

Concept Note

“Countering threats of violence and crimes against journalists to protect freedom of expression for all”

on the occasion of the

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

2 November 2021

Ending impunity for crimes against journalists is one of the most pressing issues to guarantee freedom of expression and access to information for all citizens. Between 2006 and 2020, over 1,200 journalists have been killed around the world, with close to 9 out of 10 cases of these killings remaining judicially unresolved, according to the [UNESCO observatory of killed journalists](#). This cycle of violence against journalists is often an indicator of the weakening of the rule of law and of the judicial system.

While killings are the most extreme form of media censorship, journalists are also subjected to countless threats - ranging from kidnapping, torture and other physical attacks to harassment, particularly in the digital sphere. Threats of violence and attacks against journalists in particular create a climate of fear for media professionals, impeding the free circulation of information, opinions and ideas for all citizens.

In many cases, threats of violence and attacks against journalists are not properly investigated which, too often, lead to more severe aggressions and murders. A recent [study](#) developed with the support of the Global Media Defence Fund showed that out of the 139 murders of media professionals in Latin America, half of them had received threats related to their work. It is therefore essential to strengthen the investigations and prosecutions of threats of violence against journalists in order to prevent crimes against them. In addition, justice systems that vigorously investigate all threats of violence against journalists send a powerful message that society will not tolerate attacks against journalists and against the right to freedom of expression for all. To that effect, a greater understanding of the threats of violence and attacks faced by journalists will assist in improving the quality of prevention and protection policies for media workers and journalists. In this regard, the strengthening of national protection mechanisms for journalists is essential to address this issue.

Women journalists are particularly impacted by threats and attacks, notably by those made online. According to UNESCO's recent discussion paper, [The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists](#), 73 percent of the women journalists surveyed said they had been threatened, intimidated and insulted online in connection with their work.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution [A/RES/68/163](#) at its 68th session in 2013, which proclaimed the 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI). Since then, global commemorations of IDEI serve as a unique opportunity to raise

awareness and promote a dialogue between all actors involved in combatting impunity for crimes against journalists. Such actors, including UN agencies, regional bodies, Member States, members of the judiciary, civil society and the media, play a vital role to ensure accountability and bring to justice perpetrators of crimes against journalists and media workers. In addition, the increasing commitment from the international community to tackle this issue of impunity was all the more evidenced by the final [Declaration](#) of the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, that recognized the specificity of threats faced by journalists. In particular, the declaration called for action by Member States to “Investigate, prosecute and punish threats and acts of violence, falling within their jurisdiction, committed against journalists and media workers, (...) with a view to ending impunity for crimes committed against them”.

The 2021 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists will highlight the instrumental role of prosecutorial services, in investigating and prosecuting not only killings but also threats of violence against journalists. A high-level roundtable will feature representatives from State prosecutorial services, journalists and legal experts. The event will provide a platform for dialogue among prosecutors and journalists on prevention and protection measures to address the safety of journalists. The aspect of addressing online and gender-based threats against women journalists will be integrated in the discussion.

The discussions will notably be informed by the [Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists](#), jointly published by UNESCO and the International Association of Prosecutors, which are now available in 16 languages. Further, the Safety Chapter of the [World Trends Report](#) will be published on the occasion of IDEI, including the most recent UNESCO data on killings and impunity as well as an overview of global trends in the field of safety of journalists.

In alignment with the recommendations of the [Windhoek +30 Declaration](#), adopted at the culmination of the 2021 World Press Freedom Day, the 2021 IDEI event will contribute towards the safety and independence of journalists to further enable the nurturing of media viability. In addition, the role of investigative journalism in uncovering these threats, informing prosecutors of their findings, as well as keeping them accountable will be discussed. Notably, innovative techniques of conducting investigations, particularly using the resources of data journalism, will be shared.

To further raise global awareness on the threats and dangers faced by journalists, and the issue of impunity, an online campaign will also be launched ahead of IDEI on various social media platforms.

The IDEI commemorations in 2021 will also pave the way for the 10-year anniversary of the [UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), that will be marked in IDEI 2022. Endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012, the UN Plan of Action aims to ensure a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, in both conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to foster peace, democracy and development worldwide. Within this framework, the primary objective of the IDEI 2021 agenda is to reinforce a multi-stakeholder response to strengthening the investigations and prosecutions of crimes and attacks against journalists, thereby guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom.

The main commemoration, as well as a number of national events and campaigns will be supported through the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP) along with other activities aimed at reinforcing partnerships and synergies and strengthening political commitment towards the creation of a safe environment for media workers.