

## What media can do to strengthen the safety of journalists

### Ideas raised by participants in the UNESCO conference “News Organizations Standing Up for the Safety of Media Professionals”, and a focused follow-up meeting.

On 5 February 2016, media leaders from around the world gathered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to discuss how they could more proactively work on journalists’ safety. They included media owners, editors-in-chief, unions, freelancers, and civil society. The occasion enabled members of UNESCO Member State delegations to hear media views first-hand. The meeting, involving some 300 participants, was followed by a more focused discussion by 15 media leaders, convened by the International Media Women’s Foundation, the World Editors Forum and the International Federation of Journalists.

During the deliberations, the following possible actions were raised by individual participants based on their own experiences, and which could be considered for adaptation elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> These ideas cover the potential of protocols and policy, training, risk analysis, support for freelancers, a gender-sensitive approach, awareness-raising and solidarity.

- **Safety policy and protocols**

- Establish clear habits, routines, protocols and systems (including insurance and regular training) to enhance safety, with clear responsibilities from the media organization and the reporter
- Institutionalize daily check-ins and provide back-up for reporters on dangerous assignments
- Have conversations between editors and correspondents before heading out to understand mutual responsibilities and what will happen if something goes wrong
- Protect premises and facilities

- **Trainings and tools**

- Provide training and mentoring to staff, fixers and freelance journalists on a variety of topics, such as:
  - Conducting security assessments
  - Security in hostile environments
  - Kidnap prevention
  - Medical care
  - Digital safety

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<sup>1</sup> This document is not an endorsement of these points put forward by diverse conference participants, only a record that can serve as a resource for those in the media seeking to make more impact on enhancing the safety of journalists.

- Topography
  - Psychological support
- Provide trainings for media editors and managers to sensitize them to safety issues
- Work with NGOs to provide access to low-cost or free practical tools for journalists to be more prepared when it comes to safety, and create a website for consulting existing resources (e.g., from RSF, IWMF, and the Rory Peck Trust)
- Adapt universal training manuals to local circumstances
- Work with foundations to provide matching funds for safety training
- **Risk analysis and preparedness**
  - Require risk assessments prior to deployment to understand the environment in which reporters will work, and to mitigate and reduce the risks they take
  - Not send staff to situations that are too dangerous, and be aware that taking stories from freelance journalists from those areas may constitute a double standard
  - When journalists go into conflict areas, get briefings from security forces of where they should position themselves, what material to wear, extraction protocols, etc.
  - Consider whether publishing certain stories will put correspondents in danger, and allow the journalist to see the final copy and headline of the article before publication
  - Use smart preparation and new technology to support safety and save costs
- **Support for freelance journalists**
  - Ensure fair and timely pay, and provide access to resources, trainings, press IDs, protective gear, insurance, legal support and medical support for freelancers
  - Consider asking freelancers to work exclusively for a single media organization at a time when on a dangerous assignment, and pay them enough to do so
  - Develop systems for care for local freelancers
  - Consider how to give bloggers access to the journalistic community
  - Build support networks for freelance journalists

- **Gender-sensitive support**
  - Provide specific preparations and support for women journalists, who face unique risks, such as online or physical harassment
  
- **Awareness-raising**
  - Raise awareness of the safety of journalists and tell their story, by publicizing attacks on journalists, and explaining the importance for societies of journalists being safe.
  - Use World Press Freedom Day (3 May) and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2 November) to promote journalists' safety and end impunity for crimes committed against them
  - Condemn all acts of violence against journalists, and highlight cases and statistics of those killed in the media and impunity rates (Note: UNESCO provides official UN statistics each year – the next report will be published in early October for debate at the November Council meeting of UNESCO's International Programme for the development of Communication, IPDC)
  - Create initiatives like photo contests to honour fallen colleagues
  
- **Solidarity and collective action**
  - Join a global media alliance (such as "A Culture of Safety (ACOS), and take part in a national coalition (such as the Pakistan Coalition on Media Safety).
  - Make use of the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity to find points for joint or complimentary actions on these specific issues with the UN, governments and civil society
  - Work with professional associations, press clubs and press forums to monitor threats, fight impunity, and sustain a journalist safety fund to move journalists to safer places when the threat level is high
  - Strengthen solidarity between local/community media and mainstream, bigger media, and share information about safety practices.
  - Create a network of organizations' security officers to share good practices

- Continue covering stories started by journalists who were killed before completion
- Display posters in newsrooms informing journalists of their colleagues killed elsewhere
- Initiate or take part in special task forces dedicated to investigating ongoing impunity cases/issues
- Create shared databases that law enforcement actors as well as investigative reporters can use to investigate crimes against journalists
- Create a contact group to provide alerts regarding dangerous situations/areas
- Advocate to hold States accountable for their commitments to free expression and safety through international reporting mechanisms (Universal Periodic Review process, IPDC, Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 on “public access to information and fundamental freedoms”)
- Consider support for the proposal for a special representative on safety and impunity to be established within the office of the UN Secretary-General
- Tackle as a community and industry challenges for digital safety for journalists in the context of overreach by national security and counter-terrorism laws