The “Survival Right”: Freedom of Expression During Armed Conflict

During times of armed conflict, the right to freedom of expression and information becomes absolutely critical. It ensures all individuals can access accurate and trustworthy information to ensure their own safety and well-being when they are at their most vulnerable. It is necessary for journalists and media workers to monitor and report on human rights violations and other international crimes perpetrated during the conflict. Ultimately, the right to freedom of expression and information becomes a “survival right” and provides a remedy in protecting lives, promoting peace and bringing an end to the conflict.

Despite this, the right to freedom of expression and information itself often becomes a casualty during armed conflicts. Too often, disinformation and propaganda sponsored by State and non-State actors to promote a distorted image of the “enemy” has devastating impacts on human rights, the rule of law and democratic processes and ultimately serves to perpetuate and prolong the conflict. Alongside this, parties to an armed conflict often order internet shutdowns or launch wholesale attacks on media freedom and the safety of journalists and media workers in order to maintain their official narrative.

The digital age has transformed the ability to seek, receive and impart information during armed conflicts. Although social media platforms can enable people to access life-saving information, they can also enable the spread of disinformation, propaganda and ‘hate speech’, mainly due to deficiencies in their business models and content moderation practices. While legacy media continues to assume a central role in conflict and conflict resolution, including by facilitating the free flow of information, this too also been a vehicle of propaganda and incitement to violence in certain contexts.

At the 77th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression will present her new report on...
disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression during armed conflicts. Join us to highlight the findings of the report and to discuss:

- What measures should States take to facilitate the free flow of information and combat disinformation during times of armed conflict?
- How can States ensure media freedom and the safety of journalists and media workers during armed conflict?
- What role does legacy media play in conflict and conflict resolution?
- What constitutes appropriate and effective regulation of social media platforms during armed conflict?
- How can social media platforms conduct enhanced and heightened human rights due diligence during armed conflict, including being attuned to local contexts?

Panel

- Opening Remarks from Minister/Ambassadors (e.g. Netherlands and non-WEOG State)
- Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
- Chantal Joris, Law and Policy Expert at ARTICLE 19
- A representative from the Oversight Board
- A humanitarian organisation (e.g. Nils Melzer from the ICRC)
- A journalist from an armed conflict setting

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