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**Senior Committee**

**Issue: Protection of journalists in regions of conflict**

**Background Information:**

Journalists are defined as people who write news stories or articles for a newspaper or magazine or broadcasts them on radio or television.[[1]](#footnote-1) Journalists have the role of informing citizens and to empower them by reporting reality with transparency. As of November of 2024, the Global Conflict Tracker identifies 28 zones of on-going conflict, whether at a national or international level, 16 of which are said to be worsening. [[2]](#footnote-2) It is therefore of the upmost responsibility that journalists have access to report these conflicts and that there is valuable transparent coverage of the disputes in question.

There are international laws which provide provisions to protect journalists during armed conflicts. For example, under Article 79 of Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, which codifies a customary rule, journalists in war zones must be treated as civilians and protected as such, provided they play no part in the hostilities.[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite this, journalists’ basic human rights remain at threat. For example, in the Israel-Hamas conflict, as of November 4, 2024, 137 journalists have been confirmed dead by the CPJ in just over a year. [[4]](#footnote-4) The number of reporters deaths decreased from 2022 to 2023, yet the number of deaths in regions of conflict has faced a sharp increase, in particular in the Middle East.[[5]](#footnote-5)

A severe consequence of this increased danger in regions of conflict is the emergence of *Zones of Silence*. Following the damage and destruction of media infrastructure, physical attacks, detention, confiscation of equipment or denial of access to reporting. sites, journalists have avoided these areas. Therefore, many conflicts are under reported limiting access to information worldwide and locally. The impact of a lack of journalists on the ground results with the emergence of an information void – *a zone of silence*. Further, journalists also face deliberate bans by some local governmental authorities to operate in regions of conflict, whether it be with their safety in mind or an attempt at controlling reported news. This means that without reporters on the ground, the accuracy and veracity of facts could be at jeopardy. This could lead to “patriotic journalism”, whereby the only information reported is written by journalists who favour a certain nation or faction over another, unable to offer unbiased facts, clouding local and world reporting on that conflict.[[6]](#footnote-6) Moreover, understanding humanitarian crises becomes challenging for the international community who is unable to determine the needs of each group in that armed dispute without journalists to report and engage both combatants and civilians (local or otherwise).

As a result of worsening work conditions and increased exposure to violence, many journalists cannot operate in certain areas.[[7]](#footnote-7) Media outlets do not have the financial resources required to guarantee the protection of their employees, who can either no longer operate in areas of conflict, or face severe threats to their human rights. The debate arises as a result of contrasting perspectives on how and who should protect journalists. It is in part a question of whether freedom of information should be preserved, whereby the international community should ensure the safety of these reporters who inform the people, or if it is within a state’s sovereignty to argue that the presence journalists may hinder a military operation and render a nation more vulnerable. Another point of discussion is the extent to which there should be accountability on perpetrators of violence against the press – should there be criminal punishment? What constitutes a violent crime against a journalist? Further, the role of the UN, and to which extent it is up to the international community to safeguard and impose these rights can still be a topic of argument. Lastly, there are debates over the current legal protections offered to journalists in regions of conflict and on whether they should be expanded and made more inclusive to specific situations.

**International Action:**

Article 79 Protocol I of Geneva Conventions (1977):

Article 79 established in 1949 that provided that journalist play no part in hostilities, they must be treated and protected as civilians in war zones. This meant journalists were now safeguarded by several other international laws which safeguard civilians in these areas of conflict and enjoy a much broader scope of humanitarian laws under which they are protected. Reporters’ rights are also safeguarded as despite the legal framework of discussion, journalists that work as war correspondents will always be protected under the Geneva Conventions. [[8]](#footnote-8) This article does not create a special status for journalists as it would weaken protections to other groups that have already been established. Further, despite protection measures for journalists only being codified “in the case of international conflicts (Protocol I) journalists also enjoy the protection granted to civilians in non-international armed conflicts.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012):

The UN plan of action is a conjoined effort of the UN which approaches this issue with a holistic point of view based on co-operation. It aims to address “the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection, and prosecution.” Thus, it will target the fundamental issues of unsafety for journalists and having a world-wide input from the UN aims to have lasting effects. It is divided into six areas: “raising awareness; standard setting and policy making; monitoring and reporting; capacity building; research and coalition building.”. Several different organs and bodies of the UN as well as specific initiatives aim to target all six of these areas to efficiently resolve these issues. It will also secure the help of NGOs and governments in order to act as efficiently as possible.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Resolution 69/185 General Assembly (2014):

This particular G.A. resolution is extremely comprehensive as it acknowledges the issues which endanger journalists across the globe, whilst condemning actions which exacerbate and create them. It encompasses the themes of violence against journalists and further focuses its attention on reporters in regions of conflict, especially when considering the role national governments can play in determining the work and safety of these journalists. It also reiterates other important resolutions and commends external efforts, by NGOS’s and the UNESCO in their efforts to mitigate this issue. It also wishes to raise awareness to this problem, perhaps a key step more resources should be allocated to, as it can serve as the basis to then take greater and more impactful action on the topic. Lastly, it also aims to prosecute those who perpetrate this violence by placing them under international law jurisdiction so they can be trialled and justly and fairly convicted of the crimes they have committed and the human rights violations they have amplified.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Resolution 2222 of the Security Council (2015):

The Security Council has played a particularly important role in safeguarding journalists rights, in particular this resolution. It is seen as a milestone and was passed in 2015. It “condemned all violations and abuses committed against journalists and affirmed that states must respect and protect journalists as civilians. It confirmed that that media equipment and installations constitute civilian objects and shall never be the object of attack or reprisals (2015).” [[12]](#footnote-12) It also established that although it is primarily the concern of a state to ensure the safety of journalists, the Security Council should intervene and help to ensure accountability for crimes committed against reporters. This resolution included pre ambulatory clauses which recognized the danger journalists face in regions of conflict, a key legislative step to their protection. For example, the resolution stated that “Recognizing that the work of journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel often puts them at specific risk of intimidation, harassment and violence in situations of armed conflict”. [[13]](#footnote-13)Further, acts of violence which breach humanitarian international law was a focus of this resolution, which now aimed to convict people of these crimes. The monumental impact of this Resolution was that journalists were deemed “not only as members of the civilian population but also because of their particular social function.” [[14]](#footnote-14) Because of this, they became safeguarded by other laws during time of war. Measures on the protection of journalists to ensure everyone’s right to news and information became mandatory to states.

**Current Situation and Focus of Debate:**

Currently, there are over 110 armed conflicts across the globe[[15]](#footnote-15), and the safety of journalists has become an especially important issue. With the death toll of reporters increasing world-wide, the need for increased protections for journalists has become especially important and therefore **delegates are encouraged to find proactive and efficient solutions that can target this issue, by considering both awareness, prosecution and protection methods.**

Delegates are expected to debate which measures the UN should take to should focus on developing international frameworks which can prevent national governments from restricting freedom of press. The discussion should also focus on how to mitigate the impacts of violence towards journalists and how to prosecute those who perpetrate it.

Thus, delegates are encouraged to consider the following areas and to raise these questions when debating this topic:

* How to raise awareness? Delegates must consider how to highlight the issues and prosecution faced by journalists in regions of conflicts. They may wish to resort to help from NGO’s, media, news outlets, educational campaigns, etc.
* Is there a need to improve existing frameworks? Delegates must understand and research past UN resolutions in order to understand which legislation is missing and where can it be improved. It is important that delegates are innovative and can propose refines solutions.
* Which mechanisms can monitor, and report acts of violence? Delegates must understand that if such acts are not monitored and communicated to other entities, journalists cannot be protected. Therefore, delegates must consider how to enhance such mechanisms to improve efficiency in communicating a case of violence towards journalists, so that a response may be quicker.
* What equipment, skills and support do journalists need to operate more safely in regions of conflict? Delegates need to consider that because of on-going conflicts, journalists must be give more and improved support to be able to continue to report in conflict zones.
* How can governments, NGOs, the UN, international bodies and media outlets work together to improve this situation? Delegates must consider coalitions between different reglementary bodies in order to improve prosecution, reporting, awareness and advocacy methods. Understanding the importance of creating a support system for journalists is key to create an effective resolution for this topic.
* How can the UN find a balance between security and press freedom? Delegates must consider their own countries position and work together to find a middle ground between each country’s right to sovereignty and freedom of press and speech.

**Bloc Positions:**

Israel:

The Israel-Hamas (October 2023 – present) conflict has increased the risks for journalists in the Middle East. The conflict has been one of the deadliest disputes for journalists and media workers in recent history. Reporters Without Borders has condemned “this climate of intimidation and calls on the Israeli authorities to stop obstructing the work of journalists covering the war.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The Israeli government perpetrates censorship, control and intimidation, and therefore would oppose all international frameworks that safeguard freedom of the press or the safety of journalists.

Russian Federation:

Since Putin has taken over office, at least 13 journalists have been murdered. [[17]](#footnote-17)Since the beginning of the Ukraine-Russian conflict, as of November of 2024, 103 media workers have been killed. [[18]](#footnote-18) Further, Russia has banned nearly all independent media outlets following President Putin’s isolation policy since Covid-19. New legislation has been adopted fairly quickly and lacks revision, meaning that many laws relating to freedom of speech such as defamation and “fake news” laws are now part of the penal code. These refer to “false information” spread about the Russian military or political body and can be punished by up to 15 years in prison. In practise, Russia has severely restricted rights such as freedom of speech and not worked to solve the violence they currently pursue towards journalists reporting on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict[[19]](#footnote-19). The Russian Federation would be extremely closed to implementing international frameworks and appeal to their right to sovereignty as a reason to negate these resolutions.

United Kingdom:

The UK has established a National Action Plan (2023) focusing on retaining support from the government, law enforcement and media organizations to ensure the safety of all journalists reporting in the UK. [[20]](#footnote-20)They have proposed measures to ensure the safety of journalists faced with threats to their integrity and their work but have also passed legislation regarding online protections. This reveals the progressive mindset of the country who wishes to preserve its right to freedom of speech and the press. [[21]](#footnote-21)This means the UK would be open to working together with external and national bodies to safeguard the safety of journalists, whether nationally, or as should be the focus of delegates, in regions of conflict.

Switzerland:

Switzerland has developed an action plan, which will be reviewed in 2027, however thus far, it includes measures to improve awareness for this issue as well as practical actions. Some initiatives include the promotion of respect for journalism and defending it as a pilar of democracy. The nation has also worked on “developing industry-wide standards for press passes and other safety measures.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Further, the SLAPPS initiative targets lawsuits which have a detrimental impact on freedom a speech, and wishes to either providing them a trial soon, having them re-heard, etc. Switzerland would be extremely open to proposing solutions which safeguard freedom of press and will be willing to agree to international actions from national governments, NGOs and other institutions.

Syrian Arab Republic:

Syria has been in an armed conflict since 2011, and reporters have been denied access to certain areas of the territory. The Syrian government has restricted media outlets who are now either state media or monitored by the SANA news agency which censors content. Further, legislation passed by the government allows the authorities to prosecute journalists for “spreading false news online that damages the prestige of the nation” and other laws such as “The 1965 law of protection against the revolution, the 2012 terrorism law” threaten freedom of expression. [[23]](#footnote-23) A total of 717 journalists have been killed throughout the course of the Syrian war, whether by opposing parties or controlling forces like the authorities. [[24]](#footnote-24)The Syrian government has not expressed any interest to change its current laws in regards to freedom of speech and thus, would also not be interested in adhering to any international agreements and would like the discussion to focus on a nation’s right to security and safety during an armed conflict, which may be disturbed by journalists.

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3. “Appendix I: Protection of Journalists in War Zones” 4 November 2024 <https://safety.rsf.org/appendix-i-protection-of-journalists-in-war-zones/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war” 4 November 2024 <https://cpj.org/2024/11/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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8. “Article 79 - Measures of protection for journalists” 5 November 2024 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-79> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity “12 November 2024 <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action?hub=687> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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12. “EU Statement – UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting: Protection of Journalists” 5 November 2024 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-–-un-security-council-arria-formula-meeting-protection-journalists\_en?s=63](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-security-council-arria-formula-meeting-protection-journalists_en?s=63) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “APPENDIX I: Protection of journalists in war zones” 5 November 2024 <https://safety.rsf.org/appendix-i-protection-of-journalists-in-war-zones/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “RSF calls for emergency UN Security Council meeting on Israeli violations of Resolution 2222 on protecting journalists” 5 November 2024 <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-calls-emergency-un-security-council-meeting-israeli-violations-resolution-2222-protecting> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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16. “Pressure, intimidation, and censorship: Israeli journalists have faced growing repression in the past year” 12 November 2024 <https://rsf.org/en/pressure-intimidation-and-censorship-israeli-journalists-have-faced-growing-repression-past-year> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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