational setup, and the relevance of the consortium model, the current evaluation shifts focus to the programme’s overall contribution, effectiveness, and sustainability at the end of its funding cycle. It places greater emphasis on results, stakeholder influence, and learning, including how the MFC has shaped narratives, collaborations, and capacities in the media freedom ecosystem.

In the broader context of media freedom, this evaluation is also situated alongside a growing body of work by partners and initiatives operating in this space. While a comprehensive mapping of other evaluations was beyond the scope of this assignment, the analysis was informed by knowledge of complementary efforts led by media development organisations, funders, and research actors. **The evaluation therefore offers a distinct contribution by combining a systems perspective with a participatory, learning-oriented approach tailored specifically to the MFC’s consortium model.**

Unlike the previous report, this evaluation was commissioned by the MFC Secretariat with oversight from a Steering Group convened specifically for this purpose.¹⁶ The evaluation was carried out by an independent team tasked with data collection, analysis, and drafting of the report.¹⁷ The Secretariat and Steering Group provided input and feedback throughout the evaluation process, ensuring a comprehensive review.

The evaluation findings are intended for use by MFC Member States and key stakeholders—including the CN, HLP, UNESCO, and the MFC Secretariat, but also key donors supporting the MFC’s work such as the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and Global Affairs Canada—to enhance collaboration, coordination, and overall outcomes of the MFC.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the evaluation¹⁸:

¹⁶ Dr. Mary Myers, Dr. Martin Scott, Dr. Mel Bunce, Lina Yassin, Maria Carmen (Ica) Fernandez and Dr. Rachel Khan. (2022). *Reset required? Evaluating the Media Freedom Coalition after its first two years*.

¹⁷ The evaluation was conducted by Aleph Strategies, under the leadership of a core evaluation team composed of a Project Director in charge of quality assurance; a Team Lead responsible for the data collection and analysis as well as for the different deliverables (reports and workshops); and a Research Analyst who supported the background research and report writing. The team operated independently, without interference from any stakeholders, and no conflicts of interest were identified during the evaluation process.

¹⁸ No divergences nor changes were made to the scope of the evaluation as outlined in the ToRs of the latter.

- Assessed the extent to which the MFC meaningfully contributed toward its goal;
- Examined the quality of coordination and collaboration, both among key MFC stakeholders and with other relevant initiatives;
- Evaluated the sustainability of the MFC’s results to date;
- Provided recommendations in these areas to help maximise the effectiveness of the MFC’s work.

2.2. Approach & Analytical Framework

2.2.1. A Rights-Based Approach

This evaluation adopted a rights-based approach, drawing from both the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria - specifically effectiveness, sustainability and coherence - as well as cross-cutting human rights principles, including accountability, participation, and equality.¹⁹ A human rights-based approach integrated human rights standards and principles throughout the evaluation process. It emphasised inclusivity by engaging diverse stakeholder groups and ensuring equitable consideration of both processes and outcomes. This provided a critical lens for assessing the MFC’s contributions to the protection of human rights, particularly freedom of expression.

The evaluation applied a rights-based framework that categorised stakeholders into three key groups:

- **Duty-Bearers** - Entities responsible for protecting and fulfilling human rights, including governments, including their embassies, and policymakers;²⁰

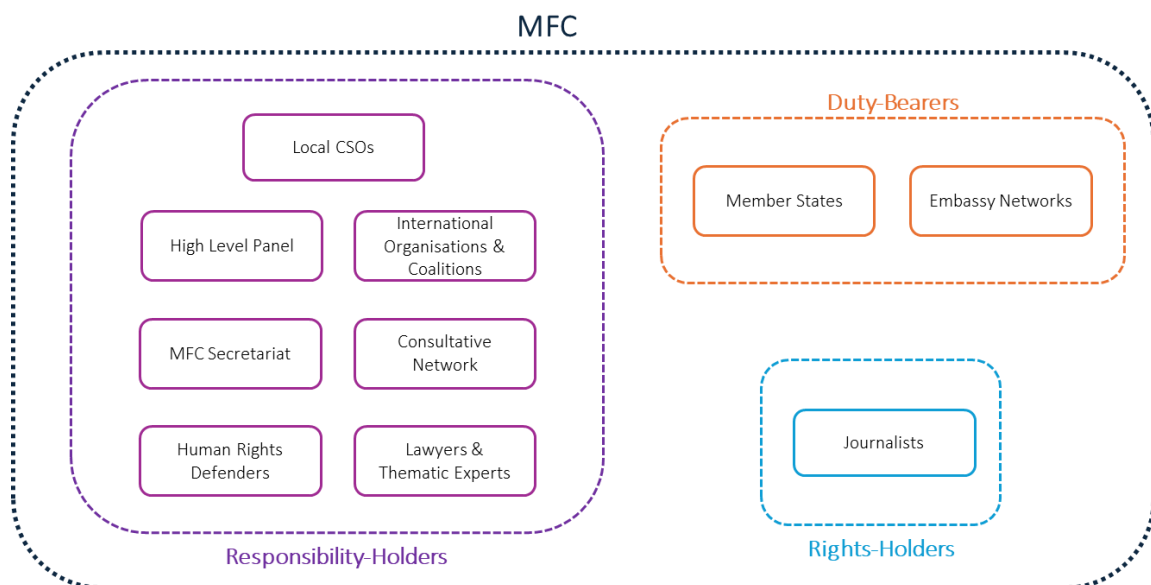
¹⁹ United Nations Sustainable Development Group. (2023). *Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Coordination* - A human rights-based approach is a framework that integrates international human rights norms and principles into development planning, implementation, and evaluation. It ensures that development efforts contribute directly to the realisation of human rights and empowers individuals—particularly marginalised groups—to actively participate in decision-making processes. This framework requires human rights principles (universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability) to guide development cooperation, and focus on developing the capacities of both ‘duty-Bearers’ to meet their obligations, and ‘rights-holders’ to claim their rights; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation*.

²⁰ While embassy networks are formally part of their respective Member States, they have been treated as a distinct stakeholder group for the purposes of this evaluation due to the specific scope of their engagement and operational role within the MFC. This categorisation was discussed and validated during the inception phase and has been applied consistently to reflect the differentiated perspectives and contributions observed across stakeholder groups.

- **Responsibility-Holders** - Stakeholders supporting advocacy, legal, and policy mechanisms to strengthen media freedom, including the CN and HLP;
- **Rights-Holders** - Individuals and groups directly affected by media freedom restrictions, including journalists and media workers.

Figure 2 on the next page how these rights-based approaches to the roles of stakeholders have been applied to the MFC ecosystem:

Figure 2: MFC Stakeholder Groups – A Rights-Based Approach



To ensure that evaluation findings were collected in an equitable and participatory manner, the evaluation engaged stakeholders across these groups. This approach allowed for a comprehensive assessment of how the MFC facilitated interactions between Duty-Bearers, Responsibility-Holders, and Rights-Holders to advance media freedom and journalist safety. **In addition to the rights-based approach, the evaluation incorporated the OECD’s Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media & the Information Environment.**²¹ These principles provided a structured framework to assess whether the MFC’s initiatives effectively supported media freedom, journalist safety, and the broader information landscape. By applying these principles, the evaluation examined how the MFC’s strategies aligned with best practices in international media support, ensuring that interventions were both impactful and sustainable.

²¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2024). *Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment*.



2.2.2. Stakeholder Participation

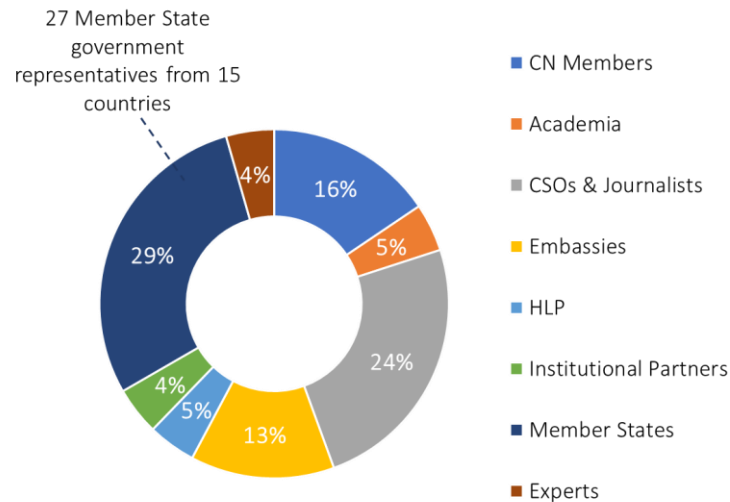
Stakeholder engagement was a core principle of the evaluation, ensuring the process remained inclusive, reflective of diverse perspectives, and grounded in the lived experiences of MFC participants. While most engagement took place during the data collection, analysis, and validation phases, stakeholders also contributed meaningfully to the evaluation design. After the inception report was presented, the evaluation approach was refined based on feedback from the MFC Secretariat, the Steering Group, and selected representatives from participating organisations.

The selection of workshop participants was coordinated with the MFC Secretariat to ensure diversity across geography, thematic expertise, and institutional roles. Participation was both purposive and pragmatic, aiming to include actors who had been engaged in different capacities throughout the programme. **The MFC Secretariat and Steering Group played an advisory and facilitative role throughout the evaluation:** they provided strategic guidance, helped identify relevant stakeholders for data collection, validated key methodological choices, and reviewed draft deliverables at multiple stages to ensure accuracy and alignment with MFC priorities.

Error! Reference source not found. below presents the sample distribution of the stakeholders engaged during the evaluation process through interviews, both on site and remotely:²²

Figure 1: Sample Distribution

²² In line with our safeguarding and confidentiality protocols, neither the identities of interviewees nor the names of their organisations are disclosed. Stakeholder insights are anonymised by category to ensure the safety and privacy of participants, particularly those in sensitive or high-risk contexts – See Appendix II for more details on ethics and safeguarding.



2.2.3. Structure of the Report

The analysis is grounded in the evaluation questions, which were developed based on the OECD DAC evaluation criteria and the specific objectives of the MFC evaluation. The structure of the findings reflects the following framework: findings are organised around the MFC’s core objectives, with sustainability added as a cross-cutting theme. By doing so, the report’s structure ensures alignment with the evaluation’s scope and purpose, and facilitates a coherent presentation of evidence-based insights linked to each evaluation dimension. Data sources—including project documentation, key informant interviews, and survey responses—are referenced throughout the findings.

2.3. Phases & Activities

The evaluation was conducted across four distinct phases - **inception, data collection, report drafting, and co-creation and finalisation**. It combined document analysis, stakeholder consultations, field research, and collaborative workshops to provide a well-rounded assessment of the MFC’s performance.²³

²³ All data collection tools—including interview guides and survey questionnaires—were reviewed and validated internally prior to deployment. While no formal pre-testing was conducted, tools were iteratively refined through internal team review and alignment with the evaluation framework to ensure clarity, coherence, and contextual relevance.



Document Review

The first phase involved an in-depth review of 64 documents, including agreements, reports, articles, and databases. This phase provided contextual and historical insights into the MFC's work, its structures, and previous assessments.



Online Survey

An online survey, available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian, was conducted with 36 journalists and media workers across 18 countries to capture perspectives from those directly impacted by the MFC's efforts on media freedom and journalist safety.²⁴



Remote Interviews

To gather qualitative insights from a diverse range of stakeholders, the evaluation team conducted 67 remote interviews with representatives from 52 organisations and institutions, including CN members, academia, CSOs, journalists, government representatives from embassy networks, HLP representatives, institutional partners, Member States, and media freedom experts.



Field Visits

Field research was carried out through on-site interviews with 48 individuals from 37 organisations in the Philippines and Chile. These visits provided a deeper understanding of local-level engagement and the MFC's impact in these regions. During these visits, the evaluation team spoke with Member States, government representatives within embassy networks, journalists, academia, and CSOs.



Co-Creation Workshops

As part of the evaluation's participatory approach, three workshops were held to engage stakeholders in shaping the findings and recommendations:

²⁴ The survey used a snowball sampling approach and was disseminated through MFC partners and networks. While the responses provided valuable qualitative insights, the overall response rate was low, and the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the broader journalist community.



- Workshop 1: Presentation of the inception report to gather feedback and refine the approach to the evaluation.
- Workshop 2: Presentation of preliminary findings, allowing stakeholders to provide feedback and refine the analysis.
- Workshop 3: Discussion on recommendations, ensuring that proposed actions are practical, relevant, and informed by stakeholder input.



Data Synthesis and Analysis

Findings from all data collection methods were analysed through the lens of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and the rights-based framework. By triangulating quantitative survey data, qualitative interview insights, document analysis, and stakeholder consultations, this evaluation provides a holistic understanding of the MFC's role and impact over the past five years.

2.4. Limitations & Mitigation Strategies

While this evaluation employed a rigorous and multi-method approach, the following limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings:

Table 1: Limitations & Mitigation Strategies

Limitation	Description	Mitigation Strategies
Stakeholder representation imbalance	Engagement levels varied across stakeholder groups. Journalists and Rights-Holders—despite being a core constituency—were underrepresented in the remote interview phase, while some government representatives were unavailable to participate. This created a risk of bias in the perspectives reflected in the findings.	Targeted outreach was conducted to ensure diversity across roles, regions, and sectors. To address the gap in journalist engagement, the evaluation team prioritised interviews with journalists during field missions in the Philippines and Chile. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to ensure broader stakeholder diversity across roles, regions, and thematic areas throughout the data collection process. Document reviews and secondary data were also used to



		supplement gaps in primary data collection.
Absence of concrete indicators and results tracking mechanisms	The lack of measurable indicators and systematic monitoring made it difficult to assess the effectiveness and impact of MFC interventions. This was further compounded by the complexity of the media freedom landscape, where attribution is inherently challenging.	Triangulated data from multiple sources—including document review, stakeholder interviews, surveys, and field visits—to develop a well-rounded and evidence-based assessment despite the absence of formal impact metrics.
Rapidly evolving media freedom context	Given the rapidly shifting media freedom landscape, some findings may reflect conditions at the time of data collection but could evolve in response to political or geopolitical changes.	The evaluation team actively monitored emerging contextual changes and made efforts to integrate them into the analysis where possible, ensuring that findings were interpreted with reference to broader political and geopolitical trends.



3. MFC's contributions to improving media freedom & the safety of journalists

Over the past five years, the MFC has worked to advance a safer, more enabling environment for journalists across the globe. This section follows the Coalition's contributions through legal reforms, diplomatic pressure, and direct interventions - spotlighting moments when quiet diplomacy helped secure a journalist's release, and when multilateral advocacy pushed states to reflect on their own media laws. As progress hasn't been even, this section also explores where the MFC has had difficulties to sustain momentum or fully integrate the voices of those on the frontlines. The examples provided below look at the Coalition's evolving role in protecting journalists, influencing power, and building an environment where independent media can thrive.

3.1. The MFC in Action: Four Pillars of Progress

To understand the MFC's contribution to global media freedom, it is useful to look at how its work aligns with four key objectives:²⁵

1. Improving the enabling environment for media freedom, by strengthening laws, policies, and the economic climate for independent media;
2. Influencing governments, state actors and other powerful individuals to uphold media freedom and hold to account the perpetrators of crimes against journalists;
3. Ensuring journalists and news organisations are better protected and better able to protect themselves from threats and intimidation;
4. Energising and mobilise the MFC's member countries to ensure a diverse, informed, engaged and coordinated Coalition.

Since its inception, the MFC has made notable contributions across these objectives. Through legal advisory work, policy engagement, and diplomatic coordination, the Coalition has helped strengthen national frameworks that support independent media (Objective 1). Member States have utilised the

²⁵ Media Freedom Coalition. *MFC's Terms of Reference*.



MFC's platform to exchange best practices and seek guidance on media laws, reinforcing a collaborative approach to legislative improvements.

In its diplomatic and advocacy role, the MFC has influenced state actors and institutions to recognise and address press freedom concerns. Coordinated diplomatic statements, bilateral discussions, and strategic interventions have provided avenues for holding perpetrators accountable and raising visibility around media freedom violations (Objective 2). While the impact of diplomatic initiatives can be difficult to quantify, stakeholders have emphasised the MFC's value in maintaining high-level political attention on media freedom.

The Coalition has also contributed to journalist protection efforts through direct interventions, legal guidance, and engagement with embassy networks. Cases of concern have been raised through trial monitoring, emergency visa support, and advocacy efforts, reflecting the MFC's role in enhancing journalist safety mechanisms (Objective 3). Stakeholder engagement suggests that these efforts have been particularly effective at the local level, where diplomatic networks and civil society partnerships have provided critical support to at-risk journalists.

Finally, the MFC has strengthened multi-stakeholder coordination, bringing together governments, civil society, and legal experts to advance media freedom efforts. Its ability to facilitate collaboration across sectors has been widely recognised as a key strength (Objective 4). However, stakeholders note that while platforms for engagement exist, there are opportunities to deepen integration between Member States and advisory bodies, such as the HLP. The HLP's high-quality legal reports and recommendations have been well received, but its full potential as a resource for both policymakers and Rights-Holders has yet to be fully realised.

The MFC's structure and engagement have positioned it as a key player in media freedom efforts, with tangible successes at local and diplomatic levels. As the Coalition continues to evolve, its multi-stakeholder model remains a distinctive feature that contributes to ongoing media freedom initiatives.

3.2. Improve the enabling environment, by strengthening laws, policies and the economic climate for independent media



The MFC has played a role in encouraging some Member States to strengthen their media freedom policies and legislation at the national level. Membership in the MFC has prompted several states to assess their media ecosystems and explore strategies for improvement. While this was an important aspect of the MFC’s mandate in 2019, it has become even more relevant given broader concerns over democratic backsliding and its impact on media freedom.²⁶ One Duty-Bearer put it frankly, *“there is clearly a concerted effort to roll back human rights more broadly.”* The commitments made by the Member States need to stand up to scrutiny if the MFC is to continue to protect media freedom as outlined in the Global Pledge. All MFC Member States have committed to the Global Pledge on Media Freedom, which underscores their responsibility to uphold press freedom domestically and internationally.²⁷ This Pledge includes references to safeguarding media freedoms in their countries including the following:

“As governments, it is our responsibility to ensure that people in our countries can enjoy all of their human rights and the benefits these bring to society.” and “We commit to speak out and take action together ... (to) shine a light on violations and abuses of media freedom, bringing them to the attention of the global public and working towards accountability.”

For some states, participation in the MFC has provided an opportunity to strengthen national frameworks on media freedom. One Duty-Bearer commented, *“Our membership has helped us develop our national framework on media freedom. After joining, we became more active in setting task forces and MoUs at the national level. The MFC has given us an internal boost.”* For other Member States, their involvement in the MFC was in fact driven by a desire to develop their media freedom approaches ‘at home’. According to another Duty-Bearer, *“We had an online meeting some time ago with key authorities of the MFC where we identified gaps in {our country} in terms of media freedom, safety of journalists. In fact, I invited the President for the Association of Journalists to be part of that meeting...working with them at that higher level is the motivating factor for us to be part of the MFC.”*

The MFC’s engagement with its members on domestic media freedom policies remains voluntary, with varying levels of participation. While some states have taken proactive steps, there is limited evidence of a structured approach to supporting or tracking member states’ commitments in this area.

²⁶ Bunce, M. (2025, January 29). *Decline in media freedom ‘hand-in-hand’ with democratic backsliding*. The Foreign Policy Centre.

²⁷ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. (2019). *Global Pledge on Media Freedom*.



The RSF Press Freedom Index indicates that, on average, press freedom has declined among MFC members since the Coalition's inception in 2019. Less than a third of member states have improved their ranking, reflecting broader global challenges rather than the direct impact of any single initiative. These trends highlight the complexity of advancing media freedom within a shifting political landscape. While this cannot be wholly attributed to the limitations of the MFC, it does raise question marks against the value of this and other media freedom initiatives which have been launched in the last few years.

The HLP has facilitated direct legal and regulatory support for select MFC Member States, engaging bilaterally to assist in strengthening national media freedom policies. Some states have sought confidential legal guidance on reforms related to media freedom. As one Responsibility-Holder explained: *"We are getting requests from states to review their legislation impacting media freedom and often these requests are on a confidential basis."*

A notable example of this engagement is the Journalists and Communications Workers Protection Bill in Chile, where the HLP provided input to align the legislation with international best practices. Given the sensitivity of legal reform processes, the impact of these efforts is not always immediately visible, and measuring real-time change remains complex.

The MFC has supported some Duty-Bearers in strengthening their national media freedom frameworks, with varying perspectives on its role in domestic policy development. Some Member States primarily engage with the MFC on international media freedom issues 'abroad', while others see value in applying insights to their national contexts 'at home'. This difference is often linked to how media freedom is framed within each government—some view it as a foreign policy issue, while others integrate it into domestic governance. The representation of Member States within the MFC also varies, influencing how priorities are set. In cases where foreign ministries serve as the primary MFC focal points, engagement tends to focus on external media freedom efforts rather than domestic initiatives. As a result, there can be a gap between international commitments and domestic implementation of media freedom standards.

Expectations of the MFC vary across Member States, reflecting differences in national priorities and approaches to media freedom. Perspectives on the Coalition's role are shaped by broader geopolitical dynamics, with some states emphasising domestic reforms, while others focus on international engagement. Stakeholders have observed that Member States from the Global South are often more



engaged in strengthening their enabling environments at home, while states from the Global North tend to prioritise the implementation of international human rights law. These distinctions align with historical policy approaches, though evolving global power dynamics continue to shape expectations.

As a multilateral coalition, the MFC provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation among states committed to defending media freedom. Credibility and legitimacy within the Coalition are reinforced by adherence to international rules-based frameworks, alongside a strong political commitment from all members. Stakeholders widely recognise the MFC’s potentially unique role in fostering diplomatic dialogue, bilaterally as well as multilaterally. As one Duty-Bearer commented, *“There are countries in the MFC that need to look internally. We need to start having frank conversations with each other.”* The MFC’s structure facilitates peer engagement, providing a space where Member States can hold themselves accountable and develop context-specific approaches to media freedom while aligning with international principles.

Coalition-building is widely recognised as a meaningful contribution to the media freedom ecosystem. Responsibility-Holders place significant value on the access and collaboration with Member States that the MFC has facilitated. The Coalition provides a platform for engagement between policymakers, legal experts, and civil society, strengthening collective efforts to advance media freedom. For the HLP, the value of the MFC lies in the commitment made by Member States to support media freedom and safety of journalists. Compared to other state-led coalitions and intergovernmental organisations, the MFC is perceived as offering a more cohesive and engaged membership. One Responsibility-Holder noted, *“There is some great virtue in the MFC as a convener of like-minded states on the issue of media freedom.”* This convening power has been particularly effective in bringing together key stakeholders in diplomatic and policy spaces. Another cited the tangible example of *“last year at World Press Freedom Day in Santiago, Chile, we co-convoked a regional meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean with the Media Freedom Coalition’s Media Development Working Group. That was really effective because when organising those meetings, the hardest people to get in the room are diplomats and foreign policy experts. But having that meeting co-convoked with the MFC, we had a really good turnout of individual Member States, which is one of the hardest things to achieve.”* Through these efforts, the MFC has reinforced its role as a facilitator of strategic dialogue and coordination among governments, civil society, and media development organisations.

Diplomatic initiatives are most effective when complemented by financial support mechanisms, which enhance their ability to drive change on the ground. One of the MFC’s stated objectives is to improve



the economic climate for independent media, aligning with the OECD Development Cooperation Principle on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment, which emphasises the importance of financial support for public interest media. Currently, the main mechanism by which the MFC has supported an improved economic climate for media is through embassies that have sustained civil society and media at a local level through the provision of funding. There have been no specific statements on media sustainability or viability, and resources examining these issues—particularly in relation to press freedom—remain limited. These considerations exist within a broader global funding landscape, where reductions in international development budgets have affected support for media and journalism projects across multiple donor countries, including some MFC Member States. Additionally, recent shifts in foreign aid policies have influenced financial support structures, highlighting the evolving nature of funding in this sector.

In a survey conducted with 36 Rights-Holders for this evaluation, the results underscore the importance of financial assistance with over 23 respondents identifying financial aid as a critical requirement for independent journalism.²⁸ This response is in stark contrast to the finding that less than 25% of respondents felt that public appearances by government representatives in support of press freedom made a tangible difference. As noted by a Duty-Bearer, *“For the MFC to become more relevant – bear in mind it was established when physical violence against journalists was prevalent here - they need to look at other issues related to the economic side of journalism as that also impacts on freedom to report.”* The findings suggest that while diplomatic engagement plays a vital role, economic considerations are increasingly relevant in shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of media freedom efforts.

3.3. Influence governments, state actors and other powerful individuals to uphold media freedom and hold to account the perpetrators of crimes against journalists

The MFC has contributed to efforts to enhance investigative mechanisms addressing violence against journalists. The HLP’s fourth report, “Advice on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses

²⁸ The survey was conducted using a snowball sampling approach and had a limited response rate. While the findings offer valuable qualitative insights, they should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all journalists or media workers. The data reflects the views of those who responded and is intended to complement, rather than substitute, other lines of evidence in the evaluation.

Against Journalists”, recommended that Member States consider establishing a multilateral Investigative Task Force outside of the United Nations system, alongside support for a permanent UN investigative body. These mechanisms would focus on investigating attacks on journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs), and other individuals targeted for their work in exposing and reporting information.²⁹ This recommendation has resulted in further work by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs who commissioned a feasibility study into the creation of a multilateral task force, published in 2024.³⁰ One Responsibility-Holder highlighted this as a concrete example of recommendations translating into action while another commented that the next step following the HLP’s recommendation should be *“state pledges... for proactive actions”*

The MFC’s multilateral engagement has played a role in shaping norms and principles related to media freedom. One responsibility-holder emphasised the convening power of the MFC via the Media Development Working Group when working on the OECD Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to the Media and Information Environment which were developed through multi-stakeholder cooperation. These principles, developed through multi-stakeholder cooperation, were formally endorsed by the MFC in a statement from March 2024 signed by all Member States, in which they committed to supporting their implementation.³¹ These efforts reflect the MFC’s ability to facilitate collaboration on both investigative responses to journalist safety and the development of international standards that promote a sustainable and independent media environment.

Joint advocacy statements on media freedom and journalist safety appear to have greater results at the local level than on the international stage. Stakeholder views on their effectiveness are mixed: while Member States often see them as tools to demonstrate influence and solidarity, civil society actors express concern over the lack of clear advocacy goals and tangible outcomes. As one responsibility-holder noted that while statements serve a purpose, they are often perceived as lacking boldness or specificity, *“I think the MFC has reduced the importance of their mandate. They might want to have a statement on something, but they could be bolder. They send us the statements for red flags, but the wording is so neutral that there’s nothing to actually flag.”* Similarly, Duty-Bearers

²⁹ Media Freedom Coalition. (2023, April). *Advice on promoting more effective investigations into abuses against journalists*.

³⁰ Government of the Netherlands. (2024, June 4). *Research study on an international investigative task force on crimes against journalists*.

³¹ Media Freedom Coalition. (2024). *Joint statement: OECD Development Assistance Committee’s media and information principles*.



acknowledge that statements alone are rarely sufficient, emphasising the need for a broader combination of actions to ensure impact: *“It was never just this one statement...you create the perfect combination of factors.”* Stakeholders also noted that joint statements are often reactive and may lack clear recommendations for action, which can limit their effectiveness in driving long-term change.

At the local level, advocacy statements are often reinforced by diplomatic actions - such as trial monitoring and diplomatic presence at events - which contribute to a greater perceived effectiveness. Stakeholders, including Rights-Holders, consistently described these efforts as ‘making a difference’. In-country interactions among CSOs, journalists, lawyers, embassies, and government actors were seen as highly effective and proactive, with this pattern observed across multiple contexts.. A notable example of this is trial monitoring which is seen as being critical to show that ‘international scrutiny exists’ alongside local accountability through civil society when statements were issued in tandem. Despite its significance, awareness of trial monitoring efforts by government and embassies remains limited. When Rights-Holders were asked more broadly about trial monitoring as a media freedom strategy through a survey, only 9 of the 36 respondents were aware of such initiatives.

The work of diplomatic networks through embassies highlights the complementary value of both multilateral and bilateral diplomacy in advancing media freedom. The virtue of multilateral diplomacy as a channel for influencing governments is recognised. Creating local ‘coalitions of the willing’ has given Member States in-roads to government. As mentioned by one Duty-Bearer, *“We saw these diplomatic networks as a good vehicle to address certain issues without the work being just bilateral.”* The MFC’s structure has enabled embassies to engage with government representatives, fostering opportunities for dialogue that might otherwise have been difficult to initiate. In one country, an embassy commented that they had been unable to approach the right people in government in silo; their presence in the MFC had opened up previously unavailable diplomatic access. Similarly, in another country, the CN strategically collaborated with embassy networks to provide talking points for advocating with the national government on strengthening protection mechanisms for local CSOs in an upcoming media law revision. These examples illustrate how the MFC’s diplomatic presence serves as a valuable platform for engagement.

“Success should be about the embassies being able to reach out to the government based on consultations with us and present recommendations ... This has worked well with what they recommend around disinformation for example.”

-Rights-Holder



Alongside multilateral diplomacy, it should also be recognised that bilateral exchanges within multilateral coalitions are important, particularly where the benefits of multilateral engagement can be limited. It was commented that regular engagements with governments locally can be better enabled bilaterally. In some cases, coordinated bilateral engagement by different members of the coalition helped maintain momentum on sensitive issues through parallel, mutually reinforcing efforts. These findings highlight the MFC’s ability to bridge multilateral coordination with bilateral diplomacy, ensuring that engagement remains flexible, context-specific, and responsive to local needs.

However, bilateral diplomacy isn’t equally accessible to all Member States. It demands resources and a certain level of diplomatic clout—something not all countries, particularly those from the Global South, have. For these countries, joining bilateral efforts can be politically sensitive or even risky, depending on the host country. As a result, Global South members often weigh such decisions carefully and may find it easier—and safer—to act within multilateral frameworks. This underscores the importance of the Coalition in creating space for more inclusive and coordinated engagement.

The MFC’s diplomatic engagement extends beyond formal statements and public advocacy, with quiet diplomacy playing a key role in influencing Non-Member State governments. This discreet approach, conducted both bilaterally and multilaterally, has enabled continuous dialogue on media freedom issues, particularly through embassy networks. Some Member State stakeholders have noted that their involvement in the MFC has facilitated ongoing discussions with governments, allowing them to raise concerns and provide diplomatic input in a sustained manner. The ability to engage discreetly is recognised as a distinct contribution of the MFC.

While quiet diplomacy offers strategic advantages, its limitations have been noted by civil society actors. A key concern is that its lack of transparency and public accountability can lead to uncertainty regarding outcomes and decision-making processes. Some Rights-Holders have raised questions about its effectiveness, with one commenting: *“Diplomacy plays directly into the hands of the regime. It is seen as agenda setting and politically motivated and de-legitimises the community.”* This is likely a response to governments talking to each other about media related topics without including civil society and journalists, which takes further agency away from those which are directly impacted by restrictive media freedom environments. By design, quiet diplomacy often excludes civil society participation, as NGOs and CSOs are not always included in closed-door discussions. While this is an



inherent feature of the approach, it can nonetheless limit opportunities for collaborative action and broader movement-building. There is also an acknowledgement that this approach can often be reactive rather than proactive, focusing on individual cases rather than fostering broader policy changes. A Duty-Bearer emphasised the need for context-specific diplomatic strategies:

“What is very important is the need to be fully aware that the Coalition needs to adjust its activities and support to specific conditions in a country.”

-Duty-Bearer

Another Duty-Bearer noted that diplomatic engagement itself can be challenging, particularly in contexts where access to government officials is limited:

“Our main difficulty is engagement with the government, and it is hard to make progress when there is no contact.”

-Duty-Bearer

There is thus a dual nature to quiet diplomacy—while it provides a valuable avenue for engagement, it also presents challenges related to visibility, inclusion, and long-term strategic impact.

The lack of clear indicators and measurement frameworks for diplomatic efforts has made it difficult for some Duty-Bearers to assess the extent of their contributions to media freedom through the MFC.

At a local level, one embassy representative noted that it was difficult to assess the relevance of the work that is done through the network and *“it would help to get a sense of the impact of the work. Maybe because we don’t have concrete indicators to address how the situation is improving or not as a result of the MFC’s work.”*

At a central level the view is more pragmatic, particularly in the context of quiet diplomacy, where success is not always visible. One stakeholder pointed out the inherent difficulty in measuring performance: *“We shouldn’t be able to measure the impact as that is the way that quiet diplomacy works. We will never know what we stopped because we can’t keep talking aloud about it.”* Despite the challenges in quantifying diplomatic influence, some stakeholders emphasise the importance of mobilisation and alignment with recommendations as a key indicator of success. As one Responsibility-Holder stated that *“Our metric of success is - were we able to mobilise States to do things that align with the recommendations that we had provided.”* In the absence of formal



measurement tools, the effectiveness of diplomatic engagement often relies on stakeholder perceptions and observed influence. Another responsibility-holder acknowledged that while the MFC may not drive immediate systemic change, its role in offering protection and increasing visibility remains valuable: *“I don’t think there’s been wholesale change in the way that any country operates because of things that have been said by the MFC. But I do think it does offer a form of protection or at least enhances visibility, so that there is that layer of protection...just seeing them be willing to take action on things is crucial because otherwise it diminishes the credibility of the Coalition itself.”* These perspectives exemplify the complex nature of evaluating diplomatic impact, where influence may be difficult to quantify but still plays a critical role in shaping political discourse and supporting press freedom efforts.

3.4. Ensure journalists and news organisations are better protected and better able to protect themselves from threats and intimidation

The MFC has demonstrated a number of tangible benefits towards the protection of Rights-Holders over the last five years. These have included several ‘cases of concern’ which were raised and addressed through a diverse range of actions which include the issuing of statements, diplomatic intervention and ongoing monitoring and advocacy. Stakeholders commented on the effective role that the MFC has played in the following cases of concern:



The overturning of a number of cases against Rappler and its CEO Maria Ressa: one was an order to close Rappler issued under the administration of the former President Rodrigo Duterte based on allegations of foreign ownership; other cases included charges of tax evasion and an anti-dummy order.



The release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich who was jailed in Russia for over 16 months after being found guilty of espionage by a Russian court in May 2023.



The release of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) journalist Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala from detention following his publication of an article which allegedly incriminated DRC military intelligence of murder of an opposition politician.



The release to house arrest of 67-year-old Guatemalan journalist Jose Rubén Zamora after over two years of imprisonment including solitary confinement and inhumane treatment.

The MFC has played a role in supporting safe refuge programmes for journalists through its collaboration with Member States, the HLP, and the CN. The HLP’s third report, “Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk”, made a clear recommendation that states should introduce emergency visas for journalists at risk.³² While specific details remain confidential for security reasons, diplomatic engagement within and around the MFC has intersected with broader state-led efforts to expand safe passage and protection mechanisms.³³ Notable developments include:

- Estonia announced the provision of 35 emergency humanitarian visas and residency permits annually in May 2023 at UNESCO World Press Freedom Day;
- Germany increased its support and protection to journalists in exile through the Hannah Arendt Initiative in March 2023 at the Summit for Democracy;
- The Czech Republic provided 800 emergency visas to human rights defenders (HRDs), including journalists, between February 2022 - 2023.
- In 2021 Canada launched a dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders (HRDs), including journalists, as well as their family members, through its Government-Assisted Refugees Program. After initially pledging to resettle up to 250 people per year, in 2023 Canada announced the expansion of this scheme to 500 HRDs and their family members per year.

As one Duty-Bearer working involved in emergency visa support commented, “*Emergency visas was a specific contribution that, without the MFC’s local presence, would not have been possible.*” An unofficial count of the number of visas issued across the 2023 came to 2000 according to one responsibility-holder who said, “*before that report, that mechanism didn’t even really exist.*” These efforts illustrate the MFC’s capacity to support international coordination on journalist protection and resettlement, demonstrating how diplomatic engagement contributes to concrete outcomes in safeguarding media professionals.

³² Media Freedom Coalition. (2023, April). *Report on providing safe refuge to journalists at risk.*

³³ While these initiatives may not always stem directly from the HLP’s recommendations, they reflect a broader policy environment in which MFC engagement has helped elevate the visibility of journalist protection needs.



The MFC has played a notable role in addressing high-profile cases, but its focus on individual incidents has at times drawn attention away from broader, systemic media freedom challenges. The work of the MFC in bringing attention to cases where journalists have been imprisoned, threatened and harassed was commended by stakeholders as outlined earlier. Yet, some Rights-Holders and Responsibility-Holders have pointed out that its focus does not always capture the full scope of media freedom threats. Stakeholders emphasised that killings, incarcerations, and harassment of journalists continue to occur beyond the cases publicly addressed by the MFC. Some CSOs noted that while they actively monitor press freedom violations and share updates with embassies or MFC representatives, the criteria for how cases of concern are selected remains unclear. According to one Rights-Holder, *“If [government] don’t find a political value in derailing it then they will find a value in solving it which also means they don’t have to solve other cases.”*

Additionally, stakeholders pointed to emerging threats to media freedom that remain outside the MFC’s current scope of engagement. One Rights-Holder cited the criminalisation of libel laws as an area where further attention could be beneficial: *“Where the MFC can really be pushing is around libel law which is a criminal law here and can used as a threat.”*

There a broader challenge of balancing high-profile interventions with the diverse and evolving risks faced by journalists globally. While targeted advocacy has been impactful, stakeholders do note the importance of ensuring that systemic and less-publicised media freedom threats remain on the agenda.

Evidence of the MFC’s contributions to marginalised groups primarily comes from a handful of thematic statements. While the MFC has issued statements acknowledging the importance of gender in press freedom, including those published on International Women’s Day in 2022, 2023, and 2024, these statements do not include specific commitments, case references, or policy recommendations aimed at providing targeted support to women and marginalised groups in journalism.

Upon reviewing the statements issued by the MFC, the most common themes are:



Crisis Response which are issued the most frequently but receive the least support at 50% average participation rate



Journalist Safety & Legal Protections provide an emphasis on structural protections for press freedom but only receive around 55% participation rate



International Advocacy which are the least frequently issued statements suggesting that norm-setting is less prioritised by the MFC compared to case-specific interventions despite these receiving a 99% average participation rate.

Despite the importance of crisis response statements, **gender-specific concerns are not explicitly addressed in key statements related to press freedom challenges in Afghanistan, Yemen, Myanmar, Belarus, Venezuela, and Russia.** This is notable given documented evidence that women journalists face heightened risks of gender-based violence, harassment, and threats in these environments. Additionally, none of the crisis statements reference sexual violence against women journalists, a recognised risk in conflict zones and repressive regimes. Under the safety, legal & advocacy themes, statements advocating for legal protections and press freedom policies also do not incorporate gender-sensitive recommendations. There is no mention of gender-specific press laws, protections against harassment, or safety initiatives for women journalists.

It is also noted that there are gaps in representation within MFC structures. The CN does not currently include CSOs specialising in gender or marginalised groups, limiting direct engagement with those providing targeted expertise and support. Similarly, in the four reports produced by the HLP, it is only the final report “Advice on promoting more effective investigations into abuses against journalists” which highlights gender specific threats against journalists.³⁴ As such, there are opportunities to further integrate considerations for marginalised groups in MFC statements, advocacy efforts, and stakeholder engagement.

The MFC’s direct engagement with Rights-Holders and organisations working on the ground to support media freedom and journalist safety has been limited. Stakeholders emphasise that incorporating the experiences, knowledge, and expertise of Rights-Holders is essential to developing effective, sustainable, and responsive strategies for media freedom protection. Multistakeholder initiatives are designed to strengthen protection and accountability by including diverse perspectives from all relevant groups. However, some stakeholders have observed that the MFC’s engagement

³⁴ Media Freedom Coalition. (2023, April). *Advice on promoting more effective investigations into abuses against journalists.*



with journalists and media workers remains limited, making it more challenging for them to access or benefit from its initiatives. As one Duty-Bearer noted: *“the more removed you are from the people you are trying to help then the harder it is to create change.”* When speaking to Rights-Holders, in this case, journalists, it is clear that there is limited understanding of the work and potential that the MFC has in supporting them. This stems not only from a gap in external engagement but also highlights the need to include Rights-Holders and their views when making decisions about issues that matter them. Based on the numbers from the survey, amongst the 36 rights holders, 66% were aware of the MFC with 33.3% who had not heard of the MFC. When broken down by activity, awareness decreased significantly. Survey data showed a significant gap in awareness among journalists and media workers regarding the MFC’s work:



Statements issued by Governments & Coalitions: A majority of respondents (21) reported not being aware of public statements issued by governments or coalitions in support of press freedom. This suggests that such statements may not be reaching key media stakeholders effectively



Embassy Events on Press Freedom: Awareness of embassy-hosted events related to journalist safety was slightly higher, with 14 respondents acknowledging their existence



Quiet Diplomacy Efforts: Awareness of quiet diplomatic interventions on behalf of journalists was the lowest among all categories, with only six respondents indicating familiarity with such efforts.

4. Coordination & Collaboration at the MFC

Behind every joint statement and diplomatic move lies a variety of stakeholders working towards a common goal. This section examines how the Coalition has sought to knit together its patchwork of Member States, CSOs, legal experts, and embassies. It highlights where collaboration has flourished: local embassy networks stepping up, the Secretariat adding structure, and moments of shared momentum. It also surfaces the fault lines - gaps in communication, underused expertise, and a need for clearer decision-making. In this part of the report, the focus is on how coordination



happens within the MFC, and what it takes to transform a diverse group of actors into a coherent force for media freedom.

4.1. Membership Diversity

The MFC’s membership composition continues to shape perceptions of its global representation.

While the Coalition includes a diverse set of countries, some stakeholders view it as being predominantly Northern-led. The majority of the MFC’s Member States are European countries (31 out of 51) followed by South/Latin America (7), Asia Pacific (5), Africa (3), United States and Canada (2) and Middle East (1). Stakeholders have noted that broadening membership to include more underrepresented regions could strengthen the Coalition’s inclusivity and global reach. Some have suggested that targeted efforts to engage new members could enhance the legitimacy and impact of the MFC’s work. However, it was noted that new members would need to demonstrate a clear commitment to upholding the principles they advocate, in order to maintain credibility within the group. It was also suggested that leveraging existing partnerships and cooperation mechanisms such as the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) would support efforts to increase the number of diverse engaged states.

There is further potential to leverage the MFC’s diverse membership. Across stakeholder groups—including Member States, CN members, HLP representatives, and the Secretariat—there is a shared perception that the Coalition is under-resourced in its current iteration. This was cited as a factor affecting the level and consistency of engagement, particularly among Member States. While no formal benchmarking exercise was conducted, stakeholders noted that limited resources have constrained the MFC’s ability to fully capitalise on its collective potential, including in areas such as coordination, visibility, and the implementation of joint diplomatic or programmatic efforts.

Participation in MFC activities is largely proactive, meaning that states must opt in to sign statements, raise cases of concern, or take an active role in diplomatic interventions. This has contributed to varying levels of engagement. Despite this, attendance at MFC meetings suggests sustained interest in participation. In 2024, 38 Member States—approximately two-thirds of the Coalition—attended an MFC meeting, while 37 countries have engaged in embassy networks, albeit at varying levels of activity.



Stakeholders also noted that clearly articulating the MFC's value proposition at both national and international levels is essential for enhancing engagement and reinforcing the Coalition's role in global media freedom efforts.

"There needs to be a better process that looks at membership as a real issue and factor in the fact that they're also all managing their own bilateral relations with States."

-Responsibility-Holder

"We can't talk about the effectiveness of these coalitions without considering sensitive geopolitical issues and their impact on credibility. We cannot dissociate these responses now."

-Rights-Holder

Overall, there is a need for ongoing discussions around membership diversity and representation, as well as on the importance of balancing inclusivity with the Coalition's strategic objectives

4.2. Information sharing within the MFC

There is a clear need to strengthen knowledge management and information-sharing practices across the MFC to support a deeper understanding of, and greater capacity to advance, media freedom among Member States. Information-sharing and knowledge management sits largely with the MFC Secretariat and, what is available, is valued highly by the Member States. Additionally, the vast majority of stakeholders, from Member States to CN and HLP members, stressed the importance and of having support functions such as the one the MFC Secretariat fulfils. It was also mentioned that the MFC Secretariat has been a key asset in the structuration process of the MFC and has made a clear difference in the coordination and delivery of its actions. At the same time, a Duty-Bearer highlighted the diplomatic complexities involved in balancing media freedom commitments with the practical realities of government engagement:

"The Secretariat navigates the complexities of supporting governments, recognising that they cannot always take on an activist role. While we are deeply committed to the human rights portfolio and eager to do more, we must also remember that we are diplomats."

-Duty-Bearer



Despite efforts by the MFC Secretariat to streamline information-sharing across the Coalition, gaps remain in understanding the respective roles and contributions of Member States - both at central and local levels - in advancing media freedom. This is partly attributed to limited visibility of the broader media freedom ecosystem and resource constraints affecting engagement and coordination. The roles that appear to be most clear to the members are those of the co-chairs and Executive Group members.

One key area identified within knowledge management efforts is the provision of practical tools and resources. The diplomatic toolkit, for example, is recognised as a valuable asset within the MFC's knowledge-sharing framework. Some stakeholders have suggested that expanding the availability of guidelines and resources could further support Member States in their media freedom-related efforts. A Secretariat representative noted that existing materials, such as the MFC's report "Why Media Freedom Matters", could be leveraged more effectively to strengthen knowledge-sharing.³⁵

Stakeholders also pointed to communication gaps that limit awareness of available resources within the MFC. Several noted that Member States have limited knowledge of the legal expertise and advisory support offered by the HLP. Similarly, there is low awareness of the CN and its role in supporting Member States' capacity to meet media freedom obligations. As one Duty-Bearer explained: "I am not the expert like a CN member. It was helpful when they gave us briefings for our CyberCrime Treaty for example." The expertise available through the MFC is recognised as a unique asset but fully leveraging it will require more consistent and structured communication to ensure that Member States can effectively engage with and benefit from these resources.

The HLP holds significant potential for greater engagement within the MFC. The HLP provides high-level legal expertise, advice, and recommendations, but its engagement with Member States has not been fully optimised. Factors contributing to this include limited capacity within some Member States and varying national priorities related to media freedom. The mandate of the HLP is to provide 'legal advice and recommendations to the Coalition and its partners'.³⁶ Member States and CN representatives all highlighted this important contribution and need to have the high-level support provided from the barristers and the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) as well as effective coordination and communication mechanisms between them.

³⁵ Zinnbauer, D. (2024, September). *Why media freedom matters*. Media Freedom Coalition.

³⁶ International Bar Association. (2024). *HRI Secretariat: Opinions to States on Legislation*.



To date, the HLP has focused on bilateral relations between Member States and on the production of four research reports with recommendations aimed at Member States to take forward in terms of concrete actions. This has been particularly effective in specific cases, such as its contributions to emergency visa programmes and the development of an international investigative task force.

Despite these contributions, the HLP itself has acknowledged that its potential remains underutilised, noting: “[we are] body of experts who are able to provide free advice to States on a private and public basis.” Engagement with the HLP has mainly taken place through the MFC’s co-chairs and the Executive Group, which some stakeholders noted could be burdensome on these particular stakeholders and limit broader collaboration opportunities. The introduction of the MFC Secretariat facilitated sessions with Member States which had not previously been enabled. Those collaborative sessions provided the HLP with the opportunity to support the States in developing bespoke engagement plans directly with the HLP which have in some cases led to clear actions.

Some stakeholders also suggested that the HLP could play a greater role in providing legal expertise to Rights-Holders. This would be better enabled through more systematic interaction and engagement with the CN, and potentially through the UNESCO GMDF programme, which focuses on safeguarding and strengthening the legal protection of journalists. Throughout the different conversations, it was made clear that the HLP’s expertise could be further leveraged to enhance the impact of the MFC, particularly through more structured and inclusive interactions with Member States, CSOs, and international legal mechanisms.

Clarity around decision-making processes among Member States varies, influencing trust-based collaboration within the MFC. In particular, members of the CN have expressed a desire for a clearer understanding of Member State involvement in key areas such as the selection of cases of concern and the drafting of statements. Increased transparency in these processes could strengthen engagement and collaboration across stakeholders. Civil society organisations bring accountability to the work of the MFC and Member States in particular. Ensuring that they provide clear oversight in the work of the MFC will enhance the credibility of the MFC further. Some local and regional CN members have indicated that they feel disconnected from broader decision-making processes, which can impact their ability to contribute effectively. As one stakeholder noted: “the MFC, and CN, needs to know better what it is looking for from its local partners.” Ensuring that local perspectives are effectively integrated into the MFC’s work remains an important consideration. Stakeholders have



highlighted the value of strategic engagement and a clearly defined role for all stakeholder groups, which could contribute to a more inclusive and coordinated Coalition.

4.3. Engagement at the MFC

Engagement of Duty-Bearers in the MFC at both central and embassy level is driven by national priorities and commitments to human rights. In the majority of cases, stakeholders from states were most likely to engage in the MFC if attention to media freedom was communicated to them as a specific directive from their central government. At the headquarters level, Member State representatives are primarily civil servants, many of whom require specialised knowledge and capacity to address global media freedom issues with confidence. Some Duty-Bearers work across multiple initiatives and committees related to media freedom and require ongoing support to effectively champion these issues. This can include access to resources and expertise that strengthen their capacity to develop informed solutions. Additionally, some stakeholders noted that addressing media freedom domestically may also contribute to greater engagement in international media freedom efforts.

Patterns of engagement can also be observed in MFC statement signatories. Opt-out statements, which require members to explicitly decline to sign, tend to have a higher number of signatories than opt-in statements where members must actively choose to sign. One reading of this practice might indicate that engagement is tied to knowledge and resource levels rather than propensity to disagree with the Coalition’s media freedom objectives. Although there will also clearly be political priorities at play in the case of some engagement inclination, it was recognised that engagement in broader thematic activities and involvement in events such as World Press Freedom Day and International Day to End Impunity For Crimes Against Journalists should be easily accomplished for all of the MFC’s Member States.

One of the biggest challenges that the MFC faces is resecuring the commitment of the Member States to the Global Pledge five years on. While many Member States remain engaged and actively promoting media freedom, in spite of varying levels of commitment in the Coalition, others have not dedicated the necessary resources—or simply lack them—to fully meet their obligations. A review of engagement trends suggests that states experiencing declines in press freedom rankings are not necessarily disengaged, nor does an increase in rankings consistently correspond with higher



participation. While some Member States that have seen press freedom challenges have been less visibly engaged in MFC activities, others continue to participate actively in diplomatic efforts. Likewise, some Member States with stable or improving press freedom conditions do not always translate this into deeper involvement in the Coalition's broader work.

A key challenge lies in engaging states that have formally committed to the Global Pledge but face structural or political constraints in implementing media freedom protections. This sometimes raises questions from critics about the depth of commitment. As one Duty-Bearer commented, *“we need to meet the Members where they are if we want them from around the world and, sometimes, they don't have the resources...the art of diplomacy in this case is key.”* Additionally, some states have been observed backsliding in their media freedom commitments, presenting further challenges for engagement. A Duty-Bearer described ongoing efforts to address these concerns diplomatically: *“we have been trying to find ways to encourage our friends there to go in a different direction, to raise the topic.”* At the same time, there are Member States with strong institutional capacity and a history of media freedom commitments that could be more actively engaged in the Coalition's broader work. These “sleeping giants” have the potential to play a more influential role in shaping MFC decision-making, reinforcing credibility, and strengthening collective advocacy efforts. As one stakeholder noted: *“When we don't have an agreement to do something as the MFC then it is hard to change other countries' decisions on [media freedom].”*

Engagement at the local level has been recognised as effective but with certain limitations. Embassies and diplomats navigating media freedom issues often do so within the broader context of human rights networks, where multiple policy priorities must be coordinated. While many embassy representatives actively engage in media freedom discussions, some stakeholders noted that human rights networks tend to generate more tangible outcomes due to a broader focus on physical human rights violations. As one Responsibility-Holder explained:

“There is a human rights network which tends to be the same people which gets more results than the media network to be honest as people in charge of this topic are more sensitive to physical human rights violations. Each state has their own agenda on human rights and hold human rights events and gatherings whereas in the media we only really see statements as the main activities of the network.”

- Responsibility-Holder



Another challenge raised by embassy representatives is the need for structured guidance and support, particularly in areas requiring specialised legal and policy knowledge. One Responsibility-Holder highlighted the role of the MFC Secretariat in addressing these gaps:

“There has to be a secretariat role that can guide the embassies as we are not all properly resourced. The MFC Secretariat was useful in cases in the last few months where there was so much legal jargon. We don’t have in-depth knowledge so the MFC stepped in and gave us a summary which was so helpful.”

- Responsibility-Holder

The emphasis here is on providing supportive systematic functions which can help to mitigate against wider issues of limited expertise, resource and time. It was argued by some of the Duty-Bearers at local level that more systemised support will help to strengthen their capacity towards the realisation of media freedom and human rights more broadly.

4.4. Coordination at the MFC

Effective coordination and collaboration are essential for coherent diplomatic interventions on media freedom and journalist safety. A key strength of the MFC is its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society representatives, and legal experts, creating new opportunities for engagement on media freedom issues. This triangulation of expertise presents significant potential for mobilisation and advocacy on key challenges.

It was recognised that, since 2022 with the advent of the MFC Secretariat, efforts to professionalise the MFC have contributed to more structured decision-making. This has been particularly evident in activities such as drafting and gathering signatories for statements. The Secretariat is also credited with increasing levels of transparency within the MFC, building on the findings of the first evaluation of the MFC. The Secretariat’s introduction of annual reports, in addition to increased information sharing across the different MFC stakeholders has also been recognised as positive contributions to transparency within the MFC. However, all of the stakeholder groups commented noted that further work is needed to ensure that these process-driven mechanisms are accessible across all groups, particularly Member States. It was suggested for example that coordination mechanisms would help address the MFC’s wider objective to improve the enabling environment through the development of



more policy responses and work. One Duty-Bearer highlighted the potential for different stakeholder groups to play a greater role in thematic discussions:

“In terms of effective work, the contact with the Secretariat is good, but perhaps on more thematic issues the HLP or CN might be useful.”

-Duty-Bearer

Interviews with stakeholders highlighted the complexity of sustaining long-term engagement, particularly given turnover within government institutions, which can impact continuity in media freedom efforts. This can affect the design and implementation of activities and may influence trust and perceptions of professionalism across stakeholder groups. As one Responsibility-Holder noted:

“I think the biggest challenge in terms of collective action is the idea of working towards consensus-based decision-making.”

-Responsibility-Holder

Member States commented that they had minimal engagement with the CN and HLP except through occasional meetings, suggesting that collaboration remains largely ad hoc. This is reflected in the CN’s ability to access embassy networks on an ad hoc basis, rather than through more systematic engagement processes. For CN members, a major challenge is the lack of transparency in how cases of concern are selected by the Member States. Some stakeholders suggested that a broader secretariat function could help facilitate more structured collaboration, ensuring that stakeholders can engage more systematically in MFC processes.

Additionally, coordination between Member States, CN and HLP remains limited in some areas. The MFC Secretariat is recognised as having dedicated significant efforts to establishing mailing lists, scheduling meetings and outreach, in particular with embassy network representatives. Some emphasis has also been devoted to sharing experience, results and lessons learned through the publication of annual reports and case studies. However it was recognised that more could be done in this area or indeed in facilitating more traditional capacity building support to Member States. Member states commented that a more centralised information system, perhaps in the form of an intranet, would be beneficial to more effective engagement.



The CN recognises the significance of developing and defining models for coordination that can be adapted for use in different scenarios. The CN commented that their engagement with the states has been largely positive and brought connections which had not been enabled prior to the formation of the MFC. They also commented that they could contribute further to the design and implementation of the strategies and activities of the Member States if there were more formalised and regular processes of communication. The level of engagement within the CN varies. While the co-chairs of the CN have regular contact with Member States and direct access to the Executive Group via the Secretariat, other CN members—who coordinate through the co-chairs—reported feeling more distant from MFC decision-making processes. These observations suggest that while existing communication structures have strengthened engagement in some areas, there are opportunities to further enhance coordination and information-sharing across different stakeholder groups. A Responsibility-Holder highlighted this dynamic:

“It seems like the Executive Group is quite active and engaged, and a lot of the updates that we get on particular cases or situations of concern seem to come from Executive Group members. But it’s not clear beyond that how committed and engaged other Member States are.”

-Responsibility-Holder

Variation in the exchange of views and expertise among MFC stakeholders can influence the Coalition’s ability to respond to long-term strategic issues and emerging threats in the media freedom landscape. While short-term responses are an essential function of the MFC, discussions on longer-term planning and systemic challenges are often less visible within the Coalition’s work.

The principles of transparency, diversity, and fairness remain central to shaping effective collaboration and coordination within the MFC. Some stakeholders noted that equitable representation, transparent decision-making, and sustainable administrative structures contribute to the cohesion and effectiveness of the Coalition. As one Responsibility-Holder observed: “[better coordination would allow the MFC to] not just be responsive to one situation but actually could be about the enforcement of international norms that they have signed up to on a broader scale.” This perspective also reflects a broader point about knowledge-sharing across the MFC. While Member States and stakeholders are actively engaged in upholding international norms, the exchange of expertise and strategic coordination could be further strengthened to ensure that these efforts are more widely understood and effectively implemented. A Duty-Bearer similarly emphasised the need for more structured coordination:



“The MFC could internally coordinate things better to use our voice more strategically.”

-Duty-Bearer

Communication between embassies and their headquarters varies across Member States, reflecting the diversity of national structures and diplomatic protocols. Several embassy representatives noted that their engagement with the MFC could be further strengthened through clearer articulation of the Coalition’s scope and available resources—particularly regarding the role and expertise of the HLP. As a result, very few embassies were aware of the work and legal expertise that could be afforded to them via the HLP. As one embassy reflected, *“we would benefit from understanding what the parameters of the MFC are – key issues are rule of law and media literacy and also external threats of disinformation – are these things that a global coalition of countries would be willing to take on?”* ?” These reflections point to an opportunity for the MFC to enhance coordination and information-sharing across levels, both within Member States and with civil society partners. In Southeast Asia, the recruitment of a regional representative for the MFC Secretariat, based in the Philippines, was cited as a positive development in this regard. It was recognised as an important step in strengthening the Coalition’s regional presence and coordination, highlighting the added value of dedicated support functions within the MFC structure .

5. Sustainability of the MFC’s results

As the MFC enters a new phase, a key question emerges: can its work and influence last? This section explores the Coalition’s efforts to build staying power - from its rotating leadership and current funding channels to its place within a broader ecosystem of global media initiatives. It looks at how the coalition has grown in credibility yet faces challenges in maintaining momentum, deepening partnerships, and staying visible to the communities it seeks to serve. By examining governance, finances, external alliances, and Rights-Holder engagement, this section explores what it will take for the MFC to move from promising beginnings to lasting impact.

5.1. Governance & Decision-Making Challenges

Current governance models influence heavily both the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the MFC. The co-chair system is widely regarded as a strong governance approach, with rotating



leadership seen as beneficial in fostering shared responsibility and diverse perspectives. However, some observations suggest that annual rotation within the Executive Group co-chairs can also present challenges, particularly in terms of knowledge retention and continuity.

A longer tenure for co-chairs could allow for a deeper understanding of MFC operations, while shorter terms may encourage a more flexible and less risk-averse approach to decision-making. Interviews with stakeholders indicated that different chairs bring distinct approaches to the MFC’s governance, which can sometimes create uncertainty about decision-making structures and points of contact.

Additionally, some Member States outside of the co-chair system have indicated that they feel less engaged in decision-making processes. This is often attributed to limited visibility into how key decisions are made within the MFC. Stakeholders noted that clearer guidelines and more transparent processes could enhance continuity between leadership transitions and provide greater clarity for all members. It is clear that more discussions are needed around governance structures, particularly in ensuring that leadership transitions support both stability and adaptability within the MFC.

5.2. Financial Sustainability

Funding modalities within the MFC occur through multiple channels, with varying levels of clarity around how resources are allocated across different stakeholder groups. The current funding structure of the MFC, which involves multiple funding avenues such as UNESCO’s GMDF and the Thomson Reuters Foundation, has contributed to perceptions of uneven distribution and complexity in decision-making processes. Some stakeholders have noted that this structure impacts trust-building and coordination, as there is limited transparency regarding funding allocation. Both the HLP and the CN have raised concerns about funding levels and resource availability, particularly in relation to their engagement within the Coalition.

Trust-based collaboration is widely recognised as fundamental to effective partnerships, particularly within multi-stakeholder initiatives that involve CSOs, governments, and legal experts. Ensuring clear definitions of project scope, stakeholder contributions, and funding mechanisms is seen as essential for fostering a strong, coordinated Coalition. As one Responsibility-Holder commented, *“the real value of the MFC is having this multi-stakeholder approach.”* Additionally, some stakeholders have observed



that uncertainties around the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups—including their Secretariats—have contributed to variability in coordination and responses within the MFC.

5.3. Collaboration with External Partners

Collaboration with similar coalitions and multilateral organisations is an effective way to extend the impact of the MFC’s work, maximise resource efficiency, and reduce duplication of efforts. Throughout these first five years, the MFC has developed good working relationships with some similar coalitions and multilateral organisations who are working on media, accountability and transparency, for example the FOC and the Open Government Partnership (OGP). It was recognised this cooperation has brought with it a broader spectrum of people and views into the development of the MFC over time. While such work has provided a good basis for collaboration, it was also commented that more could be done to formalise working relationships and processes in order to make the synergies between them more effective and efficient. A representative from one international coalition of governments commented *“there’s a clear match between our organisations and I’m not sure that we’re fully taking advantage of the way that we could be working together.”*

New and emerging coalitions also present opportunities for greater diversity and engagement. The International Partnership for Information and Democracy, for example, includes journalist protection as part of its mandate and has a membership of 54 states, including several MFC members as well as more diverse representatives such as Brazil, India, and South Africa. Given that the current MFC co-chairs are also members of this partnership, some stakeholders noted that exploring areas of collaboration could enhance engagement and cross-sector cooperation while also present an opportunity to leverage the MFC’s unique value in those spaces.

Another area of potential alignment raised by stakeholders is ensuring that MFC advocacy efforts reach the right international platforms. While the MFC produces strong statements, stakeholders questioned why they are not more frequently delivered in key diplomatic forums such as the UN Human Rights Council. A Duty-Bearer explained that *“we are producing these great statements, but why don’t we get them delivered at the Human Rights Council where the 165 people at Geneva are listening and force people to hear about it.”* Ensuring that MFC advocacy reaches the right international platforms, alongside deeper coordination with aligned coalitions, remains an area of discussion among stakeholders looking to maximise the Coalition’s impact.



5.4. Limited Engagement with Rights-Holders

The level of engagement with Rights-Holders influences both the visibility and sustainability of the MFC. Stakeholders noted that this engagement, currently limited, impacts media coverage of the MFC’s activities, as journalists do not always cover the Coalition’s work. Although it is sometimes argued that journalists do not like to be part of the story, there are also existing initiatives to cover media freedom violations as well as solutions journalism approaches which could incorporate the responses of the MFC. This would require Rights-Holders to be more directly engaged in and aware of the MFC work.

The visibility of the MFC’s work plays a role in shaping its perceived effectiveness and long-term impact. The survey examined perceived impact and effectiveness of the activities linked to the MFC—though not explicitly attributing them to the Coalition—highlighted mixed responses from Rights-Holders.³⁷



Legal Reforms & Policy Changes: Only 11 of the 36 respondents believed that government-led legal reforms contributed positively to media freedom, while 20 stated they saw no positive impact, and 5 were unsure.



Public Statements by Coalitions: Effectiveness ratings for statements issued by government coalitions were mixed, with approximately a third of respondents considering them useful, but the majority indicating scepticism about their real impact.



Trial Monitoring & Quiet Diplomacy: These actions were perceived as less effective, with over 22 respondents stating that they did not find these measures impactful.

³⁷ While the results offer useful qualitative insights, it is important to reiterate that the survey used a snowball sampling approach and had a limited response rate. As such, findings should not be interpreted as representative of the broader journalist or media worker community.



Survey responses suggest that many government-led initiatives, while potentially well-intentioned, may not be effectively addressing the needs of Rights-Holders in the long term. When asked about the key areas of support that Rights-Holders needed, respondents overwhelmingly selected financial support for media sustainability, 65%, followed by policy and legal support at 40%.

Although the CN plays a key role in representing Rights-Holder perspectives within the MFC, some local chapters reported limited awareness of the engagement between their central headquarters and the MFC. Differences in communication structures between local and central levels were noted as a factor in how information flows across the Coalition. Without direct engagement with Rights-Holders, the MFC's work will not remain relevant or sustainable. Stakeholders have emphasised that increasing Rights-Holder representation within the Coalition must be a priority in the coming years



6. Looking Forward

6.1. Conclusion & Lessons Learned

The media freedom landscape has evolved significantly since 2019, when the concept of the MFC was first developed. **Yet it has never been more important to continue to find innovative ways to defend the rights of journalists and ensure that they are able to continue to contribute towards democratic societies.** The MFC has introduced the idea of diplomatic coordination into the media freedom ecosystem, generating an important momentum for supporting democratic ideals. The unique collaboration between policy makers, legal experts and civil society has so far served to raise the profile of and bring attention to media freedom and journalism safety which has contributed to local and high-level responses in the field. This work needs to be safeguarded and supported in what are clearly challenging times.

The MFC therefore needs to think about how it can strengthen itself to be an effective and sustainable institution. This requires taking a holistic look at different aspects of what comprises the MFC and thinking more strategically about each element. The MFC needs to be clearer on what its mandate is and consider - as a multistakeholder force - whether that needs to be updated to reflect the new world order. As per OECD Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and Information Environment, Principle 3, taking a whole of system approach to media freedom should include new and emerging threats to public interest media. In this process, it is important that the MFC think about how its membership can provide transparency around its commitments to media freedom, both at home and abroad. **Establishing transparency and clarity around decision-making processes will also be essential to continue to work as an effective multilateral and multi-stakeholder organisation.**

At the heart of this institutionalisation is the importance of enhancing clear communications mechanisms across its membership, to its legal and civil society partners as well as to the external stakeholder groups it works with and of course to Rights-Holders themselves. **The MFC has the opportunity to contribute further to the narrative around media and democracy.** Ensuring that it is present and engaged in key debates will allow it to develop actions which are effective and relevant. This should include enabling the provision of financial and other forms of support to public interest



media, OECD Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and Information Environment, Principle 2.

In this regard and in what can be at best described as a fluid context, **it is important to support the collaborative tradition which has been established by the MFC**, one that includes traditional and even non-traditional actors, namely Rights-Holders, working in coordination to ensure that inclusivity, diversity and relevance remain at the heart of the diplomatic work of the MFC.

6.2. Recommendations

There is a strong case for the continued relevance and value of the MFC. At the same time, strengthening its structures, processes, and resourcing will be essential for the consortium to remain responsive to evolving and widening threats to media freedom. Both internal and external factors have placed pressure on the current model and governance arrangements. While not exhaustive, these recommendations reflect recurring themes and priorities identified throughout the evaluation:

The recommendations presented in this section are not intended as prescriptive or binding commitments. Rather, they are offered as lines of reflection to inform internal dialogue, strategic thinking, and future planning within the MFC. Their potential uptake and operationalisation remain at the discretion of the MFC's governance bodies, including Executive Group, based on internal priorities, feasibility, and ongoing discussions:

1. Reaffirm the MFC's mandate and shared purpose.

Rationale: As the global landscape for media freedom evolves, there is value in revisiting and reaffirming the MFC's core mandate to ensure it remains aligned with emerging priorities. A shared and up-to-date understanding of the Coalition's purpose can strengthen coordination, reaffirm stakeholder engagement, and provide clear direction for future actions.

Action: The MFC could convene a dedicated space for all stakeholder groups to come together and reflect on the MFC's vision. The next annual in-person meeting could serve as a pivotal opportunity to review the mandate and outline a strategic action plan informed by this evaluation's findings. In preparation, the Secretariat - working with an external learning partner - should facilitate consultations with Member States, civil society actors, and legal experts to co-develop a roadmap for implementing the evaluation's recommendations. The



roadmap could be presented during the convening and then used as a living document to steer the Coalition's priorities over the coming years.

Level of Feasibility: ● High – The proposed action can be implemented using existing structures and coordination mechanisms, requiring minimal additional resources.

2. Strengthen Member State understanding and accountability around the Global Pledge.

Rationale: The Global Pledge remains a cornerstone of the MFC's work. Continued dialogue on its operational implications can help ensure consistent understanding among Member States and support the development of a shared framework for assessing progress. This process would enhance both the clarity and visibility of Member States' commitments, reinforcing the collective impact of the Coalition.

Action: The MFC could initiate a series of exploratory discussions among Member States to reflect on how their national commitments have evolved since 2019. These dialogues should examine both successes and setbacks, aiming to identify practical lessons and challenges. Based on this process, the Secretariat could facilitate the development of a set of standardised yet adaptable criteria to guide Member States in fulfilling their pledge commitments. As such, Member States would be invited to self-assess and provide input into the evolving framework. The Executive Group would validate and oversee the integration of this framework into future MFC planning and onboarding. These criteria could also serve as a benchmark for assessing new member applications, creating a transparent and values-driven membership process.

Level of Feasibility: ● Moderate – While technically straightforward, the action involves political sensitivities and will require consensus-building across diverse Member States.

3. Enhance the MFC's visibility and strategic communications.

Rationale: The MFC plays a distinct and important role in the global media freedom ecosystem. Proactive and strategic communications can further elevate its profile, strengthen public engagement, and foster greater alignment with both multilateral and grassroots audiences. Enhancing visibility also provides opportunities to amplify member contributions and showcase shared successes.

Action: The MFC could adopt a more strategic and coordinated communication approach that reaches stakeholders at national, regional, and global levels. This could begin with reaffirming the Coalition's presence at international forums such as UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day and the International Journalism Festival, while also developing a proactive media

engagement plan that includes op-eds, expert commentary, and accessible content on social media. Parallel to these efforts, each stakeholder group should be encouraged to develop their own targeted communication strategies—tailored to their audiences and regional contexts—which can be coordinated through a centralised Secretariat-led plan. This integrated approach would allow the MFC to amplify its messages consistently, improve stakeholder engagement, and enhance its role as a reference point in the global media freedom landscape.

Level of Feasibility: ● High – This recommendation builds on existing platforms and relationships and can be rolled out incrementally with modest resource requirements.

4. Improve knowledge-sharing and resource accessibility across the MFC.

Rationale: The MFC has generated a wealth of valuable knowledge, tools, and good practices across its structures. Making these resources more easily accessible and tailored to stakeholder needs can further support implementation at all levels. Strengthening knowledge-sharing can also contribute to more consistent, coordinated approaches within and across MFC actors.

Action: The MFC could expand its internal resource hub and proactively disseminating existing tools - such as HLP reports and the *Why Media Freedom Matters* publication - to a wider audience, including those operating at the local level. The Secretariat could consult with Member States, the CN, and HLP to identify gaps in available guidance and develop new materials where needed. These could include simplified toolkits, legal briefings, embassy checklists, and curated good practice case studies. To ensure effective uptake, the MFC could also explore low-barrier dissemination channels—such as embassy briefings and CN webinars - and track usage and feedback to inform updates.

Level of Feasibility: ● High – This is a low-cost, high-impact action that can be delivered using existing networks and knowledge products.

5. Strengthen localisation through embassy networks.

Rationale: Embassy networks have demonstrated strong potential to connect the MFC's work to national and local contexts. Building on this foundation by deepening support and coordination at the country level can enhance the Coalition's responsiveness, increase its reach, and ensure that media freedom efforts are grounded in the realities of Rights-Holders and frontline actors.



Action: The MFC could enhance its localisation strategy by establishing new embassy networks in countries where demand is high or existing human rights structures—such as EU embassy networks—could be leveraged. These embassy groups could receive clearer guidance on their roles within the MFC, including how to collaborate with local CN chapters, engage with HLP expertise, and access financial support tools. The MFC Secretariat could support this process by issuing orientation packages and convening regional coordination calls to ensure coherence. Additionally, embassies could be encouraged to coordinate pooled funding efforts to support grassroots media freedom initiatives, improving the Coalition’s reach and local legitimacy.

Level of Feasibility: 🟡 Moderate – Requires political will and staffing capacity at embassy level, but aligns with existing networks and priorities.

6. Leverage the HLP and CN to support local action.

Rationale: The HLP and CN bring invaluable expertise and experience to the Coalition. Facilitating closer collaboration between these structures and local actors can help translate global insights into local action. Strengthening these linkages will further anchor the MFC’s work in practical impact while maximising the strengths of its diverse membership.

Action: The HLP and CN could adopt a proactive approach to engagement at country level. The HLP could offer bespoke legal advice and technical assistance to Member States and local actors seeking to develop or reform media legislation. Meanwhile, CN chapters could be encouraged - through targeted resourcing and direct engagement opportunities - to work more closely with embassy networks and HLP experts. This would require stronger coordination mechanisms facilitated by the MFC Secretariat, the HLP Secretariat and the CN Co-Chairs (with the support of the CN Coordinator, when hired), including matchmaking between local CN chapters, embassies, and legal experts, and potentially piloting joint missions or thematic working groups to address priority issues.

Level of Feasibility: 🟡 Moderate – Requires improved coordination and communication systems, but capitalises on existing stakeholder strengths.

7. Increase direct engagement with Rights-Holders.

Rationale: Engaging directly with Rights-Holders - particularly those at the forefront of defending media freedom - can provide critical insights that enhance the relevance and impact of the Coalition’s work. By creating structured opportunities for dialogue and inclusion,



the MFC can continue to evolve as a participatory and inclusive platform grounded in lived experiences.

Action: The MFC could initiate the design of a dedicated mechanism to incorporate Rights-Holder voices into its strategic and operational work. One option could be the creation of a non-executive council made up of journalists, media workers, and representatives of marginalised communities across different regions. Alternatively, a rotating panel of media experts with lived experience could be established to serve as an advisory body to the Member States. The CN, in coordination with the MFC Secretariat, could lead on developing the terms of reference and participation framework for this initiative. This structure could also ensure feedback loops between Rights-Holders and MFC decision-makers, enabling their perspectives to inform both public-facing advocacy and behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

Level of Feasibility: 🟡 – Moderate Requires intentional design and political buy-in but is well-aligned with the MFC’s rights-based approach.

8. Ensure transparency of processes and decision-making.

Rationale: Promoting clarity around internal processes and decision-making enhances mutual trust and fosters stronger engagement across the MFC. By communicating clearly about how strategic decisions are made, the Coalition can continue to reinforce its legitimacy and support a culture of openness and collaboration.

Action: The MFC could make a commitment to process transparency by establishing clear protocols for decision-making and regularly sharing relevant information with stakeholders. This could include publishing policies and procedures, providing updates on statement endorsements, and clarifying how cases of concern are prioritised. Where confidentiality is necessary - such as in contexts of high risk or ongoing negotiations - communications should adhere to a ‘do no harm’ approach while still keeping stakeholders informed through secure internal channels. The MFC Secretariat could also explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated internal communications platform to facilitate secure, real-time collaboration between stakeholders, reducing reliance on ad hoc exchanges.

Level of Feasibility: 🟢 High – Can be implemented with modest investment and offers substantial benefits for coalition-wide coordination.



9. Explore basket funding as a sustainable financial modality.

Rationale: The MFC's ability to deliver on its strategic priorities depends on the sustainability and coordination of its financial resources. Exploring a pooled funding mechanism offers an opportunity to align donor support more closely with shared goals, streamline resource allocation, and ensure that core functions and initiatives are adequately resourced over time.

Action: The MFC could explore the adoption of a basket funding model. This would involve pooled contributions from Member States and other donors, managed through a common framework with transparent allocation criteria. Such a model would enable more predictable, flexible, and equitable resourcing of cross-cutting initiatives and support functions. The Secretariat could initiate a feasibility study, drawing on lessons from similar multi-donor mechanisms, and convene interested donors and stakeholders to co-design the model. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that funding decisions are driven by the Coalition's strategic priorities and guided by principles of fairness, transparency, and impact. Thus, the Executive Group could provide oversight to ensure alignment with the MFC's strategic priorities.

Level of Feasibility: 🟡 Moderate – Feasible with donor commitment, though it will require strong governance mechanisms and trust-building.

10. Expand the role and capacity of the MFC Secretariat.

Rationale: As the MFC continues to grow and evolve, there is an opportunity to reflect on and clarify the roles of its different structures to ensure effective collaboration and coordination. The MFC Secretariat should continue to be recognised as the central coordinator of MFC activities and develop its organisational capacities in a manner commensurate with this role. Should the scope of its responsibilities expand, this may warrant future consideration of additional resource needs. Establishing a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities across the Coalition will contribute to greater efficiency, mutual support, and a more coherent collective effort.

Action: The MFC could launch an internal review process of the Secretariat to map existing responsibilities, identify areas of overlap or underperformance, and clarify the division of tasks between its various governance and implementation structures. This process should be inclusive, drawing on the perspectives of Member States, CN and HLP members, and Secretariat staff. Based on the findings, a revised roles and responsibilities framework could be developed and shared across the Coalition, potentially annexed to a refreshed Terms of



Reference document. The MFC Secretariat could also facilitate capacity-strengthening sessions to help stakeholders adapt to any changes and ensure consistent understanding moving forward. Clear documentation and communication will be key to embedding this clarity into daily practice.

Level of Feasibility: 🟡 Moderate – This recommendation will require time and coordination, and potentially additional resources, but will significantly enhance operational coherence.



7. Appendixes

7.1. Evaluation Matrix

OECD-DAC Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Effectiveness	To what extent are results achieved differentially, for example, with respect to gender or geographical location? (When looking at gender equality, equity, poverty and inclusion dimensions, the focus should be on the journalists/media workers who are supported – or intended to be supported – by the MFC’s activities, whether these activities are geared more towards some journalists than others, and to what extent the MFC’s approach is set up to take account of these dimensions.)
	To what extent are results achieved “at home”, which refers to results within MFC member states, versus “abroad”, referring to results in non-member states?
	What are the relative contributions of central government and embassies with respect to different types of action, and what are the strength and weaknesses of each?
	What are the key barriers and facilitators to achieving results?
	What are the concrete recommendations for the MFC on how its results can be further strengthened?
	What changes might be made to existing activities, and what new actions or approaches might be considered?
Sustainability	How can the engagement of MFC member countries be sustained (and where possible, enhanced further), both at central government and embassy level?
	Are there mechanisms that could contribute to improved sustainability of engagement, such as mechanisms for holding states to account for their commitments on media freedom?
	What is the sustainability of the engagement and operation of key stakeholders of the MFC, including the Consultative Network, High Level Panel, and MFC Secretariat?
	What other approaches might contribute to better sustainability? (There are many external factors that might affect whether particular results can be sustained, such as selections and changes in government, but MFC stakeholders are still keen to better understand how the likelihood of sustainability can be maximised.)
Coherence	The MFC has the potential to act as a platform for more systematic and fruitful collaboration both between governments themselves, and between governments and non-governmental stakeholders, but to what extent is this happening in practice?
	Does the collaboration between the MFC’s stakeholders enable more effective and coordinated day-to-day work, actions and activities – for example, through more



	effective action by embassies in specific countries, or through states implementing recommendations of the HLP and/or CN?
	Does the collaboration between the MFC’s stakeholders enable more strategic alignment between these stakeholders, and better strategic decision-making overall?
	Does the collaboration between the MFC’s stakeholders enable better information exchange, such that the actions of MFC member countries are better designed and delivered, and better respond to the needs of journalists and media workers?
	How can the collaboration between the MFC’s stakeholders be improved or optimised?
	To what extent does the MFC avoid duplication and capitalise on synergies with other media freedom initiatives?

7.2. Appendix II: Bibliography

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7.3. Appendix III: Ethics & Safeguarding

Ethical considerations were integrated throughout the evaluation process, with a focus on ensuring that all activities were conducted in a manner that was respectful, inclusive, and mindful of participants' safety and agency. While the evaluation did not involve vulnerable community members, it did include journalists and civil society actors in contexts where freedom of expression is sensitive or contested.

To mitigate potential risks to participants, especially in these media environments, the evaluation team adhered to the following ethical principles:

- **Informed consent** was obtained from all participants prior to interviews and focus group discussions. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were informed of the purpose of the evaluation, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity** were guaranteed to all respondents. No identifiable information is attributed to individuals in the report, and data was stored securely and accessed only by the evaluation team.
- **Risk assessment** was embedded in the planning of country-level data collection. Interview modalities were adjusted to minimise visibility and potential exposure, and local sensitivities were taken into account in the phrasing of questions.
- **Do No Harm** was a guiding principle. The team avoided any lines of inquiry that could inadvertently endanger or retraumatise participants, particularly those working under restrictive media conditions.
- **Ethical management of digital data collection** was followed given that remote interviews and an online survey were central to the evaluation, the process was informed by the Principles for Digital Development—particularly “Design with the User,” “Address Privacy and Security,” and “Be Collaborative.” Interview modalities were adapted to participants’ preferences, and low-risk, accessible platforms were used to ensure secure communication. No metadata was captured beyond what was voluntarily shared through the survey.



7.4. Appendix IV: Terms of Reference of the Evaluation

Attached to this report.