

**Forum:** Human Rights Commission

**Issue:** **The Question of the Safety of Journalists**

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## Introduction

Journalists are people who educate the public about the happenings and issues that occur around them and throughout the world. As they take advantage of their freedom of expression to report to the world about the good and the bad events and proceedings taking place, their existence is being threatened. Both the scale and number of attacks on journalists and their physical and mental safety have gone up in recent years. According to UNESCO, on average every five days a journalist is killed for bringing information to the public<sup>1</sup>. Journalists are also constantly being imprisoned. Attacks on journalists in non-conflict cases are often executed by organized crime groups, militia, security personnel, and occasionally even local police. Examples of these such attacks are murder, abduction, harassment, intimidation, illegal arrest, and arbitrary detention.

“Without freedom of expression, and particularly freedom of the press, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.”<sup>2</sup> Citizens can access quality information when journalists are safe and able to thrive. This furthers societies to be able to achieve other objectives such as democratic governance, the reduction of poverty, the conservation of the environment, and a culture of human rights. In places lacking press freedom, societies are unaware of their potential for the qualities stated. When there is impunity in cases related to journalism, it not only causes harm in the individual case but also causes harmful repercussions for the entire society and overall press freedom.

Societies in which it is safe to work as a journalist in are not only created by having consequences for acts against journalists. These societies also require prevention, which includes dealing with corruption and organized crime. Dealing with low wages and improving the skills of journalists is yet another act that can further their safety. Raising awareness in all societal spheres is a crucial aspect for healthy press freedom in societies. This being said, it is also important to keep in mind when discussing the question of the safety of journalists that the protection of journalists is not only

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf)

limited to the specific profession, but includes community media workers, citizen journalists, and others who use media to reach an audience.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is the power or the right that a person has to express their opinions without being censored, constrained, or legally punished.

### Arbitrary Detention

Arbitrary detention means to be arrested without having been through the due legal process or to be arrested without proper evidence or likelihood that you have committed a crime.

### Press Freedom Index

Press Freedom Index is created by Reporters Without Borders. It is an annual ranking of countries' press freedom based on the organization's previous records through a questionnaire with 87 questions. It is asked of media professionals, lawyers, and sociologists. This data plus data on abuse and violence against journalists during the period being analyzed creates the results.<sup>3</sup>

### Reprisal

An act that is illegal if done alone, but is legal when in reaction to this state's act.

### Impunity

Impunity is the release from a punishment or the consequences of an action.

## Explanation of the Question

### History

Journalism started in the 1400s, but took off in the 1600s when the printing press was invented. The first periodical was then published in 1655 called the Oxford Gazette. At first, journalists had to be very careful about what they published when saying anything negative about the government. Later on, acts that protected the freedom of the press were established and journalism became a respected profession as well as played a big role in politics and every-day life. As literacy and interest in politics

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<sup>3</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology>

increased, so did journalism. In the 1700s, governments tried to place taxes on newspapers and magazines, but uprisings started for press freedom. By the 1800s, around 234 newspapers were published in the United States of America alone. Parties began using journalism and journalism started to change in many ways as it grew. The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought new challenges to newspapers as reading online was free and many businesses had to adapt to being online.

### Freedom of press

Journalism is expressed through media in every form. Journalists are allowed to freely express themselves and share their knowledge because of the establishment of the Freedom of the Press which protects the freedom of communication in all media channels. Most governments have constructed legal and constitutional protections of the freedom of the press. Some nations have more limited press freedom as what is written and how it is written has been previously designated. In present day, there are organisations such as Reporters Without Borders which help determine a country's freedom of the press by ranking them. This is taken by Press Freedom Index.

### Areas without press freedom

As previously stated, nations' Freedom of Press varies throughout the world. Around one-third of the people in the world do not have similar access to press freedom as seen in the rest of society<sup>4</sup> because of the control of the government. Journalists who cooperate with the rules and regulations of these such governments have often been intimidated in some way and those who do not are brutally mistreated.

### Dangers of being a journalist

As stated by the Committee to Protect Journalists, nearly 50% of journalists whose death was confirmed to be related to their work were murdered, 36% were caught in crossfire, and 14% were killed on dangerous assignments. The sources of these killings were reported to be political groups, military officials, and other unknown sources. There has been an increase in the reliance of freelance journalists for news and an increase in their killing. Freelance journalists are especially prone to danger because they are often working alone, are in dangerous environments, and do not have the same level of protection and aid as staff-journalists. Journalists who work mainly for television were the subjects of the most death followed by those journalists who work for print.

Terrorism has recently begun to play a role in the life of journalists in the form of kidnappings, executions or hacking. Guerrillas no longer take in journalists as they see them as helpers of whoever they are combating and are, therefore, enemies. International press journalists are especially in danger as they are considered to be potential hostages or "sacrificial lambs" whose execution serve terrorist

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.openschoolofjournalism.com/resources/about-journalism/freedom-of-the-press>

propaganda. The side-effects of journalists witnessing terrorism presents itself as a problem. It may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder as well. As stated by Eyewitness Media Hub in 2015, 40% of journalists said that viewing video testimonies had negative effects on their personal lives. Protecting sources and surveillance is vital in the coverage of terrorism in order to protect journalists and witnesses against reprisals.

### Impunity for crimes against journalists

Over 90% of cases of the killing of journalists are left unresolved.<sup>5</sup> It is said that dealing with impunity is dire to the safety of journalists. According to the former UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, Frank La Rue, "its root cause has to be attributed to lack of political will to pursue investigations, including for fear of reprisals from criminal networks in addition to inadequate legal frameworks, a weak judicial system, lack of resources allocated to law enforcement, negligence, and corruption".<sup>6</sup>

### Punishment of journalists

Data that the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that the imprisonment of journalists is rising. The number of imprisoned journalists peaked in 2016 at 259. Reporters Without Borders claims that in 2016 the number of women journalists detained doubled. Intimidation has also grown in recent years. The Media Institute of Southern Africa recalls records of intimidation including the torching of vehicles, physical assault, and death threats. Beatings and travel restrictions are also familiar to journalists. These assaults have forced many journalists into exile as well as teaching journalists to censor themselves by, for example, not writing or talking about certain topics in emails or by phone.

### Online harassment

Technology with which is possible to take surveillance and attack digitally are improving, becoming cheaper, and spreading. This creates big problems for journalists and makes them even more vulnerable. Reporters Without Borders secretary-general, Christophe Deloire, says, "Online harassment is a phenomenon that is spreading throughout the world and now constitutes one of the gravest threats to press freedom. We have discovered that information wars are not just waged between countries at the international level. Journalism's predators also deploy troll armies to hunt down and harass all those who investigate and report the facts honestly. These despots let their mercenaries train their guns on journalists on the virtual terrain as others do in actual war zones."<sup>7</sup> It is said that people against press freedom orchestrate their attacks in three stages. The first being disinformation, content from journalists is drowned in fake news and pro-government content. The second stage is amplification. The impact that

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safety\\_of\\_journalists#Violence\\_against\\_journalists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safety_of_journalists#Violence_against_journalists)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27\\_en.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-publishes-report-online-harassment-journalists>

pro-government content is intensified by paid commentators or robots that post messages on social media. The third and final stage is intimidation. Journalists become targeted, insulted, and threatened personally so as to make them silent and discredit them. Examples of threats to the digital safety of journalists are surveillance, tracking, hacking, fake domain attacks, denial of service attacks, data mining, and confiscation of digital hardware.

## Key Member States and NGOs Involved and Their Views

### Turkey

One of the leading countries in imprisoned journalists. The number of imprisoned journalists in 2018 was 112 according to Stockholm Center for Freedom.<sup>8</sup> It is 157<sup>th</sup> on the Freedom Press Index.<sup>9</sup>

### Turkmenistan

According to the Freedom Press Index, Turkmenistan ranks as the most dangerous place to work as a journalist.<sup>10</sup> The government is in full control of all media and only some are able to access some sort of censored internet. Journalists are brutally mistreated by torture, arrest, physical attacks, etc.

### Yemen

The freedom of the press has been much altered in a negative way because of political turbulence and violence. Journalists are in constant danger of attacks and abduction. At least 16 journalists and media workers are being held by the Houthis as we speak. Most have been since 2015. It is difficult to know what exactly is going on in the war as most media is controlled by parties of the conflict. Journalists are being arbitrarily arrested and abused and are under constant surveillance. Yemen ranks 168 on the 2019 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>11</sup>

### Reporters Without Borders

RFS (Reporters Without Borders) is an international NGO very recognizable in France. Its aims are to further the protection of the sources of journalism as well as to defend press freedom. It is well-known for its ranking of states in their press freedom and surveilling crimes committed against journalists.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://stockholmcf.org/112-journalists-given-various-jail-sentences-in-turkey-in-2018/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

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<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/turkmenistan-worst-country-journalists-norway-safest-190418174410556.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/yemen>

<sup>12</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/presentation>

## Committee to Protect Journalists

CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists) is an NGO with the aim to defend the rights of journalists to report news without having to be afraid of reprisal and to promote freedom of expression. This NGO tells the status of freedom of the press and the safety of journalists, helps journalists through eg. emergency response teams, and monitors the killings, disappearances, and imprisonment of journalists worldwide.

## UNESCO

UNESCO is very involved in the protection of journalists. They have set up a mechanism to follow the judicial entries of the killing of journalists. The director of UNESCO inquires yearly about the status of ongoing investigations on each killing of the Member States that experienced the killing of journalists. UNESCO records these responses and submits them every two years to the IPDC (International Programme for the Development of Communication) Council. Other examples of what UNESCO has done is raise awareness, increased emphasis on tackling women's rights, etc.

## Timeline of Events

The timeline of the safety of journalists is very sporadic as killings are typically individual, at different times, in different places, for different reasons, and there is an endless amount of them. There are records of different points in history when the question began and when it became important to discuss.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
November 7, 1655	first newspaper issue
November 16, 2005	World Summit on the Information Society
September 2011	UN plan of action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was prepared
April 12, 2012	UN plan of action was endorsed by UN chief executive board
November 2012	comprehensive Implementation Strategy was adopted in second UN Inter-Agency meeting
May 2014	Council of the European Union adopted the European Union Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline
November 2014	inaugural International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists
December 2015	General Assembly recognized serious threats to freedom of expression in the context of reviewing progress since the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society

June 29, 2017

Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action took place in Geneva, Switzerland

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has been involved in the affairs of the safety of journalists since 1997.<sup>13</sup> There has been many resolutions made to further the safety on journalists. They have taken it upon themselves as one of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well.<sup>14</sup>

- Security Council Resolution 1738, 23 December 2006 (**S/RES/1738**)
  - This resolution denounces intentional attacks against journalists, media professionals, and associated people in situations of armed conflict and asks the UN Secretary-General to include information on their safety in the subsequent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts.
- Human Rights Council Resolution 27/5, 2 October 2014 (**A/HRC/RES/27/5**)
  - This resolution expanded on good practices including creating specialised investigative units and prosecutors and specific investigatory protocols.
- General Assembly Resolution 69/185, 18 December 2015 (**A/RES/69/185**)
  - This resolution urged the release of journalists and media workers who had been taken hostage or who had been forced to disappear and countries fight impunity with thorough investigations and by prosecuting offenders.
- Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2, 29 December 2016 (**A/HRC/RES/33/2**)
  - This resolution highlighted impunity and urged the release of journalists who had been arbitrarily detained and the reformation of laws that blocked journalists from their work. It also asked States not to interfere with tools for encryption and online anonymity.

## Possible Solutions

There are many possible creative and practical solutions that could resolve the question of the safety of journalists. Important points to keep in mind while solving the question at hand are that journalists are killed, abused, put into arbitrary detention, intimidated, kidnapped, forced to disappear, etc. as well as harassed online. Remembering also that most cases of killing journalists are not dealt with.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/sdgs/ci>

## Tracking devices

One possible solution for the safety of journalists is to keep incognito tracking devices on them. Hidden trackers could be in, for example, fake shoe soles, lipstick tubes, etc. When abductors know that journalists are being tracked, they will have to be more careful about where they are taken as they could be found at any moment.

## Bodyguards

Another solution could be to assign personal bodyguards to journalists and media workers in high risk areas. With trained people protecting them, the rates of killings, abductions, etc. would go down. It can also improve the mental state of journalists because they would no longer have to be stressed about their protection.

## Self-defence courses

Having mandatory self-defence courses for all journalists and media workers could be a further solution. Knowing that these workers can defend themselves may put-off the hurting or abusing of journalists. Threats may also seem less terrifying to journalists as they know that they can defend themselves.

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