

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

Freedom of expression is a human right. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right because it contributes to the seeking of truth, the promotion of democracy and the individual's freedom to form opinions.

Freedom of expression has a strong position in Norway. In several international rankings, Norway is high on the list: Freedom of the press enjoy strong protection, and the value of freedom of expression enjoys great popular support.

Freedom of expression is protected in the Norwegian Constitution, Article number 100.

The Norwegian constitutional protection has some unique features, such as a strong protection against prior censorship. This is why the Russian propaganda channels Russia Today and Sputnik were not blocked in connection with the invasion of Ukraine in the winter of 2022. In many other countries where there is no such constitutional ban, residents experienced such prior censorship.

Traditionally, the justification for freedom of expression has been used as an argument for the absence of regulation.

But

When faced with a new digital public arena and the social media, involving an overload of information, the spread of disinformation and hate speech, we are challenged.

Freedom of expression should offer us practice in tolerance; to tolerate statements that we strongly dislike and respond to them using words instead of repression or violence.

On the other hand, freedom of expression needs to be subject to some legal boundaries.

Some restrictions on certain statements are necessary to safeguard the freedom of expression for others.

It should be safe to express oneself, and there are limits as to what an individual should have to tolerate and be subjected to.

In Norway our Freedom of Expression Commission presented their report to the government last summer. One of their conclusions was the following:

More sanctions and prohibitions are not the solution to the challenges. A strong and diverse civil society and a sensibly regulated public sphere continue to be the best guarantee of a solid and genuine freedom of expression.

Promoting a healthy culture of expression is equally important as safeguarding the legal protection of freedom of expression.