



Committee to Protect Journalists

CONCEPT NOTE FOR UNGA SIDE EVENT

Journalists are being imprisoned at record numbers around the world. They are regularly threatened, attacked and killed, which undermines not only their own fundamental human rights, but also the public's right to receive and impart information. The past two years have seen record journalists imprisoned for their work, most on anti-state charges related to terrorism or official secrets, but also an increasing number on charges of spreading false news. Yet there has been little pushback and few countries have been held to account for their repressive and regressive practices. Countries undergoing ostensible transitions to democracy are chief among these. The Committee to Protect Journalists proposes a side event to be held during UNGA high level week that would highlight global press freedom challenges, with an emphasis on Myanmar and other countries where journalists are imprisoned for their work, denied due process during trial, and where international attention could have an impact.

The proposed event will highlight the situation of journalists imprisoned in Myanmar, Egypt, Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan. If there are positive developments in Syria by that time this would also provide a vehicle to discuss. CPJ has already secured the participation of several high-level panelists including international barrister Amal Clooney, the head of Reuters Steven Adler, and CPJ's Executive Director Joel Simon, as well as potentially a formerly imprisoned journalist. Ms. Clooney is representing the two Reuters reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who have been criminally charged under the Official Secrets Act, subjected to a sham trial devoid of due process, and sentenced to seven years of hard labor.

We understand the importance of hosting an event that does not single out a specific country so the event will also focus on the following cases:

- In Egypt, the government has imprisoned dozens of journalists on fake news and terrorism charges, and two young men who represent the future of Egypt are behind bars because of their journalism- photojournalist Mahmoud Abou Zeid and blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah.
- In Bangladesh, renowned international photographer Shahidul Alam was arrested under Bangladesh's draconian Section 57 of the ICT Act and remains in prison as the country prepares for elections, which clearly cannot be free and fair when journalists are unable to work without fear of retribution.
- In Kyrgyzstan journalist Azimjon Askarov was sentenced to life in prison seven years ago after he was charged in retaliation for reporting on corruption. He has been repeatedly denied medical attention and the U.N. Human Rights Committee found in 2016 that Askarov had been unjustly arrested, convicted, and imprisoned, but he remains behind bars.

We believe that having this event and the attention it will generate will have a profound impact on the situation for these journalists. We have secured the Permanent Mission of Australia as a co-sponsor and are seeking the sponsorship of Canada, Japan and the EU given their influence and involvement in the Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists at various multilateral bodies.