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Agenda item for discussion IPDC's Reporting Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists and Issues of Impunity

INFORMATION NOTE

SUMMARY CONTENT OF DOCUMENT

This document presents an update on the activities undertaken within the framework of the IPDC to monitor and report on the safety of journalists, with a special focus on the killings of journalists condemned by UNESCO's Director-General and on the judicial inquiries carried out on each of these killings.

Reinforcing IPDC's Reporting Mechanism on the Safety of Journalists and Issue of Impunity

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1. BACKGROUND

In 2008, the IPDC intergovernmental Council adopted a Decision on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which gives IPDC a lead role in monitoring follow-up actions on the killings condemned by UNESCO's Director-General. This decision urges Member States "to comply with the relevant obligations under international law to end impunity" and "to inform the Director-General of UNESCO, on a voluntary basis, of the actions taken to prevent the impunity of the perpetrators and to notify him[her] of the status of the judicial inquiries conducted on each of the killings condemned by UNESCO".

Since then, the IPDC Secretariat set up a monitoring mechanism by which Member States were requested to inform UNESCO on the judicial follow-up carried out on each of the killings condemned by the UNESCO Director-General on a biennial, and later annual, basis. Based on the information collected through this mechanism, the Director-General has every two years submitted to the IPDC Council a report on The Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity, which provides background information on UNESCO's work in this area as well as an update on the killings of journalists condemned by UNESCO since 2006 and on the status of the judicial inquiries into each of these killings.

Subsequent decisions were adopted by the IPDC Council in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014. The 2014 decision invites *inter alia* the Bureau of the IPDC Council to "continue to give priority to projects that further the

objectives of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”. It also encourages the Director-General and Member States to “continue their efforts in mobilizing additional extra-budgetary funding for this core area of competence of UNESCO” and urges Member States to “promote the safety of journalists by taking advantage of the knowledge, experiences and opportunities available through participation in the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity [...]”.

The UN Plan of Action, which was spearheaded by the IPDC Council and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in April 2012, is the first systematic mechanism with a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the issue of safety of journalists and impunity. Its implementation focuses on seven activity areas: research, awareness, coalitions, training, reforms, good practices, and reporting.

At its last Bureau meeting, the IPDC adopted the safety of journalists as priority focus area for the IPDC.

2. UPDATE

The last Report by the Director-General on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity was submitted to the IPDC Council at its 29th session in November 2014. A request for information on the status of the investigations carried out into the killings of journalists condemned by the Director-General between 2006 and 2015 was sent out to concerned Member States in February 2016, following a similar request sent out in February 2015. The information provided by the Member States will be used for the next DG Report to be presented at the 60th session of the IPDC Council in November 2016.

In 2014, 13 out of 59 countries responded to the formal request for information. In 2015, the response rate rose to 27 out of 57 countries, indicating a clear upward trend in the level of attention being given by Member States to IPDC’s monitoring and reporting mechanism on safety.

Against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this mechanism will become even more significant as a tool for monitoring progress of Target 16.10 which aims to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, particularly by promoting the safety of journalists as a key indicator of free, pluralistic and independent media.

3. CONCLUSION

The significant increase in 2015 in the response rate by Member States to the Director-General’s request for information should be welcomed as a positive development. The IPDC will ensure close follow-up with Member States with a view to maintaining this upward trend. It will also explore possibilities to further strengthen IPDC’s reporting mechanism on the safety of journalists and ensure that the protection of media professionals features prominently amongst IPDC’s activities in a strategic and programmatic response to the 2030 Agenda.

4. BUREAU ACTION

The Bureau, having discussed this document, may wish to:

- Request the Secretariat to promote more actively the uniqueness of IPDC’s reporting mechanism on safety of journalists and impunity issues and improve the IPDC branding of this important initiative. *(See Information Note on IPDC fundraising and communication)*
- As a follow-up to the International Conference *News Organizations standing up for the safety of media professionals*, request the Secretariat to strengthen IPDC’s monitoring and reporting mechanism on the safety of journalists and impunity issues, by preparing and submitting proposals to donors that focus on the development of new dimensions for the mechanism, such as providing capacity-building opportunities to Member States to improve their national monitoring systems. This follow-up could include making a special financial allocation of US\$ 20,000 to allow the formulation and launching of a

pilot project in a selected country. (See *Information Note on IPDC Follow-up on IPDC-related conferences*)

- Consider as a possible topic for the 2017 Annual Thematic Allocation (see *Decision in 'IPDC future focus areas, priorities and project assessment criteria' Information Note*) innovative projects promoting the safety of journalists in view of reinforcing IPDC's role as a vehicle for sharing international experiences and good practices from different parts of the world – such as protection systems for journalists, training of trainers, and support for journalists suffering from trauma.