**ATHENS DECLARATION**

**Dialogue, Safety, Diversity**

We representatives of 19 journalists’ unions from the Mediterranean and Black Sea region meeting in Athens on November 4-6, having considered the economic, political and social crisis facing journalists across the region,

***Noting*** the wide range of challenges facing journalists in the region, including their safety, press freedom and political and economic pressure on media, endeavours alongside our unions to reform media laws, introduce freedom of information and protection of sources legislation, self-regulation/press councils, and promote ethical media for the future of journalism;

***Deploring*** the increasing acts of violence against media and the pressure on journalists from unscrupulous governments, politicians and extremists, all of which is creating a new climate for self-censorship where fake news and on line hate can flourish;

***Believing*** that professional and independent quality journalism exercised in conditions of respect for core labour standards, is vital to defend citizens’ right to know;

***Condemning*** the savage cuts in editorial departments and the violations of journalists’ rights at work by many media employers who in the face of a business crisis have abandoned the mission, ethics and values of journalism. The meeting calls for solidarity with journalists victims of the economic crisis and emphasises the role of unions to stand together against job cuts, gender discrimination and financial uncertainty in the regions;

***Noting*** that the media industry is going through a revolutionary change which is transforming the nature of our work, the pattern of media ownership and every aspect of the production and distribution of news and that new business models based on algorithms and click-bait have created a new culture of communications but equally opened new spaces for our unions. An increasing concentration of ownership is leading to less diversity and media pluralism.

**DECLARE**

That the journalists of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea region will engage together to build new forms of dialogue and solidarity and campaign to rebuild trust in journalism and sustain journalism as a common good. In particular the meeting rejects the politics of division, manipulation and intolerance, and agrees to a programme of action in the following areas:

**Building Trust Through Dialogue**

***Believing*** that dialogue is key to sustain a culture of unity and solidarity within journalism and among unions of journalists, in defence of professional and trade union rights;

***Noting*** that the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions are areas of tension and conflicts, and rather than contribute to understanding between people and respect of human dignity and human rights, information has been used to promote propaganda and fake ‘news’ thus further damaging public trust;

***Believing*** that, in promoting respect for human rights and the dignity of individuals, their freedom and privacy, it is the responsibility of journalists and their unions to strengthen quality journalism based on ethical principles of truth, accuracy, and accountability and to avoid hate speech, racial discrimination, sectarianism and incitement to murder.

***Confirming*** the importance of rebuilding trust in journalism, journalists’ unions should commit themselves to

* develop their codes of ethics in line with internationally recognised conventions and good practice, and are encouraged to launch independent observatories to deal with ethical issues;
* establish national structures for self-regulation in cooperation with representatives of the profession and civil society organisations;
* encourage ethical and professional journalism and support journalists who are committed to their profession despite the political or economic pressures they are facing.

**Safety and Protection of Journalists**

Concerned that scores of journalists and media staff who covered the popular uprisings and conflicts in the region have been subjected to killings, abductions, detention, persecution and intimidation;

***Condemning*** in the strongest terms these killings and stressing the importance of pursuing the investigations into their deaths and bringing their killers and those responsible to justice;

Equally ***condemning*** the detention and imprisonment of journalists in the region, in particular in Turkey, Palestine and Egypt, and demanding the immediate release of all journalists currently jailed for exercising their profession;

Recognising that the safety and protection of journalists and media staff is paramount for press freedom and democracy, the meeting

* calls for the development of a Mediterranean and Black Sea programme for the safety of journalists to provide information, training and materials to reduce the risks facing journalists in conflict zones;
* deplores the imposition of restriction to freedom of movement in certain territories of the region as well as unjustified and harsh visa restrictions, and calls for the creation of fast-track procedures to allow journalists to travel across borders for their work without interference;
* calls on all governments of the region to recognise and respect the IFJ international press card and guarantee freedom of movement to the holders of the card;
* calls on states within the Mediterranean and Black Sea region and in conflict zones bordering the region to meet their obligations under United Nations Resolutions 1738 to protect journalists and media staff working on area of conflicts, to accept their responsibilities by investigating crimes against journalists and bringing the perpetrators to justice, and to consider deliberate targeting of journalists a war crime.
* calls on all unions to campaign to ensure that their respective governments support and promote the IFJ’s International Convention on the Safety and Independence of Journalists and other Media Professionals.
* Calls on unions/associations to help protect migrant journalists looking for asylum/safety in Europe.

**Free and Independent Journalism**

To be able to respond to the pace of change, IFJ member unions in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region resolve to join forces in the coming year to continue building strong unions of journalists and reinforcing the values of journalism, workers’ rights, democracy and equality and to demand by all means to secure jobs through Collective Work Agreements.

Participants agreed that the time has come for real reform of media legislation in countries across the region, in particular:

* adopt modern laws to regulate the work of journalists, that ensures freedom of journalistic work, the right to access information and protection of sources, the abolition of prison sentences and detention, as well as ending the suspension of publications, setting limits for fines for press offences, and the abolishing of all forms of pre-censorship;
* organise union work to protect journalists in global media groups via International Framework Agreements
* lead an inclusive dialogue to establish self-regulation structures for journalism capable of dealing with the complex media environment and complaint against the media. These structures should be fully independent organisationally, financially and politically. It should include representatives of journalists’ unions and associations, publishers and media owners, and civil society organisations;
* adopt a clear and transparent policy for finances and advertising, reaffirming that the independence of media organisations politically, financially, and culturally are essential elements to guarantee press freedom;
* reform the state owned media and make it independent from government or any other political influence.
* organise campaigns to abolish all legal provisions that criminalise press offenses or hinder journalists’ work.
* demand equal rights for staff and freelance journalists
* firmly reject hate speech and publicly denounce all kinds of discrimination.

Finally, the meeting extends its thanks to JUADN and ESPIT for their solidarity in organising this conference.

In conclusion, IFJ unions from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, agreed to strengthen their networks by launching a sub-regional group of the IFJ, in line with the provisions of its constitution. The group shall be known as Med-Solidaire. It shall operate within the framework of the IFJ constitution and represent the interests of journalists’ unions and their members within the industrial and political frameworks prevalent in the region.