

Dr Byron Camilleri

Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement

201, Strait Street

Valletta

VLT 1433

Malta

Cc: Police Commissioner, Angelo Gafà, Maltese Police Force

Cc: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Cc: Alessandra Ermellino

7th August 2020

Dear Minister, Dr Camilleri,

Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) partners and freedom of expression organisations call on the Maltese and Italian governments to ensure a robust, thorough and transparent investigation into Neville Gafà for threats made against journalist, Nello Scavo

On 27 June 2020, [Neville Gafà, a former person of trust in the Office of the Maltese Prime Minister](#), issued a threat against Italian journalist, Nello Scavo of the national newspaper, *Avvenire*. In response to a tweet posted by AlarmPhone, an independent support organisation for people crossing the Mediterranean, Gafà called on the organisation to "stop your dirty business". When Scavo responded questioning the former official's record, [Gafà called for him](#) to "stop your dirty business. If not, we will be stopping you."

This type of threat against a journalist is unacceptable, and endangers journalists' ability to work free from intimidation and the threat of violence, especially due to the high number of threats against journalists in both Italy and Malta. Currently over [20 journalists](#) in Italy require 24-hour police protection, with vigilance protocols activated in 191 other cases due to threats made by organised crime networks, politicians, business owners and other unknown individuals or organisations, many of which emerge online. In Malta, the assassination of investigative journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia was preceded by years of verbal threats, attacks on her home, vexatious legal actions and other forms of harassment. Verbal threats from government officials and high profile individuals can demonise the media and independent scrutiny and can, if unaddressed, lead to physical acts of violence and send a message of impunity. According to [Pauline Ades-Mevel of Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) who gave evidence to the Public Inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia, "journalists are still at risk" in Malta. It is therefore essential that the Maltese government and Police force takes cases of threats against journalists in Malta seriously, and endeavours to learn from previous mistakes, to prevent the risk of further violence against journalists and media workers.

We welcome the news that the Maltese Ministry for Foreign Affairs has asked the Police Force to investigate Neville Gafà's threats to Nello Scavo. This is after being asked to do so by the Italian government, who had already moved to place Scavo under police protection due to existing threats he has received as a result of his journalistic work on migration issues in Italy and the Mediterranean. While this is positive news, we call on Maltese authorities to guarantee that this investigation is robust, transparent and thorough and completed in collaboration with Italian authorities.

Further to this, we are also calling on Italian authorities to closely monitor and collaborate with this investigation and exert all diplomatic pressure to ensure international standards and principles are met in the investigation. To ensure journalists can work free from threats and violence, they need to know that they are protected. Independent and in-depth investigations are a key mechanism by which impunity can be tackled, justice realised and trust built between journalists, media workers, and the states they hold to account.

Europe is only as strong as its commitments to the protection of fundamental rights and the rule of law across the continent. The undersigned MFRR partners and freedom of expression organisations will monitor the investigation into Neville Gafà and stand ready to ensure that media freedom is defended and journalists are protected.

Signed

ARTICLE 19

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited

IFEX

International Press Institute (IPI)

Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)

PEN International

Reporters Without Borders

Scottish PEN

This statement is part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by an consortium led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) with ARTICLE 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Institute for Applied Informatics at the University of Leipzig (InfAI), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The project is co-funded by the European Commission. www.mfrr.eu

 **MEDIA FREEDOM
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