Special Conference 2

Promoting the safety, freedom, and objectivity of journalism

MODEL UNITED NATIONS
THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

Daphne de Haas

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Student Officer:	Daphne de Haas
Position:	President

Introduction

Promoting the safety, freedom, and objectivity of journalism are interrelated goals that work in harmony to uphold the integrity and credibility of the press. When these aspects are effectively addressed and supported, they create an environment where journalism can thrive and fulfil its crucial role in the society. Mentioned below is how all these elements have their individual value to unite a progression to this conflict.

Ensuring safety for journalists is paramount for the practice of objective journalism. When journalists come amongst threats, violence, or harassment, their ability to report without fear or bias is compromised. By promoting safety measures, such as legal protections, training, and institutional support, journalists can operate freely and impartially, without external pressures or intimidation.

Press freedom is a cornerstone of objectivity journalism. Journalists must have the liberty to investigate, report, and express their opinions without censorship, restrictions, or undue influence. When journalists are free to pursue stories and share information without interference, they can provide objective and comprehensive coverage, fostering public trust and facilitating informed decision-making.

Objectivity in journalism refers to the commitment to fairness, balance, and impartiality in reporting. It involves presenting multiple perspectives, verifying facts, and avoiding personal biases. By verified professional standards and ethical guidelines, journalists can provide accurate and unbiased information to the public, enabling individuals to form their own opinions based on reliable sources.

Promoting safety and freedom contributes to the practice of objective journalism. When journalists feel safe and enjoy free press, they can report their stories without fear of reprisal or censorship. This fosters an environment where diverse voices and perspectives can be heard, facilitating a fuller understanding of complex issues. In addition, objective journalism increases safety and freedom.

Objective reporting builds public credibility and trust reduces likelihood of backlash or threats against journalists. When the public recognizes and respects the objectivity of journalists, they are more likely to support and advocate for their safety and freedom.

All in all, promoting safe, free, and objective journalism is a symbiotic relationship. Each aspect feeds and reinforces the other, creating an environment in which journalists can work free from threats and restrictions. This in turn improves the quality of information available to the public and promotes informed and engaged citizens.

Definition of Key Terms

Journalism

The activity to collect, evaluate, create and present news and information through varied media platforms.

Journalist

An individual that collects information, and reproduces it in forms of texts, audio, or pictures, which they design it into a news medium to disclose.

Freedom of Press / Freedom of Media

The right to publish and disseminate information, ideas, and opinions without restrictions or censorship. Such freedom can be expressed in forms of demonstrations, protests, art, television or radio, or published articles.

Safety of journalists

The ability for journalists to collect, construct and disseminate information without encountering physical or moral threats. Which is important to protect journalists from violation acts.

Independent media / Independent journalism

Independent media or independent journalism refer to all media that is free of influence by government or corporate interests. This enables the ability for journalists to share information that they want to share.

Digital harassment

Online attacks, harassment, or threats directed at journalists through social media platforms, email, or other digital channels. Such harassment can occur in acts of cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation. Digital harassment can have a significant impact on journalists' mental well-being and safety.

Exile

The forced displacement of journalists from their home countries due to threats, persecution, or violence. Journalists may seek asylum in other countries to ensure their safety and continue their work.

General Overview

Journalism can be seen as the main organ in the world, in which the society daily gets informed about every occurrence. It's a continuous production and distribution process of spreading on reports – interacting with events, knowledge, and people. The sharing of such information is made possible through the freedom of the press, also known as freedom of the media, it is an important principle emphasizing the vital importance of unrestricted communication and expression across a wide range of media. This encompasses printed and electronic media, placing significant emphasis on the unencumbered exercise of this right. This right was firstly adopted in the constitution of Sweden in 1766 as the Freedom of Press Act. And since 1948 the United Nations (UN) acknowledged and adopted the freedom of speech as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Since journalists have the right of speech by expressing their news in the media, the limits on speech and press are restricted to boundaries of violations, such as: fraud, child pornography, threats, and obscenity. To further clarify the freedom of speech in the media, it exists of freedom holding opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Although freedom of speech is a recognized human right protected by law, this freedom and the security that accompanies it is not always respected with the certainty in question – which means that despite the enactment in 1948, these rights are still being violated. These violations threat journalists by kidnapping, torture, arbitrary detention, disinformation campaigns and harassment, furthermore, do they face this as well online as physical.

The violence towards journalists is currently a major conflict on a global scale. According to an UNESCO document on crimes committed towards journalism's safety, from 2020-2021, there a total of 117 journalists killed. Of which many of these cruel events occurred in Asia and the Pacific, namely 45 journalists' lives were ended. Latin America and the Caribbean are the following countries with a major number of 38 killing acts. In Africa there were sixteen journalists killed and in the Arab states twelve. As well as in Central and Eastern Europe as in Western Europe and Africa there were three journalists killed. 78% of all these murders found place in the journalist's house or while travelling.

Peter R. de Vries was a Dutch crime reporter and investigative journalist that had inspected multiple major cases such as the disappearance of Natalee Holloway or the Nicky Verstappen-case. Though he did not hide from any dangerous acts or threats, he was shot in Amsterdam by a liquidation on July 5th while he was on his way to a television interview. This murder was planned, because he probably had helped the crown witness Nabil B. in the Marengo-process on Ridouan Taghi. Hereby you can see this as a crucial and evidential example of how impact having this conflict on journalism safety is on people's lives.

Another crucial event is the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. He was a Saudi Arabian journalist, columnist, and critic of the Saudi government. In October 2018 he was assassinated inside the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi drew significant international attention and condemnation due to its brazen nature, as well as the implications it had for press freedom and journalists' safety worldwide. The incident highlighted the risks faced by journalists, especially those who report on sensitive political issues or challenge powerful entities. The murder of Jamal Khashoggi underscored the need for greater protection of journalists and the importance of holding accountable those responsible for attacks on press freedom. It prompted calls for stronger international measures to safeguard journalists and ensure their safety while performing their crucial role in providing information and holding power to account.

Major Parties Involved

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is a department of the UN. The OHCHR is mandated to promote and protect the essential freedom of expression, including media freedom and further rights of journalists. They provide journalists in mainly two ways of international human rights mechanisms: one for advocacy purposes and the other one for protection purposes.

Advocacy purposes are implemented to advocate for the safety of journalists globally, but also particular countries, by meeting with Special Procedures mandate holders when they to country visits or sending contributions to inform their reports and recommendations, contributing to stakeholders' reports prepared by OHCHR before States' universal periodic review. But they can also make oral statements during the Human Rights Council (HRC) when the outcomes of the State reviews are considered, and the last way is by submitting information to Treaty Bodies and attending their sessions.

Protection purposes on the other hand are compliant mechanisms of the Special Procedures or Treaty Bodies, which has a defending position by maintaining documenting the violations and ensuring that the conflict gets acknowledged and followed up by national authorities.

Free Press Unlimited

Free Press Unlimited is a non-governmental organization that combats conflicts on journalism safety in over 50 countries worldwide. To accomplish her mission, she focuses on six different themes: safety of journalists, equity and inclusion, journalism and accountability, media viability, media, and conflict, and enabling environment. She raises awareness by regularly launching campaigns to draw attention to press freedom and independent journalism issues. There are many dossiers available, containing bundled information on journalism subjects. Because of her work a lot of information is gathered on such subjects related to reliable information, independent journalism, and freedom of the press. They aim to influence the state and political players to create an enabling environment for independent media.

Mexico

For years Mexico has remained to be the most dangerous and deadly country to attend for journalists. While the constitution guarantees free speech, the reality is governmental control of the media and the continued silencing of journalists through violence and self-censorship through intimidation. Censorship is enforced through threats or direct attacks on journalists, not through lawsuits, imprisonment, or orders to stop their activities. In Mexico, the Committee to Protect Journalists recorded the killing of a total of 13 journalists, the highest number of deaths in a single year. In three of the cases, journalists were murdered and threatened before their death for reporting on crime and politics.

Haiti

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press, but journalists face many obstacles in practice. Even when journalists report credible death threats to authorities, little action is taken beyond filing a complaint, and media workers do not benefit from protective measures. Further Haiti is the second most dangerous country for journalists to attend. In 2022 at least 9 journalists had been killed. Haiti is a dangerous place for journalists to work. For decades, the press has been alternately suppressed and divided. Journalists and news organizations from across the political spectrum face threats and violence always. During Duvalier's time, attempts to establish an independent press were thwarted.

When Aristide returned from exile in 1994, many journalists believed that a new era of independent reporting was at hand. While journalism has experienced explosive growth, it has become heavily politicized. Newspapers, radio stations and television stations joined the party and were targeted by gangs on both sides. Broadcast journalists are most at risk – with more than half of Haiti's population illiterate, radio is the most important medium, with some 250 stations broadcasting in Haiti. Studios and broadcasters were destroyed, and journalists were beaten and killed.

Timeline of Key Events

In the index mentioned below, you can view the date of the mentioned event on the left, and the description of the event on the right:

Date	Description of event
1766	Sweden being the first country to adopt the Freedom of Press Act into their constitution. With this they created the beginning of the adoption in other countries' constitutions.
1948	Freedom of Press is officially adopted by the UN. Which gave journalists the freedom to spread whatever reliable information they wanted to disseminate.
June 25th 1993	The OHCHR established the mandate on promotion and protection of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression.
2003	Disclosure of Jayson Blair creating and plagiarizing stories, drawing attention to journalistic ethics, issues of accuracy, and the importance of fact-checking and editorial control.
2010	The release of classified documents by WikiLeaks, resulting in an uncertainty on the balance between journalism, national security, and the responsibility to protect sources.
2015	Attack on the French newspaper Charlie Hebdo, through which violence towards journalists was brought to global attention.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to development, October 9th, 2012, (A/HRC/RES/21/12)
- Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to development, October 2nd, 2014, (A/HRC/RES/27/5)
- October 6th, 2016 (A/HRC/RES/33/2)
- October 5th, 2018, (A/HRC/RES/39/6)
- October 12th, 2020, (A/HRC/RES/45/18)
- The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, February 21st, 2014, (A/RES/68/163)
- July 2021, (A/HRC/47/L.22)
- October 2021, (A/HRC/RES/48/4)
- The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, February 11th, 2015, (A/RES/69/185)
- The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, February 10th, 2016, (A/RES/70/162)
- The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, January 29th, 2018, (A/RES/72/175)
- Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom, January 23th, 2020, (A/RES/74/157)
- December 23th, 2006, Security Council (S/RES/1738)
- May 27th, 2015, Security Council (S/RES/2222)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists and Impunity is the result of a process launched in 2010 at the request of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC). It was approved by the UN Board of Directors on April 12th, 2012, and afterwards immediately welcomed in the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UNESCO resolutions. The UN Plan of Action aims to foster a free and safe environment for journalists and media professionals in conflict and non-conflict situations to strengthen peace, democracy, and development around the globe. The plan includes measures such as establishing inter-agency mechanisms to strengthen the contributions of each UN actor and improve coherence across the UN; working with countries to develop legal and other mechanisms to protect freedom of expression and information and the safety of journalists; building partnerships relations, awareness-raising, and advocacy initiatives.

Several international mechanisms have been established to protect journalists and promote their safety. One notable initiative is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) program o/n the safety and impunity of journalists. The program aims to improve the safety of journalists around the world by raising awareness, developing policy, and implementing measures to prevent attacks on journalists. It also seeks to combat impunity for crimes against journalists by monitoring, reporting, and promoting legal frameworks that ensure accountability.

Various organizations and legal initiatives have been formed to advocate for press freedom, protect the rights of journalists and challenge restrictions on free speech. For example, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to advocating and defending press freedom worldwide. They monitor and document abuses against journalists, provide support and assistance to journalists at risk, and engage in advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of press freedom issues. In addition, legal organizations, and initiatives such as the Media Legal Defence Initiative (MLDI) provide legal support and representation to journalists facing legal challenges or persecution because of their work.

Possible Solutions

Development of Safety Support Networks

To promote the safety of journalists, a solution could involve the development of safety support networks within media organizations. These networks would consist of dedicated safety officers or teams responsible for assessing and mitigating risks faced by journalists. They would work closely with journalists, providing them with safety training, access to appropriate safety equipment, and guidance on risk assessment and situational awareness. Safety Support Networks would also establish protocols for responding to threats and emergencies, ensuring that journalists have immediate support and resources when facing dangerous situations. By institutionalizing safety measures within media organizations, this solution aims to create a culture of safety, empower journalists to make informed decisions, and enhance their protection in challenging environments.

Establishing an International Task Force

A solution to address violence towards journalists is the establishment of an International Task Force dedicated to protecting journalists' safety. This task force would consist of representatives from governments, media organizations, human rights organizations, and international bodies. Its primary purpose would be to coordinate efforts, share intelligence, and collaborate on preventive measures and swift responses to attacks on journalists. The task force could facilitate the creation of an early warning system to identify high-risk areas, provide training on safety protocols and self-defence, and work towards ensuring effective investigations and prosecutions of those who commit violence against journalists. By promoting international cooperation and collective action, this solution aims to enhance the safety of journalists worldwide and send a strong message that violence against journalists will not be tolerated.

Blockchain for Transparency and Accountability

Blockchain technology can be utilized to enhance transparency and accountability in journalism. By leveraging the decentralized and immutable nature of blockchain, news organizations can maintain transparent records of their reporting processes, including information about sources, edits, and corrections. This can help build trust with the audience, demonstrate the integrity of journalistic work, and provide a mechanism for fact-checking and verifying information.

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Appendices

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II. Resolutions: https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/resolutions