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# GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND



# THE CURRENT STATE OF SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The number of assaulted or murdered journalists has steadily increased around the globe over the last decade. Between 2010 and 2020, UNESCO condemned the killing of over 950 journalists, while the trend of widespread impunity for the crimes committed against them persists: roughly nine out of 10 killings of journalists around the world remain unpunished.

The ability of journalists to report the news and bring verified information to the public is being hampered by a wide range of attacks and violations, including threats, harassment, economic pressures, abusive judicial prosecutions (e.g. SLAPPs), arbitrary detentions, and a lack of access to specialized and gender-sensitive legal assistance. The resulting self-censorship deprives society of information and has a lasting impact on press freedom.



**9** out of **10** murders committed against journalists remain unpunished

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# UNESCO AND THE UN PLAN OF ACTION

The **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** (“the UN Plan”) is a systematic and action-oriented UN-wide plan which aims toward the creation of a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers in both conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide.

Recognizing the importance of political will and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, the UN Plan promotes a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to enhancing the safety of journalists and to addressing the widespread climate of impunity for crimes committed against them.

As the specialized UN agency with the mandate to promote freedom of

expression and press freedom, **UNESCO** has taken a lead role in coordinating the development and implementation of the UN Plan. Working closely together with other key stakeholders, UNESCO seeks to strengthen the protection of journalists through six key approaches: 1) standard-setting and policy making; 2) awareness-raising; 3) monitoring and reporting; 4) capacity building; 5) academic research; and 6) coalition building.

The UN Plan has contributed to positioning safety of journalists and the issue of impunity on the international agenda, while encouraging states and other actors at the national, regional and international level to incorporate these issues within their respective strategies as well as to take concrete actions on the ground.

# MEDIA FREEDOM COALITION

The **Media Freedom Coalition** (“the Coalition”) is a partnership of countries who have agreed to work together to advocate for media freedom and the safety of journalists, as well as to raise the costs to those who harm journalists for doing their job.

Formed at the initiative of the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada, the launch of the Coalition was announced at the first Global Conference for Media Freedom (July 2019). The Coalition is composed of 49 governments (September 2021) who signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom, committing them to create a safer environment for journalism across the globe”.

Co-hosted by the UK and Canadian governments, the first edition of the Global Conference for Media Freedom was held in London on 10-11 July 2019, gathering over 1,000 participants from more than 100 countries. It is part of an international campaign to

shine a global spotlight on media freedom and the issue of safety of journalists (see Box 1). Canada and Botswana co-hosted the second Global Conference for Media Freedom on November 16, 2020.



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## GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR MEDIA FREEDOM

Conceived as a five-year program meant to deliver international action on media freedom and protection for journalists, the *Global Campaign for Media Freedom* aims to:

- a) Promote the need for stronger protection and safety of journalists, so that, over time, there is a reduction in the number of attacks on

journalists and state restrictions on freedom of media and expression are eased;

- b) Mobilize a global spotlight on media freedom and increase the costs to governments and others who are suppressing media freedom.

The campaign is led by two co-chairs on a rotation basis.

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## THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL OF LEGAL EXPERTS ON MEDIA FREEDOM

The *High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom* is an independent and international panel of lawyers established to support the Global Campaign on Media Freedom. Its goal is to provide specialist advice and recommendations for legal and other mechanisms that protect and encourage the functioning of a free media, as well as prevent and reverse abuses or violations of media freedom.

For these purposes, the Panel:

1. Proposes legal and other initiatives that can be taken by governments to ensure existing international obligations relating to media

freedom are enforced and advice on any new international commitments by governments that would help to prevent and reverse media abuses;

2. Disseminates elements for model legislation to promote and protect a vibrant free press;
3. Offers support to governments that want to strengthen legislation or legal mechanisms to improve media freedom; and
4. Adds value to inter-governmental efforts by reporting on means of raising the cost to those governments or others who target journalists for their work.

Source: High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom: Terms of Reference

# OBJECTIVES OF THE GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND

The **Global Media Defence Fund** (“the Fund”) is a UNESCO Multi-Partner Trust Fund/Programme developed with the goal of enhancing media protection and improving the access of journalists to specialized and gender-sensitive legal assistance. Administered by **UNESCO**, the Fund was established thanks to initial donations by the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada. This Fund is one of the outcomes of the *Global Campaign for Media Freedom*, and contributes to advancing the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

Established for an initial 5-year period, the Fund contributes to a free and safer environment for journalists to undertake their work through **four key approaches or outputs**:

1. **Fostering** international legal cooperation, as well as the sharing and implementation of good practices to promote the defense of journalists under attack;
2. **Reinforcing** the operationalization of national protection mechanisms and peer support networks to ensure journalists’ rapid access to specialized legal assistance, bolster their defense and enhance their safety, taking into account the gendered nature of threats against them;
3. **Supporting** investigative journalism that contributes to reduced impunity for crimes against journalists, and enhancing the safety of those conducting this line of work;
4. **Enhancing** structures for fostering strategic litigation in order to protect environments where the legal frameworks are conducive to an independent, free and pluralistic media ecosystem.

The Global Media Defence Fund is implemented in complementarity and/or synergy with other ongoing UNESCO initiatives (see Page 10), as well as with those led by other relevant stakeholders – such as regional intergovernmental organizations and specialized CSOs.

# IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

The Fund supports and seeks joint action between UNESCO and specialized implementation partners, including relevant civil society organizations, media associations, human rights defenders, rule of law initiatives and investigative journalism networks, among others.

Output 1: The Fund supports the work of the **International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)** and that of the **Media Freedom Coalition's Consultative Network (MFC-CN)** to enhance media freedom and the safety of journalists around the world.

Amongst other activities, the **IBAHRI** serves as the Secretariat to the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (see Box 2). It provides legal, technical and operational assistance, facilitating the Panel's advisory role and advocacy actions to strengthen protection of media freedom and journalists' access to legal assistance.

The Fund backs the efforts of MFC-CN, a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue created within the framework of the Media Freedom Coalition, to engage civil society, media and journalists' engagement in the promotion of media freedom worldwide.

Outputs 2, 3 and 4: UNESCO launches **annual or biannual competitive calls for proposals** open to specialized stakeholders wishing to undertake or upscale local, regional and/or global initiatives that enhance journalists' legal protection and their access to legal assistance, support investigative journalism that contributes to tackling impunity, and/or foster strategic litigation for the protection of free, pluralistic and independent media ecosystems. Implementation partners are selected on the basis of specific technical expertise, professional skills, staff resources, financial status, existing internal control procedures and management practices, and geographic coverage.







# CALL FOR PARTNERSHIPS

The first Call for Partnerships of the Fund was launched in April 2020 with the aim of financing local, regional and international projects seeking to bolster the legal protection of journalists and/or enhance media freedom through investigative journalism or strategic litigation. UNESCO received 110 partnership proposals from not-for-profit organizations, representing all regions of the world and targeting over 50 countries. The Organization is currently supporting the implementation of 41 projects selected out of the 2020 Call, a majority from the Global South and 17 of which are targeting Africa.

According to preliminary results, these projects are directly benefiting over:

- **1 700 journalists** • **170 lawyers** • **65 CSOs**
- **4 newspapers** • **30 prosecutors**

Some key deliverables include 850+ cases of legal assistance, 46 strategic litigation processes or interventions, and over 100 journalistic investigations on crimes against journalists – amongst many others.

The second Call for Partnerships of the Fund was launched in April 2021 and received over 140 proposals from candidates from all around the globe, maintaining the geographic coverage of the first Call. A majority of these proposals were submitted by national or grassroots organizations from the Global South, reaffirming the position of the GMDF as a funding source supporting not only global actors, but also organizations doing valuable work at a smaller scale. Support to projects selected out of this Call will be rolled out in the Fall-Spring of 2021/2022.

# COMPLEMENTARITIES AND SYNERGIES

The Global Media Defence Fund complements and synergizes with the UNESCO initiative with security forces and the judiciary to support their role in protecting and ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of expression, as well as with projects implemented under UNESCO's regular programme and with other extra-budgetary modalities supporting UNESCO's work on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity:

- **The Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP)**

The MDP supports activities to promote the adoption and application of relevant policies and normative frameworks to strengthen the environment for freedom of expression and press freedom, and to support sustainable and independent media institutions. The MDP also supports activities to facilitate pluralism and participation in media, promote gender equality in both media production and content, and empower citizens with increased media and information literacy competencies.

Link: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression/mdp/foesoj>

- **The International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)**

The IPDC is the only multilateral forum in the UN system designed to mobilize the international community to discuss and promote media development in developing countries. The Programme not only provides support for media projects but also seeks an accord to secure a healthy environment for the growth of free and pluralistic media in developing countries.

Link: <https://en.unesco.org/programme/ipdc>

- **Funds-In-Trust**

Funds-in-trust are extrabudgetary contributions received from governments, organizations – international, national or non-governmental – foundations, private companies or other sources for the purpose of enabling UNESCO to carry out, on their behalf or at their request, specific activities that are consistent with the aims and policies of the Organization.

Link: <https://en.unesco.org/partnerships/foe>



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# DONORS



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ZEALAND • SERBIA • SLOVAKIA • SWITZERLAND •  
UNITED KINGDOM

### CONTACT & INFORMATION

Visit our website for amounts and more information about the contributions:

<https://en.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund>

If you wish to pledge a contribution to support the GMDF, please contact:

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**#ProtectJournalists**  
**#EndImpunity**  
**#defendmediafreedom**

**Learn more about UNESCO's monitoring  
of cases of killing of journalists:**

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory>

**For more information, please visit:**

<https://en.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund>

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