

The Dangers of Journalism: Reporters choose Risk over Safety in the Name of Truth

28 identified 'Zones of Conflict' where journalist risk their lives each and every day, to report the truth. But when the truth becomes a death sentence, who protects them?

Press freedom is a cornerstone of democracy. The first amendment of the U.S. constitution guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble. The public needs to be able to be informed on issues that directly impact their lives. Journalists provide that information to the public. They inform and empower citizens, by reporting reality with transparency so they are able to do so freely and safely.



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Rights vs. Reality

Journalists risk their lives every day to be able to provide the public with information, yet the world is becoming more and more dangerous for the press. As of the end of 2024, the Global Conflict Tracker has identified 28 active zones of conflict (many of these zones are seeing worsening conditions). There are international laws that supposedly provide provisions to protect journalists, but in reality, those protections are often weak and unreliable, nothing more than empty promises for numerous different reasons. Journalists in zones of conflict must be treated as civilians (unless they play part in the hostilities, or, in some cases, until they report on something which could be inconvenient for the higher-ups who are in power). The number of deaths in regions of conflict is significantly increasing.

Zones of Silence

When journalists are stopped from reporting certain issues (e.g. by the government or because of safety reasons), it will result in 'zones of silence'. A zone of silence is an area where the lack of journalists creates an information void. Those regions can be dangerous, as they are breeding grounds for propaganda, and they give a rise to patriotic journalism—news that serves the state rather than the people. The most important question is if press freedom is a right that shouldn't be touched, or if national security is a good enough reason to justify censorship.



**“A free press is not a privilege,
but the exercise of a
fundamental human right.”**

- Reagan Foundation

Press Immunity

In theory, press immunity is meant to safeguard journalists. It's supposed to ensure they can report freely, and it's a legal and ethical principle that the press should be protected from things such as harassment, violence, or any other form of harm when performing their job. But, despite all these so-called 'safeguards', journalists are still harassed, detained, and sometimes even killed if they expose truths that might be 'inconvenient' to certain parties. It might seem powerful, but in reality, press immunity is only as strong as the government and institutions want it to be.



Accountability

While news stations and governments should provide safety to journalists, if they decide to report from dangerous conflict zones, they need to understand all the risks involved. But if they fail to prepare or assess the risks, that's on them. Press immunity, and protection measures can only work to a certain extent, but they can't guarantee safety all the time. It's their own responsibility to be prepared and know exactly what they are getting into. When situations go wrong, they can't simply blame it on the government or news stations.

Reporting the news comes at a high cost, and anyone in the business needs to be prepared to pay that cost.



Fake News and Social Media

In today's day and age, fake news has become a huge problem. It's been fueled by social media platforms. They prioritize sensationalism over the truth, and it has become more of a popularity contest. It's a breeding ground for unchecked narratives that are still blindly followed by the public. Social media is incredibly misleading, and legitimate journalism is being drowned out by clickbait and biased reporting.

“The fake news media is the enemy of the people.”

- Donald J. Trump

This statement by US president Donald J. Trump highlights a growing distrust in the mainstream media, and it raises a crucial question: is the press truly serving the people, or has it become a tool used to create political narratives? The huge rise of biased reporting creates distrust in the public, regarding the news they consume. In today's world, information is power. But who ensures that the truth is actually being told?



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An Insider's Perspective - Guest speaker Axel Bugge on the Risks of Journalism

In the Opening Ceremony of St. Peters International School's annual MUN conference, guest speaker Axel Bugge held a speech on the realities (and dangers) of journalism in zones of conflict. Bugge was a former Reuters news reporter, who covered numerous different stories in 20 countries all over the world. He shared some of his personal stories and experiences when he was reporting from war zones, riots, and modern slavery operations.

'Journalists are paid to go into danger'

This statement highlights the constant pressure and danger news reporters have to face to uncover the truth. There are some laws and organizations that are aimed at protecting journalists, but despite that, the risks are still present. According to Bugge, the key isn't to eliminate the dangers (since it's quite impossible), but to mitigate them.



Beyond the physical risks, he also addressed another important issue: how social media has diminished public appreciation for journalists.

'Opinion is free, but news gathering comes at a cost'

Bugge's speech served as a reminder that, obviously preparation and training are crucial, but true safety can never be guaranteed. As the conflicts in our world become more and more tense, journalists' work becomes more important than ever. He left everyone at the conference with an important question. Are we, as a society, willing to acknowledge and support the sacrifices journalists are making each and every day to keep us informed?

SPIMUN Day 2

On the second day of the SPIMUN conference, the Senior Committee debated about the issue of Protecting journalists in regions of conflicts. Many delegates showed a lot of different viewpoints.

"Journalists shouldn't be sent to war zones for reporting and the information they spread should be checked by national and international sources" - Delegation of Syria

"there is a desperate need for changes and solutions in the ways we treat journalists. They provide us with the information that shapes our lives, and deserve to be recognised for it" - Delegation of Argentina

"Journalism is an essential skill that must be preserved and protected" - Delegation of Qatar

"The west is trying to control the truth, and Russia will not allow this"- Delegation of Russia

