

How media can help themselves

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The London Symposium on Safety of Journalists:
“Making the Protection of Journalists A Reality: Time to end Impunity”

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These remarks will cover impunity, media views, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and upcoming events in November.

Let me start by drawing your attention to statistics published in the recent UNESCO report titled “[World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Access to Information](#)”. Between 2007 and 2012, UNESCO’s Director-General condemned the killings of 430 journalists and requested the Member States to investigate the cases and produce a report. Under half (42%) responded to this request, and of this fraction, only 4% reported that the perpetrator had been convicted – in other words, seven of 430 cases. There is a story in these statistics. But we should not forget that there are stories in each of these deaths.

For this coming [World Press Freedom Day](#), 3 May, UNESCO is running a web focus called “[Beyond the statistics](#)”, for which we are inviting contributions about the journalists killed during 2013 and 2014. Our appeal reads: “their deaths are more than a statistic. They have a story. They spent their careers telling other’s stories. But now it is time for us to tell theirs”. Now that you know this, I hope you might consider contributing. And I hope you in particular might also tell us – and your audiences – about the state of play concerning bringing the killers to book.

Here’s a challenge, albeit recognising that it is a generalisation: “You, members of the media, can report much more about journalistic safety – and especially you can follow-up much better on cases of impunity”.

Here are the objections I often hear:

1. Journalists aren’t special, and shouldn’t be singled out
2. It would come across as self-serving
3. It will compromise our independence.
4. Media should tell the story, not be the story
5. We can’t artificially skew the news
6. There aren’t journalists killed in our country
7. The public aren’t interested

Here’s my response:

1. All murders are unconscionable; the killing of a journalist leaves an information gap and enlarges this by stimulating self-censorship,

2. Don't depend only on others to defend the right for your profession to perform its public function without fear.
3. Editorial decision-making on coverage remains completely in your hands
4. When journalists are killed, it is the culprits who have made media into a story
5. There is ample important coverage to be done about safety, without any need to hype or invent stories
6. In a global world, your nationals can be and are killed abroad, and any killing in a far off country deprives your citizens of information. Journalists, your counterparts, in frontline countries count on your coverage of the price they pay for speaking truth to power
7. People do care about those who keep them informed, particularly when a reporter loses his or her life in the line of duty.

In practice, here's what you can do:

1. Know what's happening – and not happening – concerning the processes around impunity
2. Alert your audiences to progress and lack of progress
3. Play the classic watchdog role and hold governments accountable, ask the tough questions

Most specifically, you can appoint someone in your newsroom to be the champion of this story. Without this, it will be business as usual. While, out there, justice is falling short in the cases of fallen journalists, you can at least do justice to this story if you make it a duty for someone to follow it.

And there is probably no better opportunity than have someone planning for sustained coverage during this coming month of November.

This is because the [UN last December declared the 2nd of November as the "International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists"](#). The date coincides with:

- the day when French journalists Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon were killed in Mali in 2013
- the start of an annual campaign against impunity by media NGOs worldwide, which culminates on 23rd November which is the anniversary of the massacre of 32 journalists in 2009 in Maguindanao, the Philippines.

There's the possibility that this day can become as prominent as World Press Freedom Day every 3 May, which is marked in more than 100 countries each year, and whose relevance is enormously relevant to even those countries that to date have been blasé about their situation.

When the UN recognised 2 November, it was in a first-ever resolution by the General Assembly that directly addressed the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

You may also be interested to hear that the same General Assembly Resolution noted "with appreciation" the [United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#). This Plan, put into action over the past 18 months, has been mobilising the combined weight of the UN family into the cause of journalism safety, and joining this with the valiant work being done by other actors – civil society, media and those governments wanting to address the problem. It's not a magic wand, but it is a new opportunity in the struggle for the safety of journalists.

The End Impunity Day resolution shows some of this wider momentum. The same goes for the [debate at the UN Security Council](#) in July 2013, and a [resolution in March 2014 at the UN Human Rights Council](#) which recognised the special importance of safety for journalists covering peaceful protests. There are many other instances, including within a range of countries around the world.

You should know that as per the General Assembly Resolution, the various UN bodies are now identifying staffers as “focal points” to exchange information about journalistic safety, and to contribute to a report to the UN Secretary General for delivery in September this year.

The General Assembly resolution urged governments to undertake “impartial, speedy and effective investigations into all alleged violence against journalists and media workers falling within their jurisdiction, and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice and to ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.”

This was then elaborated to cover the following kinds of actions: (a) legislative measures; (b) awareness-raising in the judiciary and among law enforcement officers and military personnel; (c) monitoring and reporting of attacks against journalists; (d) publicly condemning attacks; and (e) dedicating the resources necessary to investigate and prosecute such attacks. These point cover issues of political will, and practical capacity.

You may be interested to hear which states sponsored the resolution: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, United States of America and Uruguay.

A clear story here is: how are these governments following through, and are other governments aware of all this? Those countries which do not have such problems, can they play a role in regard to those states where journalists are being killed, particularly their nationals working abroad? Is anyone out there asking the authorities any of this? Are attacks being condemned? Are resources being dedicated? Is there good practice that can be shared?

You should also know that planned for this November is the following:

- An initiative to reach out to the judicial community on how they can engage with the problem of impunity. There will be a major symposium jointly hosted by CFOM, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO with the European Court of Human Rights.
- An adjacent event to review the UN Plan of Action to date.
- events around the world, including the launch of an online training course for prosecutors in Latin America, and activities to sensitive police to the issues.
- Between 19 and 21 November, UNESCO will release a report to its intergovernmental council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication, covering the killings since the start of 2013 – to date our Director General has condemned 116 cases and called for investigations and reports.
- (Provisional) release of a major report on impunity by the Committee to Protect Journalists.
- The International Freedom of Expression Exchange, IFEX, [will produce publicity materials](#) on five key issues concerning impunity between the 2nd and the 23rd.

These are some of the initiatives that will make some impact this coming November. Will be any matching action in the media?

You who work as journalists are well-known for the understandable event-based focus and short self-life of your stories. You describe the moment when the shoot bursts through the earth, not the incremental growth process below the surface. You tend to cover the judgements in court cases, not the preceding steps (or lack thereof) in the justice chain. You cover the anger and distress when a

journalist is killed, and you move on to other stories. We know you do major coverage and condemnation when high profile journalists are killed – Marie Colvin, Anna Politkovskaya, Hrant Dink and Lasantha Wickrematunge; we do not see much about follow-up to these cases.

At the same time, it can also be said that you are well-known for editorial planning for big stories - for the build-up, the event, the aftermath. For instance, your coverage of elections, Olympics, the Leveson commission, the Mandela funeral... even some court cases, if I think of a certain Mr Pistorius who is having to account for his trigger finger.

Can impunity get a bit of this kind of proactive treatment? Can I urge you to do some planning for sustained coverage on impunity stories for this November? Can you use this period to play your part in ensuring that impunity and its impact is better understood by the public? Can the media take ownership of End Impunity Day?