

Opinion

# Stop crimes against journalists

29 OCT 2014 18:40 | IRINA BOKOVA

Recommend 62 Tweet 18 Share 2 Reprint this

**& ORIGINAL** The role of journalists in disseminating information is vital in turbulent times and it's imperative their safety is assured, writes Irina Bokova.



In turbulent times, freedom of expression becomes more important than ever, providing citizens with the information they need to make decisions about their lives and their societies.

For this we rely on the news media, together with social media producers who practice journalism. But their safety is not guaranteed – they face threats, harassment, violence and even death.

One journalist is killed on average every week and while fatalities include foreign correspondents, the vast majority of victims are local, covering local stories.

Worse, the majority of these crimes against journalism take place in a climate of impunity. This allows perpetrators to continue attacks without restraint, which can cripple the free flow of information.

Impunity is poisonous. It leads to self-censorship for fear of reprisal, depriving society of important sources of information.

Unesco data shows that less than 6% of the 593 journalist murders between 2006 and 2013 have been solved. A quarter of the cases are considered “ongoing”.

At the same time, we have received no information from member states for more than 60% of the killings that I have condemned in public statements.

This cannot go on. I wish to encourage all governments to show their commitment to justice in these cases by responding to requests to voluntarily report on judicial follow-up.

Civil society, a key partner in the struggle for the free flow of words, images and ideas, is increasingly mobilised, running important awareness raising campaigns, producing in-depth reports and safety training.

The United Nations (UN) is sharpening its action, bringing all stakeholders to the table and pushing for progress. This is the aim of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, spearheaded by Unesco, which draws in UN agencies, governments, the international community and civil society. There have been significant steps forward in countries such as Pakistan, Nepal, South Sudan and Tunisia on this basis.

We must also shine a stronger light at a global level on the threat of impunity.

That is the objective of the UN's International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, celebrated for the first time on November 2 this year.

This date marks the first anniversary of the assassination of French journalists Gislaïne Dupont and Claude Verlon. We must make every use of this new platform to advance the cause of bringing perpetrators to justice.

I am convinced we can do more though, by encouraging governments to create dedicated investigation units for crimes against journalists and human rights defenders for instance, or by strengthening special prosecution offices and bolstering preventive as well as protection measures.

Every journalist killed is a voice lost. It is a day without news, a day when freedom of expression is undermined and basic human rights are violated. The climate of fear created by impunity throws a shadow over the sustainable development of entire societies.

This is why we must all stand up on November 2. To ensure every journalist can do their job safely. To protect human rights and dignity. To strengthen the rule of law and democracy.

As the world shapes a new global sustainable development agenda, this has never been so important.

*Irina Bokova is the director general of Unesco.*

post a comment email this article print this article login to clip

**CONNECT**

Twitter Facebook RSS YouTube Instagram Google+

Download on the App Store Available at Amazon

ANDROID APP ON Google play PRINT EDITION

**SUBSCRIBE ONLINE:**

Paper Edition iPad Edition Kindle Edition Online Edition

Get the M&G in your inbox daily

Email address SUBSCRIBE

**M&G** Mail & Guardian Like 270,210

**MORE FROM THE M&G**

**Parliament to probe Shivambu's middle finger**

**Eskom: Majuba coal silo collapse has 'significant consequences'**