

UNESCO UNITWIN NETWORK ON GENDER, MEDIA and ICTs



28 January 2024

To Whom It May Concern

I extend this letter to you on behalf of the UNESCO Untwin for Gender, Media and ICTs, where I serve as one of the Co-Chairs. Our network is committed to advancing gender equality and promoting women's participation in media on a global scale through research, education, and advocacy. Recently, we've been made aware of the potential closure of the Public Defender's Office in Argentina and feel compelled to convey our steadfast support for its essential role in upholding Freedom of Expression and the right of individuals to be well-informed.

The mission of the Public Defender's Office resonates deeply with our commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable media landscape. We firmly oppose any notion of its closure and, in adherence to principles of transparency and democracy, we advocate for the consultation of the National Congress within the ongoing debate, a practice extended to other involved organizations.

Our attention has been drawn to discussions surrounding the possible dissolution of the Public Defender's Office as part of negotiations related to the bill "Bases and Starting Points for the Freedom of Argentines." While we acknowledge the intricacies of negotiations, we vehemently reject the idea of sacrificing an institution that plays a pivotal role in safeguarding human rights and encouraging informed public discourse.

Operating within the Legislative Branch, the Public Defender's Office serves as a crucial platform for individuals to voice concerns about inaccurate information in media or any violation of their rights. The Ombudsman, Miriam Lewin, appointed by the Bicameral Commission for the Promotion and Monitoring of Audiovisual Communication, Telecommunications Technologies, and Digitalization, has demonstrated a dedication to ensuring a fair and unbiased media landscape.

We stress that an organization of such importance, dedicated to listening to audiences, addressing complaints, and defending the right to express oneself, should not face dissolution. The proposed articles "19 and 20, Chapter V of Law No. 26522" should not be the basis for such a drastic measure without comprehensive consideration of the potential consequences.

We earnestly request that members of the National Congress acquaint themselves with the vital work undertaken by the Public Defender's Office before casting their votes. This office

plays a crucial role in facilitating dialogue, providing redress without unnecessary sanctions, and contributing to a diverse and inclusive communication landscape.

The UNESCO Unitwin Network for Gender, Media and ICTs stands united in solidarity with the Public Defender's Office and its dedicated personnel. We advocate for a thoughtful and democratic approach to any proposed changes, firmly believing that preserving the Public Defender's Office is integral to upholding the principles of Freedom of Expression and the right to be well-informed.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we trust that our collective voice will contribute to the preservation of an institution vital to the democratic fabric of Argentina.

Sincerely,

Lisa French, RMIT, Australia

Claudia Padovani, University of Padova, Italy

Aimée Vega Montiel, UNAM, Mexico

Co-Chairs, UNESCO Untwin for Gender, Media and ICTs.