



Press Release

UN human rights chief and top UN media expert urge better protection for journalists

On World Press Freedom Day, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, urge all states to live up to their commitments to protect journalists from political interference and physical threat.

“World Press Freedom Day serves as an occasion to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate the benefits of a free and independent press; and to defend the media from attacks on their independence.

Sadly on this day we must also pay tribute to media professionals worldwide who have lost their lives in the daily struggle to disseminate the news. In the last year, over 60 journalists have been killed in the line of duty. Their sacrifice should further strengthen our efforts in promoting press freedom and the protection of journalists everywhere from ongoing harassment and threats.

The safety and protection of journalists remain two of the key priorities for the full implementation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Violent conflicts in many parts of the world have a serious impact on ordinary people, including journalists and media professionals. Large numbers of journalists have been either assassinated or wounded by direct armed attacks during fighting or deliberately targeted and kidnapped by the parties to the conflict.

The proliferation of small arms, the use of increasingly sophisticated weapons by belligerents and the concern to win the “war of images” have further jeopardized the physical safety of civilians and media professionals. Such attacks, in blatant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, are committed in an environment of almost total impunity.

Every year, the UN human rights system receives hundreds of reports of individual journalists who have been detained, beaten, tortured or killed while carrying out their work. In many jurisdictions, minimal protection for media personnel is undermined by the regular use of search warrants on media offices and journalists' homes. Protection is also weakened by the use of legal and illegal surveillance, misuse of data protection laws and extraordinary measures employed by some States in the fight against terrorism.

International legal instruments give every citizen the right to receive information and ideas of all kinds, through any media of his or her choice. Governments therefore have a legally binding commitment to protect a free and independent media and in doing so guarantee the rights of those working in the media sector. Media independence and pluralism are fundamental to the process of democracy. Editorial independence should be guaranteed by respect within government and society at large for the independent, neutral status of journalists guaranteeing their right to freedom of expression.

International recognition of the importance of journalists and the need for them to work free from unjust restrictions and the threat of violence is essential. We urge all states to translate their formal concerns about the safety of journalists -- as elaborated in international forums and treaty law -- into real, concrete measures to enhance the safety of journalists and other media personnel including at the legislative, administrative and judicial levels. Such protection measures must, of course, apply to all media personnel regardless of their professional or political affiliations.”
