



JOINT STATEMENT ON DHS PROPOSAL ON I VISAS

A proposal to change the way the US manages visas for foreign journalists threatens to seriously jeopardise the exercise of journalistic freedom. We, the undersigned, urge the Department of Homeland Security to drop this proposal.

The “I visa” is required for all foreign journalists operating in the US, whether they are there for one week or five years. Once issued it is valid for up to five years, allowing journalists to work there continuously or travel in and out of the US for assignments. The proposal by the Department of Homeland Security to limit the visa to 240 days, with a possible extension of a maximum of 240 days, would seriously impact the work of the foreign media in covering the news in the US. Furthermore, the proposal is unclear about how the decision about a possible extension would be reached and what would happen after the extension period has elapsed.

Many foreign news organizations have a permanent presence in the US by sending correspondents there for a number of years (commonly 2-5 years). This period of time allows the individual journalists to better understand the country and therefore better report on it to the rest of the world. Restricting the time they could stay to a maximum duration of 480 days carries a substantial risk to how the US is represented globally.

Moreover, we do not agree that this proposal will achieve the ambitions stated: to encourage program compliance, reduce fraud and enhance national security. The I visa application process already requires the individual to name and be supported by the international media organization they work for and is only valid as long as they continue to work for that organization.

The First Amendment of the US Constitution is the backbone to its reputation for freedom of speech and of the press. This proposal is a serious threat to that and risks damaging the US’s reputation globally as a free and open democracy, as well as reducing the opportunity for the world to better understand the US.

We, the undersigned, remain firmly committed to delivering accurate and unbiased news reporting for a global audience. We therefore ask the US administration to continue to support a sustainable framework safeguarding media freedom.

SIGNATORIES

Tony Hall, President, European Broadcasting Union

Michael McEwen, Director General, North American Broadcasters Association

Vincent Peyrègne, Chief Executive Officer, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

Cherilyn Ireton, Executive Director World Editors Forum, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

Anthony Bellanger, General Secretary, International Federation of Journalists

Michael Friedenberg, President, Reuters

Sally Buzbee, Executive Editor, The Associated Press

Phil Chetwynd, Global News Director, Agence France-Presse

Brodie Fenlon, Editor-in-Chief, CBC News

Wendy Freeman, President, CTV News

Irene Gentle, Editor-in-Chief, Toronto Star

Ricardo Gutierrez, General Secretary, European Federation of Journalists

William Horsley, Media Freedom Representative, Association of European Journalists

Juan Carlos Isaza-Montejo, Managing Director, Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana

Brent Jolly, President, Canadian Association of Journalists

Luce Julien, General Manager, News and Current Affairs, Radio-Canada

Ilias Konteas, Executive Director, European Magazine Media Association & European Newspaper Publishers' Association

Simon Marks, President & Chief Correspondent, Feature Story News

Angela Mills Wade, Executive Director, European Publishers Council

Andrew Moger, Executive Director, News Media Coalition

Jessica Ní Mhainín, Senior Policy Research and Advocacy Officer, Index on Censorship

Wout van Wijk, Executive Director, News Media Europe

Adrian Wells, Managing Director, European News Exchange

Leon Willems, Director of Policy & Programmes, Free Press Unlimited