Concept Note for the Commemoration event of the 2021 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

2 November 2021, 9 a.m. New York time

Hate-speech and the safety of Women Journalists
to be hosted by the Permanent Missions of France, Greece and Lithuania to the United Nations, the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists (co-chaired by France, Greece and Lithuania), and UNESCO

Background

Journalists around the world face targeted attacks putting their safety at risk – attacks ranging from stigmatization, hate speech, trolling, to violence, rape and even murder.¹ Between 2006 and 2019, close to 1200 journalists have been killed for reporting the news and bringing information to the public.² In nine out of ten cases, the killers go unpunished. Impunity leads to more killings and is often a symptom of worsening conflict and the breakdown of law and judicial systems.³

As the Secretary-General congratulated the Laureates of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, he said: "Throughout the world, a free press is essential for peace, justice, sustainable development and human rights — and the cornerstone for building fair and impartial institutions. No society can be free and fair without journalists who are able to investigate wrongdoing, bring information to citizens, hold leaders accountable and speak truth to power. Yet anti-media rhetoric — and attacks against media workers — continue to rise. We are seeing growing violence and harassment against journalists, in person and online. Women journalists are often subjected to particular abuse."

The UNESCO Director-General's 2020 Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity highlighted various key findings from the last years when monitoring the killings of journalists globally. In 2018 and 2019, UNESCO recorded a total of 156 killings of journalists worldwide. Overall, over the past decade, one journalist has been killed on average every four days. The year 2019 shows the lowest death toll recorded by UNESCO in the last decade with 57 deaths.⁴ Despite these positive developments, journalism remains a dangerous profession: the threats faced by journalists are many and wide-ranging. Casualties related to countries experiencing armed conflict have declined. Fatal attacks against journalists covering stories related to corruption, human rights violations, environmental crimes, trafficking, and political wrongdoing have risen in a number of other countries.⁵

¹ UNESCO, 2020, Director-General’s Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374700?posInSet=2&queryId=59f40786-004d-4e02-b22a-3c5f33ef2291)
⁴ UNESCO, 2020, Director-General’s Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374700?posInSet=2&queryId=59f40786-004d-4e02-b22a-3c5f33ef2291)
⁵ UNESCO, 2020, Director-General’s Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374700?posInSet=2&queryId=59f40786-004d-4e02-b22a-3c5f33ef2291)
These figures do not include the many more journalists, who on a daily basis suffer from non-fatal attacks, including torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Furthermore, there are specific risks faced by women journalists.\(^6\)

Studies have shown that female journalists are targeted online significantly more than their male colleagues, and that the threats they face are highly sexualized, focused on their physical features, ethnicity, or cultural background, rather than on the content of their work.\(^7\) As a result, these threats tend to silence women journalists’ voices and to deplete freedom of speech by interrupting valuable investigative journalist work. A pioneering UNESCO discussion paper also points to a sharp increase in online violence against women journalists, and reveals how these attacks are now inextricably bound up with disinformation, intersectional discrimination, and populist politics, and how social media platforms and news organizations still struggle to respond effectively.\(^8\)

A number of recent UN resolutions and reports display growing recognition by the international community of the need to take into account the specific risks women journalists face both offline and online. The UNESCO Director-General in her annual request to Member States regarding judicial follow-up of killings of journalists, dated in 2020, also inquires on specific actions taken by Member States to address safety of women journalists.\(^9\)

If impunity for crimes against journalists continues to prevail, the UNESCO’s Report indicated that 2020 saw a slight decrease in the rate of impunity, with a percentage of 13 percent of cases worldwide reported as resolved in comparison to 12 percent in 2019, and 11 percent in 2018.\(^10\) By 2020, the number of States responding to UNESCO’s request for information on the status of judicial enquires into the killings of journalists rose, to a reaction rate of 71 percent.\(^11\) Extensive information supplied by States shows a range of initiatives, systems and activities in place to address the issues of safety and impunity. These cover monitoring and reporting; prevention of crimes against journalists; protection of journalists against attacks; prosecution of crimes against journalists. It is therefore critical to have a look to legal reforms and other measures that could be taken to tackle the gender dimension of journalists’ safety.

### The International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI)

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists in the General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/163 adopted in 2013. The Resolution urged Member States to implement definite measures


\(^{7}\) Safety of Women Journalists (unesco.org)

\(^{8}\) The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists (unesco.org)

\(^{9}\) Safety of Women Journalists (unesco.org)

\(^{10}\) UNESCO, 2020, Director-General’s Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374700?posInSet=2&queryId=59f40786-004d-4e02-b22a-3c5f3fe62291)

\(^{11}\) UNESCO, 2020, Director-General’s Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374700?posInSet=2&queryId=59f40786-004d-4e02-b22a-3c5f3fe62291)

This landmark resolution condemns all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers. It also urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability, bring to justice perpetrators of crimes against journalists and media workers, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies. It further calls upon States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference.

In its resolution 74/157, the General Assembly acknowledged particular risks with regard to the safety of journalists in the digital age. Greece and France, in 2006, initiated UN Security Council Resolution 1738 condemning attacks on journalists in war zones.

Greece - together with a group of like-minded partners, Argentina, Austria, Costa Rica, France and Tunisia - intends to submit to the 76th Session of the UNGA Third Committee, its joint initiative, namely the Resolution on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity”.

To commemorate the 2021 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, UNESCO, together with the Permanent Missions of France, Greece and Lithuania to the United Nations, and the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists (co-chaired by France, Greece and Lithuania), will host a virtual event discussing the impact of hate-speech on the safety of journalists, especially on women.

**Objectives**

The event will aim to:

- Examine the impact of hate-speech on the security of journalists by bringing together experts from technical agencies, media, civil society and UN Member States.
- Understand why the online communication have increased the attacks against women journalists and female media workers putting their safety at risk – these attacks can range from violence, stigmatization, sexist hate speech, trolling, physical assault, rape to even murder.
- Identify legal reforms and other measures that could be taken to tackle the gender dimension of journalists’ safety.

The event will also provide a platform for the presentation of a Joint Statement on the Political Leaders’ Narratives about the Press, by the OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.

**Event format**

The 90-minute event will consist of a moderated panel discussion among United Nations agencies and Member States (including representatives of coalitions), stakeholder groups,
and other experts. Following high-level opening remarks, a moderated discussion will consider why, when it comes to online violence and harassment, the gaps in properly investigating and prosecuting crimes against journalists are particularly significant.

The event will be virtual, with simultaneous live webcast on UN Web TV. Participants who would like to have the opportunity to make interventions will need to register in advance to receive secure access to the event platform.

**Provisional Programme**

**High-Level Opening Remarks Segment**

Opening remarks: Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations and co-Chair of the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists, H.E. Ambassador Maria Theofili

Message: Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, introduced by USG Ana Maria Menéndez, Senior Adviser on Policy (TBC)

Message: Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the General Assembly

Message: Ms. Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

Message: H.E. Mr. Nikos Dendias, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic,

Discussion with Mr. Pedro Vaca, OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression about the Joint Statement on the Political Leaders’ Narratives about the Press.

**Interactive Discussion Panel**

*Panel*

- Judge Ricardo Pérez Manrique, Interamerican Court of Human Rights (by video)
- Jineth Bedoya Lima, Journalist at El Tiempo, Columbia (by video)
- Rebecca Vincent, Director of International Campaigns for Reporters Without Borders
- Emily Bell, founding director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School
- Silvia Chocarro, Head of Protection ARTICLE 19

Moderated by Guy Berger, UNESCO Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development

**Questions and Answers / Concluding Remarks**