

Concept Note

## **Reinforcing regional cooperation to promote freedom of expression and the rule of law in Asia through ending impunity for crimes against journalists**

Following the

### **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

*4 December 2017, Colombo, Sri Lanka*

#### **Overview**

Impunity for crimes against journalists constitutes one of the main factors fueling the cycle of violence against the exercise of freedom of expression. It weakens not only freedom of expression and access to information, but all other fundamental rights. In order to raise awareness on this issue, foster actions of all stakeholders and curb the cycle of violence, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [Resolution A/RES/68/163](#) at its 68th session in 2013, which proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI). The Resolution urged in particular Member States to implement definite measures to counter the present culture of impunity. UNESCO has been requested in the Resolution to facilitate the implementation of the IDEI.

The 2017 IDEI main event will be organized in Colombo, Sri Lanka, by UNESCO and the Ministry of Finance and Mass Media, with the participation of various regional stakeholders including ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission of Human Rights (AICHR) and Human Rights Commissions' representatives. The one-day seminar entitled "Reinforcing regional cooperation to promote freedom of expression and the rule of law in Asia through ending impunity for crimes against journalists" will seek to advance dialogues and strategies to strengthen the regional cooperation on safety of journalists and ending impunity in Asia. The event will focus on the role of the National Human Rights Commissions as well as on the role of civil society and media in the persisting challenge of combatting impunity for crimes against journalists in the region. Through encouraging the exchange of best practices and identifying steps ahead and concrete solutions, the event aims to strengthen the fight of impunity for crimes against journalists in Asia and inscribe this issue in the larger framework to protect fundamental human rights.

Combatting impunity for crimes against journalists is an important step in addressing the high levels of journalists killed, as it perpetuates the cycle of violence against them. Worldwide, only 8% of the 827 cases of crimes against journalists have been resolved in the period 2006-2015, according to [UNESCO statistics](#). In Asia & the Pacific, only 13 cases of the 210 crimes against journalists have been resolved in the same period (6,2% of the cases solved).

#### **Objective and Background**

The objective of the seminar will be to promote freedom of expression and the rule of law through fostering safety of journalists and ending impunity in Asia. This event falls under the global framework of the implementation of the [UN Plan of Action on The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), UN Resolutions and UNESCO Decisions on safety of journalists. By increasing the safety of journalists, reinforcing the fight against impunity and raising awareness for international standards and regional cooperation, the project aims to contribute to fostering peace and security, good governance and the rule of law. This comes also with the proposed actions outlined in the [Outcome document](#) of the Geneva Multi-Stakeholder Consultation (29 June 2017).

The recently adopted international 2030 framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adds impetus to the challenge of ensuring journalist safety and ending impunity. Goal 16: “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” is particularly relevant to the issue of safety of journalists, as it calls for the promotion of the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, as well as ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms (target 16.10). Furthermore, Goal 5 is important as it calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls, which includes ending violence against women journalists.

The safety of journalists and ending impunity for crimes against them are major assets in ensuring fundamental freedoms and human rights, in particular freedom of expression and public access to information. Accordingly, the United Nations is developing a specific indicator as a way to review the effective implementation of SDG 16.10: “The number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates”.

The commemoration of the 2017 IDEI in Colombo will build upon previous commemorations of the IDEI around the world, which have all particularly focused the judiciary’s role in ensuring safety of journalists and fighting impunity at a national, regional and international level. The judiciary system plays a pivotal role in addressing the consistent violence against journalists and can clarify obligations of Member States to protect freedom of expression and safety of journalists and to investigate and prosecute crimes committed against journalists.

In 2014, the first year of the IDEI, UNESCO co-organized an inter-regional dialogue at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. In 2015, UNESCO and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights organized a regional event in Costa Rica. Last year, UNESCO and the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights co-organized a seminar in Arusha, Tanzania, convening judges from African regional and national courts and civil society. The 2017 IDEI in Colombo will furthermore build upon the deliberations during the 2017 World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) on 3 May, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, where there was a session dedicated on special mechanisms for the promotion and protection of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in Southeast Asia.

The Colombo IDEI event will help raising awareness amongst regional bodies, national authorities and institutions, civil society and media on the importance of solving cases of killed journalists in order to strengthen the rule of law and stop the culture of impunity in Asia. The Colombo event will also promote the exchange of knowledge and dialogues between national institutions (e.g. National Human Rights Commissions, judiciary institutions, specialized protection mechanisms), regional organizations (e.g. ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, ASEAN Parliamentarians), civil society (lawyers associations, journalist organizations) and media.

Deepening and sharing experiences, as well as strengthening human rights defenders and civil society, can be an important tool in fighting impunity by raising knowledge about international standards. Civil society, media and other relevant stakeholders will also be invited to discuss their role, focusing on strategies to reinforce their capacities. To summarize, the seminar will seek to increase knowledge and capacities of judicial members and human rights defenders on these issues; reinforce regional cooperation; and to raise awareness on the importance of reinforcing or establishing mechanisms to protect journalists and fight impunity.