



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Concept Note

Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

Thursday, 29 June 2017

Venue: Palais des Nations (Room XXI), Geneva

Convened by UNESCO and OHCHR

Summary:

This one-day event will bring together key stakeholders¹ to take stock of developments in the area of safety of journalists and impunity, within the context of the first five years of implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (hereafter the “UN Plan of Action”).

Since the UN Plan of Action was elaborated, there have been important advancements and achievements in the area of safety of journalists. In spite of these gains and the momentum created, there continues to be a pressing need for protection for journalists and to combat the prevailing climate of impunity for violations of their human rights. This is further exacerbated by the extension of safety and impunity issues into the digital environment.

In this context, there is a need to bring together the relevant actors to assess their achievements, consider the future and share best practices.

The Multi-Stakeholder Consultation will provide the opportunity to participants to identify key achievements, gaps, and challenges in efforts to enhance the safety of journalists. Participants will elaborate recommendations that will assist all stakeholders in their endeavors to secure safety for journalists and an end to impunity, in both conflict and non-conflict situations.

Background:

The UN Plan of Action was elaborated to provide a comprehensive, coherent, and action-oriented UN-wide approach to the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. Since its launch, it has become a guiding framework for activities in this area. Following its endorsement by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in 2012, the UN Plan of Action has been welcomed by the UN General Assembly, UNESCO and the Human Rights Council. Outside of the UN, it has been referred to by various regional bodies, and it has given impetus to and fostered a spirit of co-operation between the UN and various stakeholders in many countries.

¹ Member States, UN, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, media and professional associations and members of academia with a focus on safety of journalists and related areas.

In particular, the following developments regarding safety of journalists and the issue of impunity may be noted.

Intergovernmental Level

Since 2012, a number of activities have taken place at the international level, particularly in the context of the United Nations:

- UNESCO has provided leadership to the UN Plan of Action.
- Since 2008, the biennial [UNESCO Director-General Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#) has attracted increasing attention. It provides an analytical overview of the information from Member States on the follow-up to the killings of journalists. The report is submitted every two years to the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and is a unique tool within the UN system, specifically for monitoring the killings of journalists.
- Eight resolutions on the safety of journalists have been adopted by the UN Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council in the last five years.² Connected with this, a number of States have formed “Groups of Friends for the Protection of Journalists” in New York, Geneva and Paris.
- In 2013, the General Assembly declared 2 November the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.
- OHCHR has contributed to progress in the area of safety of journalists in various ways, including through preparation of reports mandated by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, the provision of technical advice to national authorities, monitoring and reporting on violations against journalists, and advocacy and awareness-raising. The issue has been addressed by the UN human rights treaty bodies, special procedure mandate holders concerned with the right to freedom of opinion and expression, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and human rights defenders, and by the Human Rights Council, including through its Universal Periodic Review.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly Goal 16, provides a new framework within which progress towards the safety of journalists and accountability for violations committed against them can be achieved and measured. The UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) endorsed a global indicators framework, which includes two indicators for Goal 16, Target 10. The relevant indicator for the safety of journalists requires the collection of data on the number of verified cases of violations committed against journalists (namely, killings, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture). The methodology for the indicators is currently under development by OHCHR, UNESCO and ILO, prior to being endorsed by the UN General Assembly, along with all other indicators for the 169 targets developed to measure the 17 SDGs.
- The outcome document of the High Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society includes a call for the protection of journalists.

² In descending chronological order: [Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/33/2](#) (2016); [UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/162](#) (2015); [UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2222](#) (2015); [UNESCO 196th Executive Board Decision \(196 EX/31\)](#) (2015); [UN General Assembly Resolution \(A/RES/69/185\)](#) (2014); [Human Rights Council Resolution \(A/HRC/RES/27/5\)](#) (2014); [UN General Assembly Resolution \(A/RES/68/163\)](#) (2013); [Human Rights Council Resolution \(A/HRC/RES/21/12\)](#) (2012).

- Regional intergovernmental organizations have been active in prioritizing the implementation of States' obligations on the UN Plan. This includes the Council of Europe which operates an early warning system, the online "Platform for the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists", the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media who provides early warnings on violations of freedom of expression, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, both of which have issued statements calling on Members States to ensure safety of journalists and end impunity.

Civil Society, including Media

The UN Plan of Action has served as an inspiration to many national, regional and international civil society organizations, including media, and they have undertaken significant initiatives at the global, regional and national levels, such as:

- The International Press Institute (IPI), in cooperation with the Al Jazeera Media Network, the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and the Africa Media Initiative (AMI) elaborated an International Declaration on the Protection of Journalists. A number of media groups have put their weight behind developing standards for freelancers. The "Freelance Journalist Safety Principles" have been endorsed by over 90 organizations. At national levels, associations and individuals in media have been active as well. France Médias Monde has launched a training session about safety in dangerous areas adapted to the specific needs of media professionals. Stronger internal procedures and protocols have been put in place by news media. The Dawn newspaper in Pakistan, is preparing a 'lock down' room, as well as working on relocating correspondents from particularly insecure regions.
- National actors are increasingly forming national coalitions to confront and address the questions of protection and impunity in a more comprehensive and strategic manner.
- A campaign was launched on gender-based violence at work, which is scheduled to be debated at the ILO Conference in 2018.
- Safety issues are being addressed through: the production of safety guidelines, safety and security online resources, risk assessment templates in various languages, handbooks for reporters in high-risk environments as well as trainings for journalists and media workers on first aid, digital safety and stress and trauma issues.
- International media support organizations are working hand in hand with national and regional partners to build the capacity of national protections mechanisms.

Regional and National Judicial actors, law enforcement institutions

Judicial actors across the world are increasingly participating in exchanges regarding relevant jurisprudence and best practices. For instance, seminars involving representatives of regional human rights courts were held to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists in 2014 (Strasbourg, France), in 2015 (San Jose, Costa Rica) and in 2016 (Arusha, Tanzania). These have focused on legal frameworks for the protection of journalists and the problem of impunity. Training of law enforcement officers and military personnel on the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists and establishing professional relations with the media have been organized in more than 12 countries in Latin America, Africa and the Arab region based on the training manual "Freedom of Expression and Public Order".

Parliamentary bodies

A letter of intent was signed between three branches of the State of Paraguay, the judiciary, the legislative, and the executive, and UNESCO to establish a permanent safety committee for journalists in the country. It will propose legislation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and develop policies for the prevention of violence against journalists, including training and capacity building for journalists themselves, as well as police and judicial officials.

The Pan African Parliament adopted a Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Parliament of Pakistan is in a process of adopting a draft Bill to guarantee journalists protection and welfare.

Academia and journalism education

A Journalism Safety Research Network, which has approximately 90 members from different universities around the world carrying out in-depth research on the impact of the UN Plan, is being hosted by the Center for Freedom of Media (CFOM).

Since 2014, UNESCO supported a series of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) entitled “International Legal Framework on Freedom of Expression, Access to Information and Protection of Journalists”, which have been developed for judicial officials in the Latin-American region. In total, almost 3,200 judicial officials, including 800 judges, were trained on international standards pertaining to freedom of expression and information and the role of the judiciary in defending these fundamental freedoms.

The Model Curricula for Journalism Education has been updated in 2016 to include a specialized syllabus on the safety of journalists. In 2016, in partnership with the International Federation of Journalists, UNESCO developed a full “Model Course on the Safety of Journalists” for Arab States that is being piloted in 12 universities across the region in 2017.

Objectives of the Multi-stakeholder Consultation:

The Multi-Stakeholder Consultation seeks to:

- Initiate preparatory discussions within each stakeholder group through the consideration and completion of the request for contributions circulated in advance of the Consultation itself. This will encourage each group to review and assess its contribution to furthering the safety of journalists since 2012 and to suggest next steps. This preparatory work will feed into a draft outcome document that will be discussed at the Consultation;
- Bring together the various experiences and views of the stakeholders; and
- Produce an outcome document that will build on the UN Plan of Action and constitute a basis for a coordinated, comprehensive and action-oriented approach to tackling the safety of journalists and issue of impunity by providing strategic direction and specific recommendations to all stakeholder groups.

The structure of the outcome document will follow the Implementation Strategy of the UN Plan of Action, which sets out four expected results:

a) UN coordination mechanisms are strengthened and harmonised, and current and new actions are put in place, in order to increase the impact of work on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

b) Member States are advised on the implementation of existing international standards at national level and on the development of journalists’ safety mechanisms, as well as supported in regards to

the sharing of good practices and capacity-building amongst various actors, including the criminal justice chain, to promote a safe environment for journalists at national level.

c) The work of intergovernmental organizations outside the UN and of other organizations such as professional associations, media, academia, and NGOs, is reinforced and their work is harmonised within the implementation of the UN Plan.

d) State institutions, governments, media houses, and other key stakeholders have increased awareness of the importance of safety of journalists and combating impunity, and of ways to achieve these conditions.

Process:

A template document following the UN Plan of Action Implementation Strategy structure will be disseminated to key stakeholders. By 8 May 2017, these templates should be completed (maximum four pages) and returned to UNESCO. As noted above, they will inform the draft outcome document that will be finalized during the Multi-Stakeholder Consultation. At the Consultation, participants will consider consolidated recommendations for each stakeholder group, and cross-cutting priorities, and the results of these discussions will be incorporated into the final outcome document, which will be widely disseminated.

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