



UN PLAN OF ACTION ON THE  
**SAFETY OF**  
**JOURNALISTS**  
AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY AND IMPUNITY:

# A UN PRIORITY



# INTRODUCTION

The safety of journalists and media workers is of great concern to each and every one of us. It is a prerequisite for preserving the fundamental right to freedom of expression for all – the right to seek, receive, and impart information. Information is the lifeblood of an inclusive and democratic society and without it, no one is able to make any knowledgeable decision about the issues which affect him or her.

The scale and number of attacks on the media around the world - a vast majority of which committed with impunity - have contributed to the high level of personal risk that journalists and media workers face in carrying out their job. As the ultimate form of censorship, every five days a journalist is killed for bringing information to the public.

The killing of a person for their journalism not only brutally eliminates that person's right to freedom of expression – it also puts a symbolic gag around the same right for every citizen. Attacks such as online threats and harassment, especially of women journalists, intimidate everyone and interfere with the free flow of information. A silenced journalist mutes the voices of the people and curbs their right to know. The result is a society where fearful citizens resort to self-censorship and where it is not possible to make informed decisions.

The widespread climate of impunity fuels a vicious cycle of violence, bolstering those who aim to silence public debate and block sensitive information. In response, the United Nations has worked with media, NGOs, academia and governments to develop the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UN Plan). The rule of law and justice for journalists are crucial in safeguarding freedom of expression and freedom of information, and contribute to the achievement of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

**EVERY FIVE DAYS**

**A JOURNALIST IS KILLED**

**FOR BRINGING**

**INFORMATION TO**

**THE PUBLIC**

A PLAN FOR A

# FREE AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

FOR JOURNALISTS



# WHAT IS THE UN PLAN OF ACTION?

The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is a systematic UN-wide plan to work toward a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, including social media producers of public interest journalism, with a view to strengthen peace, democracy, and development worldwide. It covers both conflict and non-conflict situations.

**GIVEN THE LENGTH AND  
BREADTH OF THESE ISSUES,  
NO ACTOR IS ABLE  
TO RESOLVE THEM  
SINGLEHANDEDLY**

Spearheaded by the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and endorsed in 2012 by the UN Chief Executives Board, the highest level coordinator mechanisms of the UN system, the UN Plan provides an overarching framework for co-operation between all relevant stakeholders, including UN bodies, national authorities, media actors, and national, regional, and international organizations.

Given the length and breadth of the challenges, no actor is able to resolve them singlehandedly. Combined efforts are needed to create a safe and enabling environment for journalists both online and offline, and also to combat impunity for crimes against them.

The UN Plan and Implementation Strategy propose principles for cooperation and possible practical actions. Great strides have been made in an unprecedented flurry of resolutions of different UN bodies. This momentum needs to be maintained. Similarly, at country level, the UN Plan encourages the setting up of mechanisms for the prevention and punishment of attacks on journalists, and for their protection in the face of threats.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow turtleneck scarf and a black leather jacket, looks off to the side with a serious expression. In the foreground, a microphone with a yellow foam cover is held up towards her. The background shows a busy outdoor setting with a green metal fence, a white van, and other people.

HOW DOES

# THE UN PLAN WORK?

As the UN agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom, UNESCO actively promotes the safety of journalists and those who produce journalism.

Taking a lead in developing and implementing the UN Plan, UNESCO is working closely together with other stakeholders to strengthen the protection of journalists through various key approaches.

**AWARENESS  
RAISING**

**STANDARD  
SETTING  
& POLICY  
MAKING**

**MONITORING  
& REPORTING**

**CAPACITY  
BUILDING**

**ACADEMIC  
RESEARCH**

**COALITION  
BUILDING**

# AWARENESS RAISING



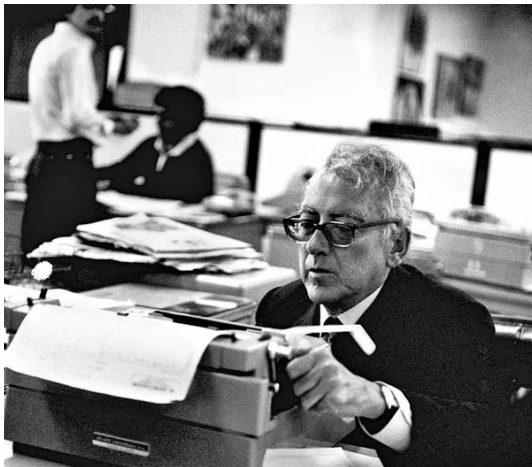
## A GLOBAL PROBLEM CALLS FOR GLOBAL ATTENTION

*Efforts to sensitize the public as well as relevant stakeholders to the societal importance of professional journalism is key in the achievement of the UN Plan.*



## INTERNATIONAL DAYS

World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November and the International Day for Universal Access to Information on 28 September bring together all parties and serve to highlight the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity worldwide.



## UNESCO GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

Ms Christiane Amanpour, Chief International Correspondent of CNN, is the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Freedom of Expression and Journalist Safety.



## UNESCO/GUILLERMO CANO WORLD PRESS FREEDOM PRIZE

The annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize is awarded on 3 May and honours a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the promotion of press freedom.



Photo: ©UN Photo/Rick Bajorna

## NEWSLETTER

The bimonthly UNESCO newsletter on the UN Plan provides an up-to-date snapshot of the global situation of safety of journalists and shares valuable information.



# STANDARD SETTING & POLICY MAKING

## GLOBAL GOALS AND STANDARDS

*Global standard setting provides a baseline on which regional and national policies can be established and draws international attention to the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.*

## LANDMARK RESOLUTIONS

Landmark resolutions have been adopted across the UN system, including the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and the UN Human Rights Council which demonstrate the growing concern of the international community.



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Photo: ©Adrian Grycuk/ CC BY-SA 3.0 pl

## REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Regional organizations including the African Union, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization of American States have established specific mechanisms tasked with promoting and protecting the right to freedom of expression with the safety of journalists as a core issue.

## GROWING RECOGNITION

The inclusion of the UN Plan in the Declaration of the Council of Europe (April 2014) and in the Guidelines published by the European Union in May 2014 is an example that reflects the growing recognition of the importance of addressing these issues more prominently.



# MONITORING & REPORTING

## RESEARCH IS THE FIRST STEP

*Journalists and media workers are under siege worldwide. Research on the global situation of press freedom and journalists' safety is the first step into addressing these issues. The UN Plan encourages this through a range of mechanisms and publications.*

## UNESCO's Director-General Report

The UNESCO Director-General (DG) publicly condemns each confirmed killing of a journalist. Concerned governments are requested to ensure judicial inquiry and to inform the DG, on a voluntary basis, of the status of the case(s). The DG analyzes this information in a biennial report, that includes information on the condemnations of journalist killings since 2006 and is presented to the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC. Less than one out of ten cases of killed journalists are considered resolved, perpetuating the cycle of violence against the media.



## Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSIs)

Developed by UNESCO's IPDC, the JSIs are a mapping tool that evaluate the extent to which journalists' safety is guaranteed within a country and serve as a baseline against which changes related to the UN Plan can be assessed. JSIs have been launched in Pakistan, Honduras, Guatemala, Nepal, Iraq, and Kenya.



## World Trends on Freedom of Expression and Media Development

A biennial publication that reviews safety of journalists within the wider context of developments in the media landscape. Furthermore, the UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom delve deeper into the issues of the online landscape.



## UNESCO's Academic Research Agenda

Continued academic research is being encouraged through UNESCO's Academic Research Agenda on Safety of Journalists.

## From theory to practice

Many other bodies produce important research on safety and impunity, which is used for awareness-raising, campaigning, training, and reform of laws and institutions. Examples are the Universal Periodic Review and the various UN Secretary-General's Reports about these issues.

# CAPACITY BUILDING



## CHANGE STARTS LOCALLY

*Local stakeholders are the enablers of tangible positive change in the field. Through capacity building initiatives their role is reinforced significantly.*

## NATIONAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS

The development and implementation of nationally owned protection mechanisms for preventing attacks against journalists and combating impunity ensures a concrete focus on these issues from local legal actors. Initiatives include special investigative units, independent commissions, special prosecutors as well as mechanisms to gather information and provide rapid response. Implementation is taking place in countries such as Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Mexico, Pakistan, Serbia and South Sudan.



Photo: @Supreme Court of Justice of Paraguay



Photo: @Léo Mattei

## DIALOGUE WITH COMMUNITIES

Along with partners, UNESCO strengthens local capacity through the implementation of concrete projects to foster dialogue between key authorities and media professionals.

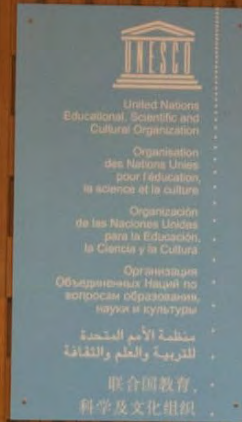
## TRAININGS

Capacity building initiatives include trainings of journalists, media owners, security forces, and the judiciary on the issues of safety of journalists and impunity. Each stakeholder is brought into the fold to address these widespread issues.



Photo: @Sebastien Rieussec

# COALITION BUILDING



## A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE

*The widespread nature of impunity requires all stakeholders to push for universal safety of journalists and media workers. Building new coalitions while strengthening existing ones is therefore central to the UN Plan.*



## LOCAL OWNERSHIP

While there is a role for international bodies, the UN Plan recognises the paramount need to build national coalitions and mechanisms, with local ownership, capacity, and sustainability.



Photo: ©Nadia Abdullah

## UN SYSTEM

The UN Plan encourages systematic linkages between each UN actor involved, thereby enhancing UN-wide coherence.



Photo: ©UNESCO/Mehdi Benchelah

## MEMBER STATES

Cooperation with Member States is key to develop legislation and other mechanisms to guarantee a safe media environment.



Photo: ©UNESCO/Michelle Salomons

## MEDIA

Partnerships are the foundation of capacity building initiatives and the implementation of local projects (e.g. international NGOs as well as partners at grassroots level).

## Sharing best practices

UNESCO co-organises events to share good practices and strengthen cooperation between the media industry, professional associations, civil society, international organisations, and Member States.



A multi-stakeholder partnership:  
**UNIVERSALITY IS KEY**



# WHICH ACTORS ARE INVOLVED IN THE UN PLAN?

**MEDIA (JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA OWNERS)** are key actors in providing safety for journalists and tackling impunity at the grassroots level.

**CIVIL SOCIETY** is an important partner when it comes to implementing the UN Plan and supporting capacity building initiatives.

**ACADEMIA** contribute significantly towards an increased understanding of the complex topic of journalists' safety and assist in creating safer working conditions for journalists through in-depth research and the tutoring of future media professionals.

**STATE INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL ACTORS** such as the national judiciary, security forces, and governments play a key role in adopting and enforcing local measures to protect journalists. Trainings to combat impunity and to enhance the relationship with the media are given priority.

**UN AGENCIES** have increasingly recognized the issue of the safety of journalists and the ending of impunity. In line with the UN initiative 'delivering as one', UNESCO works towards improved coordination with other UN bodies in a multitude of ways and areas to promote the safety of journalists.

**INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS** engaged with the UN Plan underpin its implementation through the adoption of measures and declarations, fortifying the global norms and standards. Furthermore, they provide assistance in capacity building initiatives.

# 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

# WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and its target 10, the recognition of the role of free expression and information as prerequisites and enablers for development and all human rights was boosted further.

## SDG 16 TARGET 10 IS A CONDITION SINE QUA NON FOR THE RULE OF LAW AND THE END OF IMPUNITY

SDG 16.10 is a condition sine qua non for the rule of law and the end of impunity. One of the indicators that has been decided upon by the United Nations Statistical Commission for tracking progress in the achievement of target 10 relates to the number of verified cases of killings, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists and associated media personnel.

SDG 16 target 10 is a significant step towards mainstreaming safety of journalists in the international development agenda, and the implementation of the UN Plan is the way forward to achieve this target.

SDG 16 target 10 includes public access to information and fundamental freedoms as indispensable conditions to sustainable development for the next fifteen years. SDG 16 target 10 reads: "Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements."

"Public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms are prerequisites for all Sustainable Development Goals, but to fulfill SDG 16, we must protect and ensure a safe and free environment for journalists."

*Frank La Rue, UNESCO  
Assistant Director - General  
for Communication and  
Information*

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Whenever a journalist is killed,

society loses another voice and freedom of expression is

brutally attacked. A society imposing self-censorship comes closer with each killing, threat and attack. The issues of journalists' safety and impunity affect us all. Become part of the global initiative by **sharing** and promoting the UN Plan, **subscribe** to the UN Plan newsletter, **contribute** to research via the JSIs, and **follow** UNESCO's efforts in fostering a safe and enabling media environment worldwide!

**#Journosafe**

**#EndImpunity**

# FAQ

## 1. WHAT IS THE UN PLAN OF ACTION?

The UN Plan is a UN-endorsed framework for multi-stakeholder co-operation to ensure a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers in both conflict and non-conflict situations.

## 2. WHY IS THE UN PLAN NEEDED?

Every five days a journalist is killed in pursuit of a story. The safety of journalists is an important prerequisite for achieving freedom of expression, democracy, and social development. A silenced journalist mutes the voice of the people and curbs their right to know.

## 3. HOW CAN THE UN PLAN BE USED TO ADDRESS THREATS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO JOURNALISM?

The UN Plan promotes the safety of journalists through a wide range of actions including standard-setting, policy-making, monitoring, reporting, building capacity and awareness-raising on all levels. The UN Plan takes an inclusive view, seeking to protect the spectrum of professional journalists, media workers, and people who use social media to do journalism.

## 4. WHICH ACTORS ARE INVOLVED IN THE UN PLAN?

The UN Plan follows a multi-stakeholder approach to address threats against journalists. It aims to develop shared solutions and draws the wider UN system into a coordinated programme to stop the killing of journalists and threats made against them. It does so through cooperation between governments, media, academia, civil society, UN agencies, and international organisations.

## 5. WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

The UN Plan recognises the importance of a holistic approach and political will in securing media safety. Increased cooperation in awareness-raising, legal and institutional reform, capacity-building, and cementing the norm that journalism should be protected is crucial in fostering a safe and enabling media environment worldwide. Freedom of expression and freedom of information are essential in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



**#JournoSafe**  
**#EndImpunity**

**More info, visit:**

[en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists](https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists)

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