



Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR)
% European Centre for Press and Media Freedom

Menckestrass 27

04155 Leipzig

Germany

Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Simon Byrne
Chief Constable of Police Scotland, Iain Livingstone

CC: Naomi Long MLA, Northern Ireland Minister of Justice

CC: Humza Yousaf, Scottish Minister of Justice

Sent electronically

26 October 2020

Re: Threats against journalist Patricia Devlin and her family

Dear Chief Constable Simon Byrne and Chief Constable Iain Livingstone,

We are writing to express our concern about the threats against journalist Patricia Devlin and her family and the handling of the matter by Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Police Scotland. We urge you to ensure that going forward, the investigation is effective and transparent and responds to the urgency the situation demands.

On 28 October 2019, Patricia Devlin received threatening messages on her private Facebook account, which included threats of sexual violence against her young child. They were sent by a dangerous criminal with known connections to paramilitary groups and white supremacist organisations. Subsequently, Devlin was again subjected to threats on social media in April 2020 and in August she received a phone call from the suspected perpetrator.

Regrettably, we observe that to date, no effective investigation has taken place. We are deeply concerned that the suspected perpetrator has apparently been free to travel back and forth between Northern Ireland and Scotland without any concerted action from the authorities. Moreover, communication of the PSNI with Patricia Devlin has been inadequate throughout. Among others, the inconsistent and contradictory information provided about jurisdictional issues and the collaboration between your police services is particularly worrisome. This lack of transparency breeds mistrust and uncertainty and

places a significant burden on Patricia Devlin. Lastly, we understand that despite Chief Constable Byrne's personal assurance that her details would be passed on to the Public Protection Branch in April 2020, appropriate protection measures remain wanting.

Additionally, we have been made aware that Patricia Devlin has submitted a complaint to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and we hope your services will be forthcoming in this context, acknowledging the severity of the issues that have necessitated this step. The National Union of Journalists, of which Patricia Devlin is a member, also support this complaint.

Threats to journalists affect not only the victim but also the public's right to information and gravely undermine media freedom. We urge you to ensure that the necessary steps are taken with the appropriate urgency that lead to the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrator of the threats against Patricia Devlin and to immediately put in place the necessary protection measures.

Sincerely,

ARTICLE 19

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)

This letter 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 a consortium led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including 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.

 **MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE**

