

Forum: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Proposing a global framework to prevent the persecution of journalists and independent media

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INTRODUCTION

Unbiased journalism and independent media are public commodities, they have the authority to empower civilians and assist in creating a fairer and more just society. Without such resources, corruption, human rights violations, crimes, and other unethical behaviors would not be exposed, and the public would be blind to the unjust going on behind closed curtains.

At this point in history, unbiased news has become an indivisible part of functioning democratic societies. The role they play when informing civilians, and assessing certain events or decisions is considered a large contribution to the democratic process. This is why a number of people have gone as far as to call the media an unofficial “fourth branch” of government. This is obviously a rhetorical device; however, the media's impact on modern society cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, a vast number of corrupt, high-ranking officials, organizations, and governments try to silence and persecute journalists and independent media that attempt to shed light on their wrongdoings. This can be done in many different ways such as manipulation, censorship, intimidation, violence and bribes.

According to UNESCO, a journalist is killed every five days on average for shedding light on new information, that others want to remain secret. In that same study, UNESCO reports that attacks on media professionals are often enacted in non-conflict situations by organized crime groups, militia, security personnel, and even local police. In 2020, a record number of journalists were kept under custody worldwide. With major news stories breaking out constantly during the past couple of years, that number is only rising.¹

When discussing this issue, while it should be deliberated thoroughly, there should be no direct focus on the retribution of the journalists that have already been persecuted, as there is a much bigger conversation to be had about the protection of journalists and independent media outlets. The persecution of journalists and independent media continues to be an issue in both

¹ “Safety of Journalists.” *UNESCO*, 17 Nov. 2020, en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists.

more and less economically developed countries and there is a dire need for the development of a global framework to prevent and protect journalists from oppression and mistreatment.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Journalism

The activity of gathering, evaluating, creating, and presenting news and information. Objective journalism is an integral part of democratic societies since it is a means for improving government accountability and reducing corruption. Furthermore, journalism acts as a “watchdog” and has often served as a way for unethical behaviors such as crimes conducted by civilians and/or government officials to be uncovered.

Independent Media

Simply put, independent media is any news source that is free from any government or corporate influence. Such media outlets present information without any ulterior motives, whether that be political or religious affiliations, paid partnerships, and so on.

Self-Censorship

Otherwise known as “self-imposed censorship”, self-censorship is the act of censoring oneself out of fear of conflicts of interests, threats, and public outcry. Journalists will often censor themselves or leave out details from their work to avoid the abovementioned issues.

Soft-Censorship²

Soft-censorship is a subtler method of censorship used mostly by authoritarian regimes to silence the media without doing so directly. This does not refer to physical methods of intimidation, for instance detaining and imprisoning journalists, but rather a more refined approach to silencing the press such as bribes or censorship “by-law”.

Rule of Law³

“The rule of law implies that the creation of laws, their enforcement, and the relationships among legal rules are themselves legally regulated, so that no one—including the most highly placed official—is above the law.”

² “The Growing Threat of Soft Censorship.” *Open Society Justice Initiative*, www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/growing-threat-soft-censorship.

³ “Rule of Law.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/rule-of-law.

This definition is important to this topic as the persecution of journalists is often done so as to avoid the rule of law. If a news story is important enough to attempt to publish, then surely the people that are involved in it are high-profile individuals, meaning that they have the means and determination to try to silence those trying to expose them.

Freedom of the Press⁴

A human right that allows people to report and share current events without interference from any outside factor. Freedom of the press falls under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Brown Envelope Journalism⁵

The involvement of monetary bribes with intent to influence journalists to produce more positive reporting on an issue or to “kill” a negative story. The name of this phenomenon derives from the brown envelopes where monetary bribes are often enclosed in.

Global Framework

In the context of this study guide, a global framework would entail a binding agreement between the United Nations, in our case the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3) and the member-states that are part of the committee.

Impunity⁶

Impunity in this context ties in with people that persecute journalists in outwardly illegal ways like murder and kidnapping but are rarely persecuted by law themselves because of the sociopolitical context of their surroundings. “Exemption or immunity from punishment, recrimination” or from “unpleasant consequences”

⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

⁵ Ndhlovu Lungelo. “‘Brown Envelope’ Journalism in Africa and How to Combat It.” *International Journalists’ Network*, <https://ijnet.org/en/story/brown-envelope-journalism-africa-and-how-combat-it>.

⁶ “Impunity Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary.” *Impunity Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/impunity.

Authoritarian States

Certain nations whose laws lack civil liberties such as freedom of speech, association and expression and whose governments are not decided by the people but rather by factors such as ancestral bonds, military intervention, and so on.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Necessity of Unbiased Journalism and Independent Media

Unbiased journalism and freedom from outside influence independent media is extremely necessary and crucial for the development of a functioning modern society. If the media is biased, then people will be misinformed thus having a false and superficial image of the true state of their surroundings, leading to extremism and even radicalism at times. For instance, if a government is corrupted and there are no journalists to uncover their wrongdoings, as in this scenario most of the journalists are dependent on the government for stable employment, then the citizens of the said country will be completely clueless about the fact that they live in a country where their government takes advantage of them. This may not only be limited to this one example: the same can happen with militia groups, organized crime, local governments, and so on. Any democratic society should have at its forefront independent media, and quality journalism.

Number of cases with impunity across all categories, including full justice for killings (2002-2021)

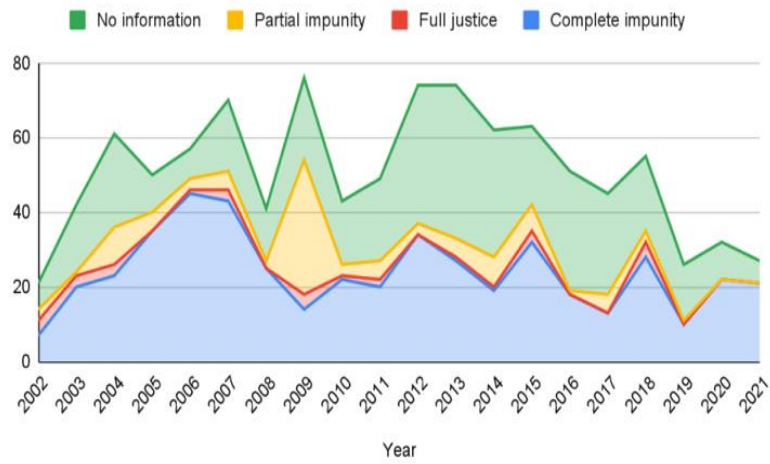


Figure 1: Number of cases with impunity across all categories, including full justice for killings (2002-2021)⁷

⁷ Harrison, Jackie, and Sara Torsner. *Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom: Trends in Non-EU Countries from a Human Rights Perspective*. European Parliament, 2022, www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/702562/EXPO_BRI%282022%29702562_EN.pdf.

The Ethics of Journalism

In order for journalism to be considered objective, meaning that the news presented are free from any personal bias, there are three main recurring needs that need to be met. This is vital when discussing this issue since this exact “honor code” might get journalists persecuted. Traditionally, the ethics of journalism can be simplified into three main points: truth, transparency, and assisting the community.

Online Persecution of Journalists and Independent Media

The 21st century has brought lots of technological advancement to the public’s daily lives; however, when given such advances, certain individuals and organizations are able to use them to further their own agendas, by spreading so-called “fake news” and harassing independent media and journalists into silence. This is not an issue that affects a specific region or country, rather it has been spotted all around the world. Journalists that are publishing certain pieces that the general public or a group of certain people do not agree with may be sent death threats or disrespectful comments via social media, they may also be harassed and doxed. Moreover, many untrustworthy media organizations may attack certain journalists whose work does not fit their agenda, labeling them as producing “fake news” when in reality, they simply do not want the news story to be made public for their own reasons. An interesting yet concerning phenomenon that has come of this is that women journalists are most often targeted in these attacks, Maria Ressa being one of the many women that have experienced this during the past few years. These attacks are often fueled by misogyny and sexism and they are seriously putting female journalists at a disadvantage and discrediting their work. In fact, according to a survey conducted by UNESCO and The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) 73% of women journalists reported that they had faced some form of online harassment for their work, with 20% of them reporting that they have faced offline violence that was initially online.⁸

⁸ Posetti, Julie, and Silvio Waisbor. “Online Attacks on Female Journalists Are Increasingly Spilling into the 'Real World' – New Research.” *The Conversation*, 20 Apr. 2021, <https://theconversation.com/online-attacks-on-female-journalists-are-increasingly-spilling-into-the-real-world-new-research-150791>.



Figure 2: UNESCO campaign against online harassment of women journalists⁹

Journalists in Conflict

When conflicts occur, journalism becomes of the utmost importance, as it is a means of communication between the country at war and the rest of the world. It is central to the outcome of the conflict and how the winning party will be perceived by the global community, as well as if legal action will need to be taken for war crimes. This is why reporters, journalists, and independent media outlets are needed at times of war and conflict. They have the ability to provide insight into the terror of war and inform the general public of what is truly going on inside the conflict. They are also an instrumental part of fighting against propaganda and fake news that may arise from both sides of the conflict.

The Geneva Convention, which consists of four treaties and three additional protocols, established the legal standards for humanitarian treatment at war. Article 79 of the Geneva Convention emphasizes that “Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians...”. The convention goes on to say that journalists “...shall be protected as such under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and without prejudice to the right of war correspondents accredited to the armed forces...” The convention also calls for journalists to obtain an identity card, which is issued “by the government of the state of which the journalist is a national or in whose territory he resides or in which the news medium employing him is located,” this identity card “shall attest to his status as a journalist.”¹⁰

⁹ “#JournalistsToo: 73 % of Women Journalists Participating in UNESCO/ICFJ Survey Have Experienced Online Violence in the Course of Their Work.” *UNESCO*, 17 Dec. 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/journalisttoo-73-women-journalists-participating-unescoicfi-survey-have-experienced-online-0>.

¹⁰ “Practice Relating to Rule 34. Journalists.” *Customary IHL - Practice Relating to Rule 34. Journalists*, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_rul_rule34.

To sum up, journalists are considered civilians under international law unless they have taken actions that do not reflect that status. This is rarely protected in instances of conflict. Most of the time, journalists that expose the terrors of war are targeted and often killed or tortured for “disobeying” the party that commits such horrors. All in all, one side of the conflict will almost always find ways to persecute journalists and media sources that support the other side.

War correspondent Marie Colvin is a prime example. Colvin was an American journalist that worked for the Sunday Times. During her career, she covered nearly all of the wars happening at the time, from three different continents. Her mission through her reporting was to expose the horrors of war, something that would clearly put her in a vulnerable position. In 2012, while covering the Syrian civil war she was murdered presumably at the direction of senior Syrian military officers for her attempt to expose the true number of casualties that occurred during the Homs siege.

Marie Colvin’s life was sacrificed in the name of quality journalism and truth; examples like these, in which multiple human rights are violated, are unfortunately a very real occurrence that journalists have to face when covering news stories in dangerous spaces. This does not have to happen to journalists that are simply trying to unfold the reality of a certain situation. If there was a global framework that protected journalists against such situations, there would be much less fear of covering these types of conflicts.



Figure 3: Marie Colvin in 2005¹¹

¹¹ Matloff, Judith. “Dispatches.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 8 Nov. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/on-the-front-line-and-under-the-wire.html.

Journalism in Authoritarian States

In authoritarian societies, the citizens are supposed to instinctively succumb to authority and not question certain decisions the regimes make. Because authoritarian states often suppress freedoms such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press, it becomes increasingly difficult for journalists to report on what is truly going on inside the country out of fear of persecution and at times death. In this case, censorship can either be direct or indirect. If the authoritarian nation is semi-democratic or if it does not have complete control of the media, indirect ways of censoring are used, such as bribes, economic pressure, state advertisements in newspapers, etc. However, if the authoritarian nation is more outwardly controlling, then the censoring becomes much more severe. In these cases, journalists may be kept in custody, kidnapped, tortured, and even killed in order for an example to be made for other journalists that may attempt to shed light on the situation.

An example of this are two Belarusian television reporters, Daria Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreyeva, that were put on trial and later detained for “organizing and preparing of actions that grossly violate public order.” The true reasoning behind their arrest probably lies in their work reporting the widely disputed reelection of Alexander Lukashenko in August 2020 and the live streaming of the mass protests that succeeded the results of the election. The two journalists worked for Belarusian independent media outlet Belsat TV and are now facing two years in prison for their work as reporters.

Cases like these are not uncommon in countries like Belarus; in a very concerning series of event, this is becoming the new norm for journalists in authoritarian states - that being jail time for very vague offences. What is most concerning, though, is that there is much uncertainty about what conditions the journalists are being kept in, given the track record of human rights abuses certain countries have. All in all, journalism in authoritarian states is a very demanding and difficult job that unfortunately very few people have the conviction to do – which could become problematic as even now it is very difficult to get a clear picture of what is going on inside.

Maria Ressa

Maria Ressa is one of the most prominent journalists in the Philippines. In the early 1970s, she immigrated to the United States after martial law was declared in the Philippines. As a young adult, she studied at Princeton and shortly after returned to her native country, becoming a local correspondent for CNN, where she covered the growth of terrorism in Southeast Asia. In 2012, she founded Rappler, an independent news website operating in the Philippines. Rappler is known to often expose the Rodrigo Duterte regime for its abuse of power, corruption, brutal and violent

anti-drug campaign, and increasing authoritarianism. The site was subject to many legal proceedings by the Duterte regime that were directly targeting Ressa. In 2020, she was charged with cyber libel by a Manila court, while also being accused of fraud, tax evasion, and having received sums of money from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). However, she has not yet served prison time for this conviction. In 2021, she received ½ of the Nobel Peace Prize for fighting for press freedom worldwide and in the Philippines, having her prize motivation be “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace”.



Figure 4: Maria Ressa¹²

Persecution of Journalists by Terrorists and Terrorist Organizations

The formal definition of terrorism is “The calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear. Terrorism is intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”¹³ This definition is very accurate to what independent media have to deal with when terrorism is involved. During the last few years, there has been a surge of instances where independent media and journalists have been persecuted by terrorists or terrorist organizations. These organizations or individuals stage attacks in spaces where journalists work at or on individual journalists that had published something which they did not agree with. What is most interesting about the relationship between the media and terrorism is that terrorist organizations are often interested in controlling the media of a certain area or region, as it gives them the power of fearmongering and sculpting the news to their advantage, similar to the actions of authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, terrorist organizations often persecute journalists to make an example out of the situation; to promote fear amongst news circles, and to ensure that no one attempts to shed light on their actions. Lastly, journalists may be kidnapped and killed by terrorist organizations in an attempt to “exchange” them with someone or something. One example of

¹² “Maria Ressa: Philippines Allows Nobel Laureate to Go to Norway.” *DW.COM*, www.dw.com/en/maria-ressa-philippines-allows-nobel-laureate-to-go-to-norway/a-60006024.

¹³ “Terrorism.” *Oxford Reference*, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803103209420.

this trend is US journalist Daniel Pearl. Pearl was the Southern Asia Bureau Chief for the Wall Street Journal in Mumbai, India. On January 23, 2002, while on his way to an interview in Pakistan, he was kidnapped by a Pakistani terror group. The group, who called themselves the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty, demanded that in order for Pearl to be freed, there needed to be an immediate release of all Pakistani terror convicts by the United States. US intelligence agencies attempted to track Pearl and the group, but they were unsuccessful and a few weeks after the kidnapping, Pearl's remains were found. It must also be noted that multiple members of Al-Qaeda have been connected to this case. Overall, terrorism and journalism are often at odds and situations like Daniel Pearl's rarely end agreeably or overall well.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Belarus

As mentioned in a previous section of the study guide, Belarus has had more than one instance where abuse of the freedom of the press has been evident. Recently, more and more journalists have been getting detained and arrested in Belarus, particularly for speaking out against the regime and exposing certain actions the "prime minister" Alexander Lukashenko has taken. Thus, what the media can report on without risking censorship, harassment or arrest is very limited. State-owned media are often the sources from which citizens get their information on current affairs, which given the situation in which the government is in may not always be the most trustworthy news source. Belarus remains the world's 4th largest jailer of journalists and was the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Costa Rica

When discussing Latin American countries and their relation to freedom of the press, it is not uncommon for people to assume that all journalists in Latin America are marginalized and heavily persecuted by corrupt governments and organized crime. However, that is not the case in Costa Rica. Having placed 8th in the freedom of the press index conducted by Reporters Without Borders, Costa Rica has several forms of diverse media, and its journalists are rarely, if ever, majorly persecuted or censored. The index goes on to state that: "The country's journalists can exercise their profession with ease and have a solid legal framework for freedom of expression."¹⁴ Moreover, the abovementioned legal framework is not only established in the country's constitution, but it is also present in its signing of the American Convention for Human Rights.

¹⁴ "Costa Rica." *Bienvenue Sur Le Site De Reporters sans Frontières*, 11 Nov. 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/country/costa-rica>.

Reporters Without Borders (RWB)

Reporters Without Borders is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that was founded in France in 1985. Its name is an allusion to Doctors Without Borders/Médecins sans frontières. The organization is best known for its World Press Freedom Index, a fundamental factor in the issue of persecution of journalists and independent media. The index is published every year since 2002, and its main purpose is to rank countries based on how well enforced freedom of the press is, taking into consideration media independence, legal, economic, and social factors, as well as pluralism and abuses against independent media and journalists that have happened in the past.

Iran

In 2022, Iran ranked 178th out of the 180 countries that participated in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.¹⁵ This comes as no surprise, as in 2021 the country ranked 174, in 2020, 173, and in 2019, 170. This often happens in Iran as journalists' right to press freedom is not technically protected by the Iranian Constitution. When referring to freedom of the press, the Constitution reads: "Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law."¹⁶ This is vague enough to be interpreted in more than one way and has often given authorities ground to jail journalists and people working in independent media organizations. Moreover, most of the news channels in Iran are state-owned, leaving little liberty for independent media channels and newspapers to properly function. When independent media outlets do manage to function, they are often accused of working with foreign forces and are heavily persecuted by unfair trials and arbitrary arrests. Statistics from the World Press Freedom Index show that more than 1,000 journalists or independent media workers have been detained, killed, and pronounced missing since 1979.¹⁷

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

The Committee to Protect Journalists is a nonprofit, independent organization whose main aim is to promote press freedom and fight against the persecution of journalists worldwide. The Committee's work is mainly focused on research on the persecution of journalists around the globe. With this research, the organization is able to document attacks happening against journalists and independent media and provide their findings to the public, raising awareness

¹⁵ "RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index : A New Era of Polarisation." RSF, https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation?year=2022&data_type=general.

¹⁶ *Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989*. Constituteproject.org, 1989, p. 14. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en.

¹⁷ "Iran." *Bienvenue Sur Le Site De Reporters sans Frontières*, 28 June 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/country/iran>.

and protecting media personnel. For instance, at the time of writing this study guide, the CJP has reported 42 killings of journalists around the world, with confirmed or unconfirmed motives, 293 imprisonments, and 65 missing persons in 2022. They also offer practical solutions to problems journalists have to face when persecuted and protect them against harassment, censorship, kidnapping, and torture.

65 Journalists Missing

in 2022



42 Journalists and Media Workers Killed

in 2022 / Motive Confirmed or Unconfirmed



Figure 5 & 6: Extracts from the CPJ website¹⁸

Mexico

Mexico has one of the worst track records when it comes to the persecution of journalists. In Mexico, journalists and independent media that criticize the government are often harassed, experience unprecedented violence, and are killed at a rate much higher than that of other countries. Killings and overall violence against journalists have been drastically increasing for the past couple of years. At some point during this year, there were more journalists killed in Mexico than there were in Ukraine, which is currently an active warzone. Upon writing this guide, 11

¹⁸ "Committee to Protect Journalists." *Committee to Protect Journalists*, https://cpi.org/data/killed/2022/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&motiveUnconfirmed%5B%5D=Unconfirmed&type%5B%5D=Media%20Worker&start_year=2022&end_year=2022&group_by=location

journalists have been murdered in and 15 are missing since the start of 2022. Drug cartels and organized crime may also be to blame for these murders and disappearances, considering the fact that they often play a crucial role in Mexico’s social and political scene. What makes the situation worse is that little to none of the murders and disappearances have been thoroughly investigated by local and federal police forces, which unfortunately is somewhat normal in Mexico as cases of arbitrary conduct are often simply filed and never investigated or simply go unpunished, without any main suspect or evidence present.



Figure 7: Woman protesting the killings of journalists in Mexico, holding a sign that reads: “freedom of expression?”¹⁹

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1981	The Committee to Protect Journalists is founded.
1985	Reporters Without Borders is founded.
3 May 1994	First World Press Freedom Day established by the United Nations General Assembly.
23 January 2002	Daniel Pearl is kidnapped in Pakistan.

¹⁹ “Annihilating Journalism’: Mexican Reporters Work amid Attacks, Killings.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/annihilating-journalism-mexican-reporters-work-attacks-killings-rcna14196

2002	Publication of the first World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders.
22 February 2012	Marie Colvin is killed in Syria.
12 April 2012	The United Nations Plan on Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is endorsed by the UN Chief Executive Board and welcomed into resolutions.
18 December 2013	General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/163 is adopted.
26 November 2014	First review of the United Nations Plan on Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.
29 June 2017	Second review of the United Nations Plan on Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.
24 May 2020	Protests start in Belarus.
15 November 2020	Katsiaryna Andrejeva and Darya Chultsova are detained while reporting on protests in Minsk.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity²⁰

The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists is an UNESCO initiative that was later endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board in 2012 and welcomed in UN resolutions in committees like those of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and naturally UNESCO. The plan's main aim was to protect journalists both in non-conflict and conflict situations, to strengthen peace and democracy on a global scale, and to create a free and safe atmosphere worldwide for journalists to publish their work without fear of persecution. The plan

²⁰ UNESCO. "UN plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity", *United Nations*, 2012, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf.

has been reviewed twice, once in 2014 by a committee in Strasbourg, and a second time in 2017 by 250 representatives of various UN organs, member states, and so on. Overall, as seen with the multiple reviews throughout the years, the plan needs strengthening in order for it to be implemented thoroughly.

A/RES/68/163²¹

This General assembly resolution A/RES/68/163 was adopted on the 18th of December 2013 and tackles the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. The resolution calls upon Member states to help in preventing violence against journalists and media workers and to further promote freedom of journalism expression and the freedom of the press. The given resolution goes on to condemn violence against journalists in all forms and to encourage organization between UN committees, agencies, organizations, and funds. Lastly, the resolution requests that the Secretary-General attends the next session of the General Assembly. All in all, while the resolution is well-written and has good intentions, it fails in tackling the issue wholly and in-depth.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Protesting

Protesting against the persecution of journalists has become a very popular form of activism in many countries. A lot of people have taken to the streets to voice their concerns on the gross organized human rights abuses journalists often have to face in their native countries but also abroad. The success of such actions depends completely on the place, time, and intention of the protest. For instance, in a lot of countries where human rights are not as respected, there may be arbitrary arrests of protest-goers even if the protest is of a peaceful nature; on the other hand, protests may inspire legislators, government officials and other personnel to take the issue of the persecution of journalists more seriously and create government functions that will systematically protect future journalists from getting persecuted. Protests whose main purpose is to promote the safety of journalists have happened in countries like Belarus and Thailand. As aforementioned, Belarus went through a phase in 2020-2021, where protests were almost an everyday occurrence, a major part of these protests were in the name of press freedom, which the country has at a limited rate. In Thailand, during the summer of 2021, there was a major attempt at democratizing the nation through mass protests. One of the reasons the protests were happening was that the Thai government had published very strict laws regarding freedom of expression and press freedom; therefore, the people were unhappy and took to the streets to express their views. What both of these surges of protests have in

²¹ United Nations General Assembly. "The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity", *United Nations*, 18 December 2013, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/449/23/PDF/N1344923.pdf?OpenElement>.

common is that, while they were successful in raising awareness about what the press freedom situation is like in their country, they also resulted in a number of arbitrary arrests and further censorship regarding coverage of the protests themselves. The protests in Belarus and Thailand are proof that, while extremely important to the expression of people in certain countries, protests can be a double-edged sword. In any case, it is important to remember that protesting falls under the category of the human right of “peaceful assembly” and protest suppression is a human rights abuse of its own.



Figure 8: Protest against the persecution of journalists in Cameroon²²

Solutions Proposed by the European Union (EU)

The EU has claimed many times that their member-states are classified as some of the safest places for journalists. This is not a baseless claim, since some EU countries are in fact ranked amongst the top in the World Press Freedom Index. The EU’s attempt to further freedom of press in their member-states is not only evident in their claims but also in frameworks and legislations. An example is the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024 (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_492). In this plan, there are provisions to protect journalists and independent media that are threatened by outside forces and frameworks for legal cases that have such elements. Moreover, the plan condemns all forms of violence against journalists and encourages all member states to adopt such prerequisites in order to promote freedom of the press in their respective nations. This plan was not only

²² Kindzeka, Moki Edwin. “Cameroon Journalists Protest Harassment, Abusive Arrests.” VOA, Cameroon Journalists Protest Harassment, Abusive Arrests, 3 May 2020, www.voanews.com/a/africa_cameroon-journalists-protest-harassment-abusive-arrests/6188633.html.

successful in protecting journalists further, it also assisted in raising awareness towards to persecution of journalists happening around the world.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Legal Framework

Creating a legal framework to protect journalists would be a feasible and practical solution. If there was a universal legal framework in place to protect journalists, it would consist of two main parts. One part would tackle legal measures to prevent journalists from getting persecuted in the first place, while the second part would mostly tackle what would happen to the people that tried or were successful in persecuting journalists. Obviously different guidelines would apply to the degree of persecution that took place.

Collaboration

Collaborating with multiple different UN committees and organs, in this case, is a good idea as it would assist in creating a multi-faceted global framework that would tackle the issue of addressing the persecution of journalists in a variety of ways. For instance, if collaboration was used when creating the global framework there would be ways for legal proceedings, sanctions, and other tools to be used that would not limit the framework to GA3 authority. It must be noted that while sanctions are a very useful tool in global cooperation, the GA3 does not have the power to impose them and that is why collaboration would be ideal in cases like this. In any case, when discussing this option there needs to be a formal, rational debate about what this solution would entail, as it has proven extremely difficult in the past to create a global framework using multiple UN organs as communication can sometimes be problematic and challenging.

Creation of a Help Line

Creating a phone line and/or application where journalists can reach out to local or UN-stationed authorities when they are in danger or when there has been an attempted censorship is also a way of addressing this issue. This phone line could be national for every country or international, in any case, it would create direct communication between journalists and people that are willing to help them if they are in an unfortunate situation. Moreover, this helpline could also be connected to the national emergency phone number, if the country is deemed qualified to help journalists in these types of situations. In any case, this phone line is a feasible alternative to partly solve the issue of asking for ways to protect journalists.

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness towards victims of persecution and violence is of the utmost importance when discussing this issue. Not only is it a way to inform others of the human rights

abuses that certain journalists and independent media employees have to go through, but it also goes against what the people that are behind the persecution are meaning to do. Staying informed about these issues and educating others about them is one of the most significant and powerful ways this issue can be solved.

It must also be noted that raising awareness should first and foremost be prioritized in countries that rank low on the World Press Freedom Index, in order for citizens to be more aware of any arbitrariness that goes on against journalists and independent media workers. This can be conducted through UN initiatives and other international programs that can easily reach these countries, even the ones that have a corrupt government or are inaccessible to journalist's due to war or other types of conflict.

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