International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI)

CONCEPT NOTE of Panel Discussion

“Ending impunity for crimes against journalists: strengthening implementation and the case of women journalists”

Thursday, 2 November 2017

1PM – 2:45 pm, Conference Room 8, UNHQ, NY

Impunity for the killing of journalists prevails as the predominant trend, with the vast majority of cases that occurred between 2006 and 2016 remaining unresolved.

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (2 November), UNESCO, the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN, together with the New York Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, are holding a panel discussion at UN Headquarters in New York on Thursday, 2 November from 1PM to 2:45 PM.

Also on 2 November, UNESCO will be launching a social media campaign to raise awareness for the ‘International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists’ (IDEI) worldwide. All are invited to take part in this campaign using the hashtags #EndImpunity and #Journosafe, as a means to publicize this important International Day and its activities. The key findings related to the safety of journalists presented in UNESCO’s forthcoming ‘World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: 2017/18 Global Report’ will be made available at the same time, as part of this campaign.

On the fourth occasion marking IDEI at UNHQ in New York, the event shall take the shape of an interactive panel discussion bringing together all stakeholders concerned by this issue (Member States, UN, Civil Society – NGOs, practitioners, academia and students of journalism, political science and law) for a discussion on moving the agenda forward and attaining concrete results. The discussions shall also follow up on the ‘Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity’, which UNESCO and OHCHR organized in Geneva on 29 June 2017. This consultation produced an Outcome Document and a Report on the implementation of the ‘UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity’.

In fact, a number of engaged Member States have formed a Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists in New York, Paris and Geneva and are leading initiatives to raise awareness on the crimes against journalists and the challenge to bring the perpetrators to justice.

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1 Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, France, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Sweden, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Tunisia, Uruguay, and the USA.
BACKGROUND:

Impunity for crimes against journalists constitutes one of the main factors fuelling 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. 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.

Under the leadership of Greece, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/68/163 at its 68th session in 2013, in order to raise awareness on this issue, foster actions of all stakeholders and curb the cycle of violence. The Resolution urged Member States to implement definite measures to counter the present culture of impunity and proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI). The date was chosen in memory of the assassination of two French journalists in Mali on 2 November 2013. The Resolution requested UNESCO to facilitate the implementation of this International Day.

This action was followed by UNGA Resolution A/RES/69/185 adopted in 2014 and UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/162 adopted in 2015, reinforcing the commitment of the UN General Assembly to protect the safety of journalists and end Impunity.

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”.

IDEI ACTIONS:

In 2014, the first year of the IDEI, UNESCO co-organised a high-level panel titled “Ending impunity: upholding the rule of law” together with several permanent missions to the United Nations (Argentina, Austria, Costa Rica, France, Greece, and Tunisia). UNESCO also organised an inter-regional dialogue at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France – in partnership with the Council of Europe, Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM), University of Sheffield, and the European Lawyer’s Union. Other related events took place in Abuja, Accra, and Tunis, all under the auspices of UNESCO. That same year, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/69/185, recognising that everyone’s right to freedom of expression depends upon the safety of journalists and an end to impunity for crimes against them.

The Riga Declaration of the World Press Freedom Day international conference, held in Latvia on 2-4 May 2015 reiterated this call. Also that year, UNESCO and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights organized a regional event in Costa Rica and the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/70/162 on the issue of safety of journalists and need to combat impunity. Furthermore, the UN Security Council, under the presidency of Lithuania, adopted Resolution S/RES/2222, which saw a large number of Member States comment on the need for implementation steps to ensure safety of journalists and an end to impunity. A side event, organised by Lithuania and Latvia was held to discuss actions.

In 2016, 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. At the UN Headquarters, UNESCO and the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN held an interactive panel discussion on ending impunity in conflict situations.
THEME:
The number of killed female journalists in comparison to male journalists has significantly increased, from 5% in 2006 to 10% in 2016. Although 90% of journalists killed in 2016 were men, it is critically important to acknowledge that women face additional gender-based threats and attacks on top of the same threats as those faced by their male counterparts. Gender-based attacks take on different forms that have severe long-term consequences. Current laws and policies are insufficient in curbing gender-based violence against women journalists, and this has a chilling effect on women journalist and fosters a culture of impunity.

In 2017 the ‘Report of the UN Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity’ (http://undocs.org/A/72/290) focuses on the safety of women journalists. The IDEI event will thus target the issue of gender, safety and impunity aiming to sustain momentum from the existing UNGA and Security Council Resolutions, as well as to contribute insights for the 72th UNGA’s resolution on ‘The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity’. It shall focus on the situation of women journalists more in particular, but also how it relates to the SDGs, and draw on the latest figures on safety and impunity. It will serve as the occasion to launch UNESCO’s Report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development, which shall be used as a factual basis for the interaction. Moreover, the event will elaborate the linkages with Sustainable Development Goal 16, which recognizes the need for access to information, fundamental freedoms, reducing violence and combatting impunity.

Participants will also learn about the outcomes of the ‘Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity’, organized by UNESCO and OHCHR on 29 June 2017, to bolster the implementation of the ‘UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity’.

PARTICIPANTS / PANELLISTS:

- Ms Maria Theofili, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Greece to the UN; 
  ⇒ to speak on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists.

- Mr Frank La Rue, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO; 
  ⇒ to speak about UNESCO’s 2017/2018 World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Global Report, SDG16 and universal access to information, plus the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the issue of Impunity.

- Ms Nupur Basu, Independent journalist and documentary filmmaker from India; 
  ⇒ to present excerpts from her documentary film ‘Velvet Revolution’, which profiles women journalists who have paid a high price for speaking truth to power.

- Ms Sonali Samarasinghe Wickrematunge, award winning investigative journalist and editor from Sri Lanka; 
  ⇒ to illustrate a strong personal story of a woman journalist.

- Ms Judy Taing, Senior Officer on Gender and Sexuality, ARTICLE 19; 
  ⇒ to present ARTICLE 19’s project #SpeakingUp: Freedom of Expression to Counter Technology-related Violence Against Women, which takes a forensics level approach in understanding the role of technology in enabling/prohibiting attacks against women journalists.

- Ms Michelle Ferrier, Associate Professor in the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University; 
  ⇒ to speak of TrollBusters, a tool she founded to fight cyber-harassment with love.

- Mr Christophe Deloire, Director-General of Reporters Without Borders; 
  ⇒ to speak about the situation of journalists and the issue of impunity.

MODERATOR:

- Ms Penelope Manis, Senior Director of Programming, CNN International.