

IFEX Presentation to IPDC Council – November 17, 2016

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Excellencies,
Honorable délégués,
Madame la Présidente du Conseil du PIDC,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Merci beaucoup au PIDC de me donner l'occasion de discuter d'une question cruciale pour le futur de notre société :

La fin de l'impunité des crimes commis contre les journalistes.

As we have seen the UNESCO Director-General's report on the Safety of journalists and the Danger of Impunity has helped draw much needed attention to the issue of impunity.

25 years ago UNESCO was at the table supporting a small group of NGOs committed to freedom of expression that saw value in collaboration and working together, sharing ideas and strategies. Today that group is IFEX - a global network of over 100 member organisations promoting and defending freedom of expression and access to information.

FOR over 90% of our members, confronting the spectrum of impunity is and has been their work, their main priority for many years -seeking justice in cases of harassment, surveillance online and offline, physical attacks and the murder of journalists, media workers and social media producers. Working on impunity uses the lion's share of the often-scarce- human and financial resources available to these NGOs which is difficult but still it is important work that needs to continue.

We gather the grim statistics of increased violence against journalists and know the effect it has on the community. However, in our work we see the people not just the numbers. We know their names and their circumstances. According to the DG's Report the number of those killed in the last 10 years is 827 and that number is staggering. We need to see the number of victims decrease by increasing the will to address the violations and seek justice for the victims.

Wherever the media is allowed to be vilified and attacked in a society it is a threat to the public interest as a whole. Wherever crimes against journalists and media (online and offline) are tolerated, in fact in many cases ignored...the violence becomes normalised and that violence is seen as just another risk of the job. This isn't right. Journalists have traditionally received safety training to cover

wars and now it seems the conflict zone can be anywhere. This isn't right. We all know shutting down the voices of journalists diminishes the public's right to be informed.

I was invited here today as a member of a dynamic and engaged network of organisations called IFEX working on many levels combatting impunity. We are dedicated to promoting mechanisms that identify the problem, create a safe environment for journalists and hold those responsible for violations accountable.

It was the IPDC Council that made possible the report of the Director-General and also the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This is a clear statement acknowledging the problem of impunity and the role of states in addressing it. However, despite these developments, attacks on journalists are not decreasing.

It is time to move from acknowledgement to actions. And I would like to make some proposals to this end for us to consider.

First of all, the report of the UNESCO Director General has become a global reference. The information that it provides is very relevant for those, like, the IFEX membership, to use in their campaigns and analysis of the issue. The report has put numbers to the issue of impunity, allowing for data-driven arguments to be incorporated into the overall conversation and serve as a baseline in evaluating how we are doing in combatting the issue. It helps to know the full scope of a problem in order to solve it.

Hearing about the increase in responses to the DG's report by UNESCO's Member States on the judicial inquiries into the killing of journalists certainly gives us reason for some optimism.

Sixty-two percent of countries have responded, almost double that of the last report, and notable as it also represents an increase of political will by States, which is the important first step.

However, we cannot be complacent and efforts need to be made to ensure the thirty-eight percent of the countries in the world that have not provided information do so by the next report.

- The IFEX network will keep impunity as a priority and continue as one part of our ongoing campaign work to increase and maintain the engagement of member states in reporting on the state of impunity in their context.
- We should also focus on deepening the content of the responses. Two years ago, the IPDC Decision on The Safety of Journalists and the Danger of impunity invited States to make their responses public. To date about half have done so. Making this information more transparent will contribute to a

truer picture of impunity so we are not only able to monitor but also to support States in exploring and developing more efficient reporting mechanisms.

- We also invite UNESCO to focus on one of the aspects of the report that has been less developed which is to encourage countries to report on actions taken to prevent impunity. While the report lends itself to presenting the reality of impunity it is also a space where advances in relevant, practical and lasting measures to combat impunity can also be shared...and in fact, inform countries already creating mechanisms to address impunity.

The Director-General's report is one of the tools within the UN to measure the level of commitment by States on journalists' safety, but not the only one.

Within the UN, there is also the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity approved in 2012, thanks to this Council, which facilitated the process.

Led by UNESCO, it has now been implemented for four years. Based on this experience there is now a framework States can benefit from to help compliment their reporting on the issue and we encourage you to use it.

As for IFEX and the many groups and organisations working on disassembling the culture of impunity - using the DG's Report helps to situate where to focus our efforts, establish which states work on addressing impunity and which states need to be targeted to increase their response rate. We want to ensure there is not only commitment to reporting on impunity but to changing it.

The creation of the International Day to End Impunity on Crimes Against Journalists, supported by the UN member states and a focus point for IFEX member campaigns, is yet another space for civil society and States to engage in work raising awareness on myriad issues relating to the issue of impunity and the important role journalists play in contributing to the public interest.

In regards to commitments, at IFEX we know that it is crucial to talk about one of the most promising agreements we have recently made: The Sustainable Development Goals.

As you know, every country has committed to "ensuring public access to information" and protecting "fundamental freedoms". So we see that using the DG's report is key - as a vehicle to measure the advancement of the SDG 16:10.

Finally, it is the role of the government is to protect everyone... and this includes journalists. Silence is not an option...silence is the pernicious accomplice of impunity. Not addressing, condemning or creating mechanisms to provide for the safety of journalists or ensuring accountability for those responsible for crimes

against journalists make us all complicit. We need to be committed to continue to use everything in our capacity and work together to stop impunity.