Joint appeal for a Council of Europe Convention on Transnational Repression

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We, the undersigned civil society organisations, call upon the Member States of the Council of Europe
to take urgent and collective action to address the growing phenomenon of transnational repression (TNR) through the adoption of a Council of Europe Convention dedicated to preventing and combating this serious and evolving threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe.

TNR refers to efforts by states to silence dissent beyond their borders by targeting members of their diaspora and exile communities. TNR activities include assassinations and violence, abductions, forced renditions, abuse of extradition, misuse of mutual legal assistance frameworks and Interpol mechanisms, digital surveillance and harassment, and threats or retaliation against family members.
The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has recognised that such practices not only violate non-derogable fundamental rights but also undermine democracy and the security of host states.

According to Freedom House, over 1,000 documented TNR cases have occurred since 2014, affecting
individuals across 100 countries and involving at least 44 perpetrator states. Europe has emerged as a critical venue for TNR, with a growing number of targeted journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents and whistleblowers seeking safety and protection on European soil.

Despite the scope of the problem, there is currently no binding European or international legal instrument specifically addressing TNR. Existing human rights instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), while applicable in principle, do not offer comprehensive safeguards tailored to the realities of TNR.

The Council of Europe is uniquely positioned to lead a coordinated European response. As the continent’s foremost human rights body, it has a long tradition of responding to emerging threats with meaningful legal instruments—most notably through conventions that establish standards, guide domestic reform, and promote intergovernmental cooperation.

A Convention on Transnational Repression would:

- **Define TNR in international law**, creating a shared understanding and basis for policy across member states.

- **Set clear obligations** for host states to protect individuals under threat, ensure access to remedies, and prevent complicity in TNR.
- **Create institutional frameworks and set standards for supporting and protecting** victims of TNR.
- **Regulate and prevent the misuse of international legal mechanisms** (e.g., extradition, Interpol notices, mutual legal assistance) from abuse.
- **Promote inter-state cooperation and information sharing**, including through the establishment of a dedicated monitoring and coordination body.
- **Ensure accountability** for perpetrators and reinforce the resilience of European democracies against foreign interference.
  While we welcome the ongoing discussions within the Steering Committee for Human Rights on potential non-binding instruments, we firmly believe that only a legally binding Convention will provide the
  necessary harmonisation, enforcement, and institutional weight to counter the complex multi-national
  challenges of TNR.

A TNR Convention would also strengthen the Council of Europe's commitment to protect the rights of
individuals beyond borders, reinforcing its foundational principles and enhancing regional security. We therefore urge Council of the Europe Member States to:

1. **Acknowledge transnational repression as a grave and systemic threat** to human rights, democratic resilience, and regional stability.
2. **Support the development and adoption of a Council of Europe Convention on Transnational Repression**, establishing legally binding standards and mechanisms for prevention, protection, and accountability.
3. **Engage civil society and affected communities** in the drafting of the Convention to ensure that it is grounded in lived experiences and meets the needs of victims.In doing so, the Council of Europe will affirm its historic role as a guardian of human rights and democracy, and demonstrate its determination to confront modern authoritarian threats with the tools and solidarity they demand.

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- Araminta
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Center for Civil Liberties
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- Civil Society Forum
- DESTA MEDIA
- Egyptian Human Rights Forum
- European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
- Free Press Unlimited
- Freedom Files
- Freedom House
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
- Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
- Human Rights Centre ZMINA
- Human Rights Defense Center Memorial
- Human Rights Foundation
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Index on Censorship
- International Partnership for Human Rights
- Justice for Journalists Foundation
- Law and Democracy Support Foundation (LDSF)
- Lawtrend
- LIBERECO – Partnership for Human Rights
- OVD-Info
- Promo LEX
- Public Association “Dignity”
- Public Verdict
- Richardson Institute – Lancaster University
- Start Point
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- The Italian Federation for Human Rights – Italian Helsinki Committee (FIDU)
- Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO)
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