

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Establishing guidelines to guard journalists' safety to ensure the
freedom of the Press



Leonor Gomes (Main chair) and Finn Straver (Co-chair)
30-12-23

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introducing Your Chairs	3
An Introduction To The Topic	4
Definition of Key Terms	5
A General Overview of the Issue	6
Major Parties Involved	8
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	9
Possible Solutions For The Issue	10
Timeline Of Key Events	11

Introducing Your Chairs



Hi everyone! We are Leonor Gomes and Finn Straver and we'll be your chairs in this year's FAMUN. Previous year we were both in the Executive team of FAMUN being delighted as deputy and member of Team Research (the best team). Here we were responsible for finding interesting issues for the debates and handling research reports just like this one.

Leonor:

Hi, I'm Leonor, your main chair. I'm really looking forward to this year's FAMUN and I'm sure we're going to have a lot of fun. This is my first time being the main chair and second time chairing overall, but I've given chair workshops so we should be okay. I'm a four-time-delegate. I speak Portuguese, English, Dutch, French and a bit of Spanish. I'm 18 years old and still a student at Farel but I want to study Psychobiology at the University of Amsterdam. In my free time I like to just relax, watch some tv and bake and play some tennis.
See you in February.



Finn:

I'm Finn and have the pleasure of being your deputy chair on the UNESCO committee this year. This will be my first time chairing and I'm very excited about it! Last year I graduated from the Farel and now I study Geophysics in Utrecht where I learn all about processes in and on the Earth. In my spare time, I like to do sports, especially bouldering. Last year I had a lot of fun as a member of the Executive team and was eager to try and be chair for once as well.



An Introduction To The Topic

On December 2, 1766, the Swedish parliament passed legislation that is now recognized as the world's first law supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information. Narrowly, the Freedom of the Press Act abolished the Swedish government's role as a censor of printed matter, and it allowed for the official activities of the government to be made public. More broadly, the law codified the principle—which has since become a cornerstone of democracies throughout the world—that individual citizens of a state should be able to express and disseminate information without fear of reprisal.

The notion that the press should be free could have emerged only after the press itself had become commonplace. The invention of mechanized printing in the 15th century led to the proliferation of books, newspapers, and other publications that spread ideas faster and farther than ever before. However, because of the potential for these ideas to challenge official power structures, some political and religious authorities actively suppressed publications that they deemed subversive. Twenty-five years after the Freedom of the Press Act came into force in Sweden, the framers of the U.S. Constitution enshrined the same principle in the document's First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or the press."

While many countries have come to understand freedom of expression as a common good—indeed, it is one of the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—state censorship and regulation of the press have not entirely disappeared. The international organization Reporters Without Borders (RSF) monitors conditions for journalists worldwide and ranks countries by their degree of media freedom. Countries that rank toward the bottom of RSF's list include those that maintain various forms of state media and impose restrictions on independent outlets, such as China, Russia, and North Korea. (John M. Cunningham, 2018)

Freedom of the press is vital to investigative reporting. While all reporting could technically be considered "investigative," investigative journalists tend to report on especially serious issues, such as political corruption, crimes, major corporate scandals, human rights abuses, and so on. Investigative journalists collect massive amounts of in-depth research and communicate with people who often need to stay anonymous. In places where freedom of the press isn't protected, investigative journalists face censorship and significant threats to their safety. (Soken-Huberty, E. 2023)

Definition of Key Terms

Advocacy: *Any action that speaks in favour of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.*

Freedom of Press: *Freedom of the press gives individuals and organizations the right to express, publish, and share information, ideas, and opinions without fear of censorship or government interference. It does not cover things like defamation, hate speech, and incitement to violence.*

Impunity: *The ability to act with exemption from punishments, losses, or other negative consequences. In the international law of human rights, impunity is failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice and, as such, itself constitutes a denial of the victims' right to justice and redress. (Wikipedia contributors, 2023)*

Investigative journalism: *A form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest, such as serious crimes, racial injustice, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing. Practitioners sometimes use the terms "watchdog reporting" or "accountability reporting".*

Journalist: *A person who writes for newspapers, magazines, or news websites or prepares news to be broadcast.*

Reporters Without Borders RSF: *An international non-profit and non-governmental organisation focused on safeguarding the right to freedom of information. It describes its advocacy as founded on the belief that everyone requires access to the news and information, in line with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognises the right to receive and share information regardless of frontiers*

A General Overview of the Issue

For the media, political criticism consists of reporting, analysing, and commenting on any form of politics, such as politicians, legislation, and world events. Criticism occurs in newspapers, TV news, opinion pieces, political cartoons, talk shows, and more. Freedom of the press gives journalists, publishers, and TV networks the freedom to criticize any politician or legislation, regardless of how the target feels about it. In places without freedom of the press, political criticism is often illegal, so anyone (journalist or not) who engages in it is at risk of imprisonment or even death. (Soken-Huberty, E. 2023)

Journalism is fundamental for sustainable development, human rights protection, and democratic consolidation, but it remains a dangerous and too often deadly profession - and nine times out of ten, the murder of a journalist is unresolved. According to the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists, more than 1,600 journalists have been killed since 1993. Other threats against journalists, online and offline, continue to grow, especially in non-conflict zones. Journalist imprisonment is at a record high, while online violence - particularly against women journalists - and harassment spurs on self-censorship and, in some cases, physical attacks. Numerous reports and studies confirm that threats inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups. (United Nations, w.d.)

Dangerous working conditions:

The RSF defines 'High-risk assignments' as a journalist's working conditions where the likelihood of physical harm (death, injury, or serious illness) is significantly higher than normal. These include:

- Hostile environments: dictatorships, zones of conflict, insurgency, or high crime, and also regions of extreme climate or terrain (jungle, polar regions, desert).
- Dangerous events, such as violent demonstrations, riots, terrorist attacks, chemical, biological, or nuclear accidents, natural disasters, or pandemics.
- High-risk activities such as investigations into terrorist groups, mafias, or violent extremists and/or working undercover.

(RSF Resource for Journalists' Safety, w.d.)

With more investigative journalists devoting investigations to zones of conflict such as the Gaza Strip the journalist's safety is at high risk as proven by casualty numbers. More journalists have been killed in the first 10 weeks of the Israel-Gaza war than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year, according to CPJ data. By December 23, at least 69 journalists and media workers had been killed since the October 7 start of the conflict. Of those 69, 62 were Palestinian, four Israeli, and three Lebanese. (Committee to Protect Journalists, w.d.)

More than 750 journalists have been killed since 2005 in the course of, or as a result of, their work. They have been targeted because they are journalists, and their stories and investigations are a threat to the propaganda of one side or the other.

Advancing technology:

The rapid progress in information and communications technology has given rise to a new danger for journalists: surveillance of their reporters without borders 14 reporters without borders 14 activities and interception of their data. Digital safety is a constant challenge. (RSF Resource for Journalists' Safety, w.d.)

Risks to female journalists:

As the media have increasingly opened up to women, another danger has arisen: sexual harassment and violence. A violent attack on a war reporter from the CBS television network in Cairo's Tahrir Square, Egypt in 2011 helped to remove the taboo on sexual violence against female journalists. According to a study by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), carried out among 977 female journalists between August 2013 and January 2014, almost half of the respondents said they had been the target of sexual harassment in the course of their work. Although such pressure occurred mainly in the office, it also happened on reporting assignments and at press conferences. In the same study, one respondent in seven said they had been subjected to physical harassment – mainly molestation – and eight in 10 said they did not report the incidents, with some saying they feared that would make them more traumatizing.

The Director-general of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, has described such violence against female journalists as a "double attack", as a result of their sex as well as their profession. In the light of this, UN Security Council resolution 2222 passed on 27 May 2015 notes the "specific risks" to which female journalists and media workers are exposed in the conduct of their work and calls for the importance of gender when considering measures to ensure journalists' safety during armed conflict. (RSF Resource for Journalists' Safety, w.d.)

Prevention:

In preventing and decreasing attacks on journalists, law enforcement plays a big role. When good legislation is in place, that protects press freedom and freedom of expression, the tolerance for attacks on journalists will decrease. To accomplish this, advocacy is an important tool, we actively encourage those responsible to put press freedom higher on the political agenda and to take concrete action. (*Safety of journalists*, w.d.)

Major Parties Involved

The UN is actively working to protect journalists. This is evidenced by an increasing number of declarations, resolutions and other normative texts, the UN Secretary-General's latest report on the safety of journalists and impunity, and his Call to Action for Human Rights. Protecting journalists is also part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is mandated to promote and protect the effective enjoyment by all of all human rights, including the rights of journalists and media workers. (United Nations, w.d.)

Therefore, the countries in the UN are actively involved in ensuring journalist's safety.

According to the RSF's definition of High-risk assignments for journalists, countries with for instance dictatorships, zones of conflict, insurgency, or high crime are dangerous. Therefore, most of these countries are involved in this issue. It is not uncommon that violent demonstrations or riots occur due to dictatorships or conflicts heightening the risk for journalists in these countries.

The RSF's list ranks countries by their degree of media freedom with the top and bottom 10 countries being:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Norway | 180. North Korea |
| 2. Ireland | 179. China |
| 3. Denmark | 178. Vietnam |
| 4. Sweden | 177. Iran |
| 5. Finland | 176. Turkmenistan |
| 6. The Netherlands | 175. Syria |
| 7. Lithuania | 174. Eritrea |
| 8. Portugal | 173. Myanmar |
| 9. Timor-Leste | 172. Cuba |
| 10. Lichtenstein | 171. Bahrain |

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Aiming to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, in 2012, the United Nations developed in a participative and multi-stakeholder manner the first-ever systematic global strategy to protect journalists, which brings together UN bodies, national authorities, media, and civil society organizations. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity addresses the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection, and prosecution. The Plan calls for a coalition-based and holistic approach to its implementation, which is coordinated by UNESCO. (United Nations, w.d.)

The UN Plan of Action aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. The Plan includes measures such as the establishment of an inter-agency mechanism to strengthen the contribution of each UN actor and enhance UN-wide coherence; cooperation with States to develop legislation and other mechanisms for safeguarding the freedom of expression and information as well as the safety of journalists; and the establishment of partnerships, awareness-raising and fostering initiatives. (OHCHR, w.d.)

UNESCO organized on 29 June 2017 a multi-stakeholder consultation to review ways of strengthening the UN Plan, bringing together about 250 representatives of UN agencies.

The 10-year anniversary was a milestone to Reaffirm, Recommit and Reposition efforts to advance the UN Plan.

- Reaffirm the relevance of the UN Plan of Action as the blueprint of all parties involved tasked with protecting the safety of journalists.
- Recommit political will, purpose, and resources to advance the Plan's objectives.
- Reposition to increase impact on the ground, prevent attacks, protect journalists in danger and hold those accountable that are responsible for attacks against journalists.

Over 50 countries renewed their commitment to the UN Plan of Action by a political declaration complemented by pledges, as well as civil society's Call to Action. They committed to addressing new and emerging threats to the safety of journalists, media freedom and media pluralism, such as those arising in the digital age, as well as the specific risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work. (United Nations, w.d.)

Possible Solutions For The Issue

The first ten years of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity have seen significant improvements in promoting a safer and enabling environment for journalists and media workers, despite shrinking press freedom, reduced public trust in professional journalism and the disruption of media business models.

But the past ten years have also seen setbacks and the emergence of new threats to the freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, which were not anticipated when the Plan was first conceived.

Among these are digital challenges such as digital surveillance, online violence and cyber-crimes, particularly affecting women journalists, the increasing prevalence of disinformation and hate speech and the exponential growth of digital technologies giving rise to concerns about the misuse of digital platforms and the role of internet companies in mediating freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. These challenges further include the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which are often aimed at journalists to prevent them from reporting on matters of public interest or the increasing need to provide emergency assistance to journalists in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Strengthening the implementation of the Plan in the next decade, therefore, requires addressing these emerging challenges. (United Nations, w.d.)

Bibliography

Committee to Protect Journalists. (w.d.). *Committee to Protect Journalists – Defending Journalists Worldwide*. <https://cpj.org/>. Accessed 27 December 2023.

Cunningham, John M. "A Brief History of Press Freedom". Encyclopedia Britannica, 3 May. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/story/250-years-of-press-freedom>. Accessed 27 December 2023.

OHCHR. (w.d.). *UN plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>. Accessed 28 December 2023.

RSF Resource for Journalists' Safety. (w.d.). *CHAPTER 1: The Growing Risks for Journalists*. <https://safety.rsf.org/chapter-1/#:~:text=These%20include%3A,%2C%20polar%20regions%2C%20desert>). Accessed 27 December 2023.

Safety of journalists. (w.d.). Free Press Unlimited. <https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/themes/safety-journalists>. Accessed 27 December 2023.

Soken-Huberty, E. (2023, 11 september). *Freedom of the Press 101: Definition, Examples, Significance*. Human Rights Careers. <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/freedom-of-the-press-101-definition-examples-significance/#:~:text=Freedom%20of%20the%20press%20gives,speech%2C%20and%20incitement%20to%20violence>. Accessed 27 December 2023.

United Nations. (w.d.). *Safety of Journalists* | United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/safety-journalists>. Accessed 27 December 2023.

UN plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. (2023, 27 juni). UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action>. Accessed 28 December 2023.

Wikipedia contributors. (2023, 29 november). *Investigative journalism*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Investigative_journalism. Accessed 27 December 2023.

Wikipedia contributors. (2023, september 13). *Impunity*. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impunity#:~:text=Impunity%20is%20the%20ability%20to,right%20to%20justice%20and%20redress>. Accessed 28 December 2023.