

UNESCO

Study Guide

The Issue of Protecting the
Safety of Journalists



PREPMUN
2022



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UNESCO

Introductions



Welcome letter
Chair introductions
Council introduction



Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at PREPMUN 2022! As your chairs, we have the pleasure of facilitating discussion throughout this conference, and we are extremely excited to meet you all.

Our council will be focusing on the topic of Journalistic Safety, which has become an increasingly relevant topic in recent years due to the growing prevalence of the persecution of journalists synonymously with the rise of mass media through the internet. Delegates, on behalf of your country and delegation, will be discussing solutions that aim to resolve this issue. Do remember that you have to maintain your country's stance and interests over your own, regardless of how tempting it is to express your personal opinion.

During the course of the conference, we hope that you will all have an enjoyable and fulfilling experience during council sessions as you work together to uphold international security. We hope that this conference is a warm and inviting first introduction for you into the MUN scene, or an opportunity for you to get some more MUN experience. Beyond simply providing experience in debate, current affairs knowledge, and resolution-writing, this conference will provide you with a chance to collaborate with others with different perspectives and backgrounds, in a truly unique setting that only a MUN can offer. Should you encounter any issues, please email prep22.unesco@gmail.com.

Best regards,

Dais of UNESCO

Jamie Chen

Joanne Tan

Zhao Jiankai

Chair Introductions

Head Chair: Jamie Chen

Jamie is a Y5 student from ACS (Independent) constantly haunted by that nagging feeling that you've forgotten something. She enjoys a multitude of hobbies such as event photography, rock climbing, embroidery, and attempting to decipher abstract art. As she takes the most content-heavy subjects possible – History, Literature, and Biology – Jamie's already limited memory capacity is presently near its breaking point, and she welcomes any questions from delegates to distract her from the distressing reality.

Deputy Chair: Joanne Tan

Joanne is a Sec 4 student from NYGH who enjoys watching dramas in her free time. Though she tries not to be part of the 23 59 squad, procrastination has (unfortunately) been her best friend. (Maybe it would be better if she had 40 hours a day.) She looks forward to meeting delegates at PREPMUN 2022.

Deputy Chair: Zhao Jiankai

Jiankai is a Y5 student from RI who attends MUNs in an attempt to convince himself that taking History, Economics, Literature, and Mathematics was a useful choice to make. As PREPMUN was his first MUN ever, he is extremely glad to be back here at PREPMUN 2022 as a chair, and looks forward to an enriching and exciting conference with delegates.

Council Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was founded in 1945 as the successor to the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.¹ It is made up of 193 members and 11 associate members.

The Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO declares that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”² Through international collaboration and cooperation, the agency addresses aspects of soft power rather than military might, promoting the principles that the UN is united by. UNESCO's programmes also play an active role in contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.³

UNESCO focuses on the sectors of education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture and communication/information. Specifically, the mission of UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector is to improve the social conditions and human rights in nations. Past actions taken to support its cause include promoting freedom of expression, by supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information legislation through the International Programme for the Development of Communication.⁴

Whilst UNESCO is not a legally-binding organisation, it achieves its goals through soft law, including frameworks for actions, declarations and recommendations. These provide a normative framework which governments are expected to bring into effect through national legislation. While some have questioned the effectiveness of soft law in enacting constructive change due its non-binding nature, soft law is in fact increasingly being used by policymakers, with states increasingly finding soft law-making attractive because there are relatively fewer decision costs involved.⁵

UNESCO also partners with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which offer specialised knowledge and act as a platform for engagement with the populace. Currently, UNESCO enjoys

¹ News9 Staff, “UNESCO Formation Day: History, Mission and All You Need to Know,” NEWS9LIVE, November 16, 2021, <https://www.news9live.com/unesco-formation-day-history-mission-and-all-you-need-to-know>.

² UNESCO, “Non-Governmental Organizations,” UNESCO, June 25, 2013, <https://en.unesco.org/partnerships/non-governmental-organizations>.

³ “UNESCO Moving Forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development UNESCO Task Force on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/247785en.pdf>.

⁴ “International Programme for the Development of Communication.” <https://www.unesco.org/en/international-programme-development-communication>.

⁵ Guruparan, Kumaravadivel, and Jennifer Zerk. “Influence of Soft Law Grows in International Governance.” Chatham House, June 17, 2021. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/influence-soft-law-grows-international-governance>.

official affiliations with 401 NGOs. This enables them to act swiftly and effectively to tackle global issues that may be too complicated for UNESCO to address alone.



UNESCO

The Issue of Protecting the
Safety of Journalists



Topic Introduction

Article 1 of its Constitution requires UNESCO to “further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world.”⁶ To realise this purpose, UNESCO seeks to protect the safety of journalists, and in turn the freedom of expression, democracy and peace. The safety of journalists and the quintessential role they play in ensuring the right to access of information has been recognised in Sustainable Development Goal 16.

The safety of journalists is viewed as key to ensuring press freedom. A free media serves to keep the government accountable to the people by investigating and reporting on government wrongdoing. However, the freedom of expression is often curtailed, especially in countries under autocratic leadership, or in the midst of experiencing an armed conflict. On average, a journalist is killed every 5 days for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Journalists are threatened in both areas rife with conflict as well as non-conflict situations by both state actors and non-state parties – inclusive of syndicates, terrorists, and militia – causing domestic media professionals to face the highest risk.⁷

UNESCO spearheaded the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012. It aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. Examples of measures that were taken include setting up an inter-agency mechanism to handle issues related to the safety of journalists and assisting countries in developing legislation and mechanisms favourable to the freedom of expression and information.⁸

However, a cycle of threats, impunity and censorship still undermines the safety of journalists till today; with loopholes and inadequacies surfacing in outdated international humanitarian law and national legislations continuing to surface, attacks on journalistic freedom are poised to continue should the issue remain unresolved.

⁶ “Text of the Constitution | UNESCO,” [www.unesco.org](https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution), June 24, 2022, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution>.

⁷ UNESCO, “Safety of Journalists,” UNESCO, May 22, 2013, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists>.

⁸ UNESCO, “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity,” UNESCO, February 20, 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists>.

Background

Definitions

Journalist: An individual who gathers information to be published in the media — including both traditional media and new media, in the form of a news story.⁹

Freedom of the press: The right of journalists to conduct free and unbiased reporting on matters of public interest.¹⁰

Human rights: Basic rights that are believed should be afforded to every human being, regardless of the state.¹¹

History

The importance of press freedom has been recognised since 1933, when World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly.¹² Since then, World Press Freedom Day has been celebrated annually on 3 May in support of a media free of control and to mourn journalists who lost their lives in seeking truths and bringing information to the public. This recognises the importance of journalists and a free press in protecting democracies.

The importance of ensuring the safety of journalists then came into discussion in 2010, when discussions regarding the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was proposed by the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).¹³ Subsequently, a second UN Inter-Agency meeting was held in November 2012 to put together a concrete implementation strategy at global and national levels.¹⁴ Since then, multiple meetings have been held to discuss means of enhancing the implementation of the UN Plan of Action.

Apart from the UN, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have stepped up to do their part in protecting the safety of journalists. This includes the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), which was founded in 1981 by a group of U.S. correspondents in hopes of protecting those engaged in acts of journalism.¹⁵

⁹ CareerExplorer, “What Does a Journalist Do?,” Careerexplorer.com (CareerExplorer, April 24, 2018), <https://www.careerexplorer.com/careers/journalist/>.

¹⁰ Freedom House, “Media Freedom,” Freedom House, n.d., <https://freedomhouse.org/issues/media-freedom>.

¹¹ “OHCHR | What Are Human Rights?,” OHCHR, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>.

¹² United Nations, “World Press Freedom Day,” United Nations, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/observances/press-freedom-day>.

¹³ UNESCO, “History,” UNESCO, October 25, 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists/history>.

¹⁴ UNESCO, “Second UN Inter-Agency Meeting on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity,” UNESCO, October 25, 2017, <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists/inter-agency-2>.

¹⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Our Mission,” accessed August 6, 2022, <https://cpj.org/about/video/>.

However, in light of surging authoritarianism and the backsliding of democracies, political leaders seeking to quash dissent have actively sought to increase restrictions on the freedom of expression, silencing journalists using “fake news” legislation and prosecuting journalists who attempt to push the limits. As a result, despite continual introduction of international law, failures in compliance and implementation have stunted progress in ensuring the safety of journalists around the world.

Key Issues

Definition of Journalists and Journalism

Journalists are loosely defined as an individual who gathers and publishes information. However, with the rise of social media, the questions of who journalists are and what journalism actually encompasses have become increasingly pertinent. In the digitised age, anyone who owns a smartphone can collect and publish information online, including bloggers and influencers, and it has remained unanswered whether they too, should be considered journalists.

The lack of a universal definition as to who should be considered a journalist has made it difficult to determine the people who are entitled to claim legal protections traditionally provided to journalists.¹⁶ For example, in the United States, journalists are accorded reporter's privilege, a limited First Amendment right not to be forced to reveal information or confidential news sources in court,¹⁷ which ensures the safety of the journalist and their news sources. However, the lack of a definite, universal understanding of what constitutes journalism has sparked debate over whether certain persons should be granted such privileges, especially due to the subjective nature of the profession itself. This has surfaced through disagreements over the legitimacy of certain news outlets, as well as the criterion necessary to be recognized as a journalist. Canada, amongst many other states, has encountered public discontent and debate regarding its ban of specific parties from press conferences, due to conflicting opinions regarding whether said parties constitute legitimate journalism.¹⁸

In the international discussion of journalistic safety, delegates ought to establish a universally accepted definition of journalists and journalism so that uncertainties in debate and legislation can be minimised – only then can any proposed solutions combat the issue in a specific, focused manner.

Impunity

Crimes against journalists — violence, arrests, detentions, torture and online harassment — have been used to silence journalists around the world.¹⁹ Impunity, with regards to the safety of journalists, refers to the perpetrators of crimes against journalists being free to evade the law and its consequences.

¹⁶ Ugland, Erik. "Who Is a Journalist and Why Does It Matter? Disentangling the Legal and Ethical Arguments." ResearchGate, October 2007. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45181445_Who_Is_a_Journalist_and_Why_Does_it_Matter_Disentangling_the_Legal_and_Ethical_Arguments.

¹⁷ John Omanochu, "Reporter's Privilege," Mtsu.edu, 2018, <https://www.mtsu.edu:8443/first-amendment/article/1146/reporter-s-privilege>.

¹⁸ Michelle McQuigge, "Rebel Ban Sparks Debate over Journalism in the Digital Era | Globalnews.ca," Global News, February 18, 2016, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2524952/rebel-ban-sparks-debate-over-journalism-in-the-digital-era/>.

¹⁹ International Media Support, "Impunity Stays a Serious Challenge for Global Press Freedom," IMS, November 2, 2020, <https://www.mediasupport.org/news/impunity-stays-a-serious-challenge-for-global-press-freedom/>.

Impunity is a serious obstruction to ensuring the safety of journalists as it leaves little to deter offenders, resulting in a vicious cycle of continued acts of violence against journalists.

Impunity can create a climate of fear, and in turn bring about self-imposed censorship. Meanwhile, perpetrators of crimes against journalists are emboldened because they know there is a very small likelihood of them being caught and brought to justice.²⁰ Additionally, impunity may not only be carried out by opposition groups and militants, but even government-sponsored militia. This makes it even harder for justice to be brought upon and leaves journalists completely at the mercy of the perpetrators.

The UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022 showed that 87% of cases of killings of journalists recorded between 2006 and 2020 remain unsolved.²¹ This emphasises the profundity of impunity in the world today, and is a call for UNESCO to take further action against impunity.

Censorship

Censorship — the suppression of the freedom of expression of an individual — can be either state-imposed or self-imposed. A state-imposed form of censorship is forced onto individuals by the group in power, through means such as punishments and threats. This cultivates a “chilling effect” which results in self-imposed censorship as individuals attempt to avoid punishment.²²

Political censorship arises from the desire of the local government in power to conceal or falsify information which may threaten their legitimacy. Through restricting the media, the public is kept from knowing information that may threaten the authorities. However, such censorship can pose a threat to the freedom of press and freedom of expression, and in turn the rule of law and democracy of a country, when authorities are no longer kept in check.

In recent years, with the rise in disinformation and fake news on social media, legislation which allows the government to order information deemed false and misleading to be taken down has been introduced in various countries in an attempt to curb the spread of fake news. It has been recognised that with anyone, and in fact everyone, a journalist in the social media age, there has been a loss of centralised gatekeepers ensuring the veracity of information. This has led to the exploitation of

²⁰ Barry, James. “Press Freedom: Safety of Journalists and Impunity.” Medellín, Colombia: UNESCO Conference on Press Freedom, Safety of Journalists and Impunity, 2007. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000156773>.

²¹ “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity | UNESCO,” [www.unesco.org](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity), <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>.

²² Michael Sweeney, “Censorship - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics,” [Sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/censorship), 2015, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/censorship>.

journalism as a tool by various actors, ranging from political leaders to radical individuals, to achieve their vested interests. The deliberate publication of fake news casts doubt on the status of verifiable information produced by professional news producers, and erodes public trust. A study by the Harvard Kennedy School found that fake news sources often target mainstream media organisations of bias and incompetence, which reduces people's confidence in the press.²³

Misinformation also leads to consequences which extend to all aspects ranging from the manipulation of elections, which threatens democracies, to damage to public health and safety.²⁴ For example, a Yahoo News and YouGov poll in May 2020 found that 28% of U.S. adults believed that Bill Gates wanted to use COVID-19 vaccines to implant microchips in people to track them.²⁵ Such unfounded conspiracies in a population already concerned about the safety of immunisation resulted in further resistance amongst the populace to getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Yet, questions have been raised on whether these laws are merely a tool used by the ruling government to silence dissent. Freedom of expression advocates fear that legislation will threaten the democratisation of information and opinion which has been enabled by technology. For example, Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) grants government ministers the authority to issue "correction notices" to those they claim have published falsehoods. Yet, orders are often directed at an opposition party or politician, or a government critic, leading to widespread dissent that POFMA is merely an instrument against political opposition.²⁶ Similar laws have also been introduced in countries such as France and Germany.

With rising falsehoods on social media today, countries are seeing the importance of introducing legislation which would enable swift action to be taken against misinformation. However, this has also made it increasingly challenging for governments to strike a balance between preventing the spread of misinformation and overly limiting the freedom of expression.

²³ "Misinformation in action: Fake news exposure is linked to lower trust" 2 Jun. 2020, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/misinformation-in-action-fake-news-exposure-is-linked-to-lower-trust-in-media-higher-trust-in-government-when-your-side-is-in-power/>.

²⁴ "journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation - Unesco." https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0.pdf.

²⁵ "Will public trust in science survive the pandemic? - C&EN." 25 Jan. 2021, <https://cen.acs.org/policy/global-health/Will-public-trust-in-science-survive-the-pandemic/99/i3>.

²⁶ Kirsten Han, "Opinion | Want to Criticize Singapore? Expect a 'Correction Notice,'" The New York Times, January 21, 2020, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/opinion/fake-news-law-singapore.html>.

Scope of Debate

Defining Journalistic Rights

The Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 have broadly defined journalists as civilians,²⁷ and as such, allocates journalists the same fundamental rights of all civilians in armed conflict—including the right to humane treatment and the prohibition of violence and the passing of unlawful sentences as detailed in Article 3, Convention I.²⁸ Despite this clear statement of journalists’ basic human rights, hundreds of journalists today remain falsely imprisoned and face life-threatening danger as a direct consequence of exercising their right to freedom of expression.²⁹ Often, vague accusations are utilised by states that wish to control the flow of information, resulting in the unlawful silencing of journalists on similar basis, or states outright ignore the conventions outlined by the UN, prioritising their own self-interest due to a lack of consequences involved. In addition, the definition of journalistic rights as outlined by the Geneva Conventions are over seventy years out of date, and do not address the modern threats that are posed towards journalists, such as doxxing, judicial harassment as a form of intimidation,³⁰ distribution denial of service (DDoS) attacks and more.³¹ With the evolution of technology, the dissemination of media has changed in turn, making information much more readily available, including the personal information of certain parties.

Delegates should outline the basic universal rights that all journalists – in line with the council’s definitions thereof – should be afforded, taking into account the current geo-political context and the council’s opposing interests. The Committee to Protect Journalists has found that journalists are most commonly targeted by the state for “false news” or defamatory charges.³² With a specific framework to build the foundation of defining journalistic rights, ambiguous or easily disputed actions against journalists that may cause international disagreements can be eliminated or dismissed. The council can thus examine the extent of which journalistic rights extend to the protection of journalistic works, including considering which journalistic works ought to be published free from fear of repercussions, and the extent of freedom governments should grant to the press.

²⁷ United Nations, “Treaties, States Parties, and Commentaries - Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Conventions, 1977 - - Part IV : Civilian Population - Section III -- Treatment of Persons in the Power of a Party to the Conflict - Chapter III -- Journalists,” [ihl-databases.icrc.org](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/470-750102?OpenDocument), June 8, 1977, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/470-750102?OpenDocument>.

²⁸ United Nations, “Treaties, States Parties, and Commentaries - Geneva Convention (I) on Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, 1949 - 3 - Conflicts Not of an International Character,” ihl-databases.icrc.org, August 12, 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=BAA341028EBFF1E8C12563CD00519E66>.

²⁹ Reporters Without Borders, “2016 Violations of Press Freedom Barometer | Reporters without Borders,” RSF, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/barometer>.

³⁰ Council of Europe, “Freedom of Expression and Defamation,” Council of Europe Bookshop, 2016, <https://book.coe.int/en/human-rights-and-democracy/7072-freedom-of-expression-and-defamation.html>.

³¹ Susan McGregor, “Why DDoS Attacks Matter for Journalists,” Columbia Journalism Review, October 26, 2016, https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/journalists_ddos_hack_passwords.php.

³² Elana Beiser, “Record Number of Journalists Jailed Worldwide,” Committee to Protect Journalists, December 15, 2020, <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>.

Protection of Journalists' Rights

Clarifying the rights of journalists and threats that may violate these rights is ideally the forebear to discussion of the modes through which journalistic safety will be protected by UNESCO. As the UN body dedicated to global peace and security through the protection of the media and press freedoms (amongst other aspects of culture),³³ UNESCO upholds a responsibility to safeguard the journalistic field. However, the enduring efforts of the committee have been unable to completely eliminate the professional dangers of journalism due to independent parties that persecute journalists and member states ignoring previously made agreements in favour of their individual agendas.

Delegates should examine the modes through which journalistic safety will be protected, and provide motivation for all parties causing harm to journalists to comply with the structure defined by the council. This includes incentives for governments to protect journalists' safety from the dangers previously specified, in particular positive encouragement for nations to actively defend journalistic rights, and consequences for infringement upon these rights. UNESCO has previously provisioned journalists with the Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones or Dangerous Areas,³⁴ yet this charter was focused on advising journalists on the actions they were meant to take as individuals, and failed to address the responsibility of journalistic safety that fell upon states, nor was a comprehensive plan to uphold journalistic safety and protect their human rights outlined.

The council can also propose additional methods to ensure the safety of journalists to be implemented on a domestic or regional basis, such as granting journalists particular privileges and protections, whilst also keeping in mind the powers and abilities UNESCO possesses. Regardless, multiple issues may arise in this process – for one, UNESCO is not a legally binding council, and hence cannot mobilise UN Peacekeeper troops or punish member states for offences against journalists.³⁵ The committee merely exists to advise and foster cooperation between nations to ensure continued access to information globally. Furthermore, certain privileges may prove too extensive for some countries, who may not have the resources or do not find that it is in their best interest to take such actions. For example, the Kingdom of Thailand has stringently upheld its lèse-majesté law for over a century, despite international condemnation of its usage against political opponents and domestic journalists covering Thailand's politics.³⁶ Due to cultural emphasis on respect for the presiding monarchy, the law

³³ UNESCO, "Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013," Unesco.org, 2020, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000149999>.

³⁴ RSF and UNESCO, "Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones or Dangerous Areas Rsf," 2002.

³⁵ UNESCO, "Our Expertise | UNESCO," www.unesco.org, <https://www.unesco.org/en/our-expertise>.

³⁶ Somchai Preechasilpakul and David Streckfuss, "Ramification and Re-Sacralization of the Lese Majesty Law in Thailand," 2008, <https://www.law.cmu.ac.th/law2011/journal/20682.pdf>.

has been strictly enforced to uphold an enduring reverence for the Kingdom. In such cases, greater priorities may take precedence over extending support towards journalists.

On the other hand, governmental reform regarding the journalistic environment has shown considerable improvement in press freedom and safety overall – in the Maldives, the election of President Ibrahim Solih in 2019 was subsequently followed by the elimination of a 2016 defamation law, which had been criticised for its usage against journalists.³⁷ Taking the differing priorities of states into account, delegates should consider the role and significance of journalists to their states and societies, which will supplement a more nuanced and informed stance.

Recognising Existing Threats to Journalistic Safety

Though journalists face a great variety of dangers in their line of work, the UN has yet to explicitly recognize and clarify these dangers in an official resolution passed by a council. This lack of awareness results in limited resources and attention dedicated to resolving the issue, as well as confusion over what constitutes a threat to journalists' safety. Acknowledgement of the ways in which the personal safety of journalists are threatened should, by extension, include how journalistic works are being threatened. Moreover, the significance of certain parties' intentions should be considered, which will aid in the council's understanding of the professional dangers in journalism. Currently, UNESCO's efforts are hindered by international contention over how to tackle the matter at hand – such as claims that false news and misinformation necessitates a certain level of censorship³⁸ – as well as states deliberately avoiding providing statements regarding journalistic safety so as to avoid clarifying their stances. Even beyond select governments' actions, the threat posed to journalists by non-state actors such as terrorist groups and organized crime continues to grow due to these organizations' accumulation of power.

The council should also be able to identify which circumstances pose the greatest threat to journalists. Indeed, the distribution of journalists killed, jailed, or facing other forms of danger is concentrated within specific regions and contexts. In 2016, it was found that a majority of murdered journalists were killed in war zones or areas rife with armed conflict.³⁹ States with limited press freedoms, and/or are operating under extremist dictatorships also further exacerbate the already endangered perils that hound journalists worldwide. Ideally, delegates would also discuss and clarify the underlying reasons

³⁷ “Maldives Improves on Press Freedom Index,” Maldives Independent, April 18, 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-improves-on-press-freedom-index-144928>.

³⁸ Daniel Funke and Daniela Flamini, “A Guide to Anti-Misinformation Actions around the World - Poynter,” Poynter, 2014, <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/>.

³⁹ Amy Watson, “Journalists Killed by Conflict Situation,” Statista, January 18, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/789949/journalists-killed-conflict-situation/>.

for poor journalistic protection in these regions, such as a lack of a functional framework in less-developed countries, or a lack of regulation during major conflicts as in Ethiopia.⁴⁰

Structural Changes

Of the many legal instruments concerning the protection of human rights, such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights,⁴¹ the Geneva Conventions, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁴² as well as the numerous regional systems that have been implemented by regional blocs, very few confront the issue of journalistic safety. As of 2022, the most extensive document on the topic is the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, the UN's first and only strategy regarding the matter. Despite its groundbreaking nature, the plan fails to comprehensively address and rectify certain matters, such as the disproportionate violence against female journalists, especially in politically or culturally conservative regions.⁴³ Much of its content urges the creation of legislation or the recognition of UNESCO Resolution 29.⁴⁴ However, there is yet to be concrete action taken as many states remain reluctant to completely eradicate domestic legislation prosecuting crimes of expression, positioning the Plan of Action as a precursor to productive change in the field of journalistic safety.

Beyond simply proposing new measures to be undertaken, delegates should also examine the flaws in existing infrastructure and reevaluate past policies that have failed and succeeded. The scrutiny of past actions will determine a clear path forward into the future for UNESCO on the topic of journalistic safety, bringing light to the history of the predicament that permeates the field of press. The proposal of structural changes and possible improvements to be implemented should hence be based upon the discussions made regarding the stated concerns. Infrastructural reform should be pursued as the end result and culmination of the delegates' debate in council, comprehensively addressing every aspect of journalistic safety and its future.

⁴⁰ Muthoki Mumo, "Journalists Face Growing Hostility as Ethiopia's Civil War Persists," Committee to Protect Journalists, August 1, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/08/journalists-face-growing-hostility-as-ethiopias-civil-war-persists/>.

⁴¹ United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>.

⁴² UNITED NATIONS, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," OHCHR, December 16, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

⁴³ "UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity | UNESCO," www.unesco.org, accessed August 6, 2022, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>.

⁴⁴ UNESCO, "Resolution 29 'Condemnation of Violence against Journalists,'" Unesco.org, November 1997, <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resolution29-en.pdf>.

Key Stakeholders

With regards to the issue of protecting journalistic safety, there are three broad categories of countries delegates will represent: nations with limited journalistic freedoms, nations experiencing armed conflict, and nations supporting freedom of expression.

Nations with Limited Journalistic Freedoms

There are two main types of nations with limited journalistic freedoms: nations under authoritarian regimes and nations with heavy media regulation. Countries such as North Korea and Eritrea belong to the former;⁴⁵ while countries such as Singapore and Russia are examples of the latter.⁴⁶ By preventing journalists from exposing questionable practices conducted by the country's leaders or, in the case of authoritarian regimes, introducing democratic ideas to the general population, such nations curtail journalistic freedoms in order to, as they claim, preserve the peace of the country. As a result, journalists are subject to the heavy scrutiny and censure of the government.⁴⁷

However, the extent to which journalistic freedoms are limited varies according to the context of each individual country. Authoritarian regimes are likely to be more restrictive of journalistic freedoms as compared to paternalistic governments with a penchant for exerting control over the media. Therefore, the solutions supported by such nations will vary correspondingly with the context – while authoritarian governments are likely to be highly reluctant in allowing external intervention in its domestic journalist landscape, countries with heavy media regulation may be more open to improving journalistic freedoms, or at least journalistic safety. In accurately representing their country, delegates must therefore acquire a nuanced and acute understanding of the degree of journalistic freedoms provided in their country, as well as the rationale behind their country's stance.

Nations Experiencing Armed Conflict

Nations in the Middle East such as Iraq and Yemen, as well as countries such as Ukraine, are examples of nations experiencing armed conflict currently.⁴⁸ In nations experiencing armed conflict between multiple parties, there is often no single political authority responsible for safeguarding

⁴⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, "10 Most Censored Countries," Committee to Protect Journalists, September 10, 2019, <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist/>.

⁴⁶ Robin Hicks, "Press Censorship in Singapore and Russia – Rife but Serves Different Purposes," Mumbrella Asia, January 6, 2016, <https://www.mumbrella.asia/2016/01/think-media-not-free-singapore-try-journalist-russia>.

⁴⁷ Dina Matar, "2021: A Grim Year for Journalists and Free Speech in an Increasingly Turbulent and Authoritarian World," The Conversation, December 23, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/2021-a-grim-year-for-journalists-and-free-speech-in-an-increasingly-turbulent-and-authoritarian-world-174020>.

⁴⁸ Reporters Without Borders, "RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index : A New Era of Polarisation | RSF," [rsf.org](https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0), May 3, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0>.

journalistic freedoms and the rights of journalists. Due to this lack of responsibility, the environments in which journalists must operate in such countries are highly volatile and dangerous, and the safety of journalists is incredibly hard to guarantee.⁴⁹

Moreover, threats to journalistic safety abound since parties engaged in armed conflict are likely to prioritise the conflict and the public perception of it, and as such may resort to prosecuting or even harming journalists who expose the controversial aspects of armed conflict. For example, in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, Russia has been censoring information regarding *sub rosa* details, including information about military technology and casualties, as well as levying heavy punishments on media outlets that portray the conflict in a “negative manner”.⁵⁰ This operative silence has been echoed by its adversary, Ukraine,⁵¹ such that its enemies do not have access to details about its strength – which could jeopardise its military campaigns – or have its perception by the international community tainted, which is a position taken by almost all countries in armed conflict due to the sensitive nature of armed conflict. Delegates must consider the degree to which their stance provides for them to be concerned about international journalistic safety, and in the case that their stance calls for them to be adequately concerned, how to successfully put in place protections for journalist rights.

Nations with Extensive Press Freedoms

Nations supporting freedom of the press are mostly Western liberal democracies, such as the U.K., the U.S., Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden.⁵² These nations are highly supportive of a free media with journalistic agency and possess provisions for the human rights of journalists due to a constitutional emphasis on the right to freedom of the press, and a general public perception that liberalism regarding journalistic rights should be pursued. Therefore, the safety of journalists is often protected in these countries.

However, current protections of journalistic safety in these regions may not be enough as press freedom spirals downwards globally.⁵³ There exists emerging threats to journalistic safety such as increasingly partisan and sensationalist reporting in liberal democracies which can be hugely divisive

⁴⁹ Council of Europe, “Not a Target – the Need to Reinforce the Safety of Journalists Covering Conflicts,” Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, May 2, 2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/not-a-target-the-need-to-reinforce-the-safety-of-journalists-covering-conflicts>

⁵⁰ Robert McMahon, “Russia Is Censoring News on the War in Ukraine. Foreign Media Are Trying to Get around That,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 18, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/russia-censoring-news-war-ukraine-foreign-media-are-trying-get-around>.

⁵¹ Sky News, “Ukraine War: Operational Silence across Southern Ukraine,” www.youtube.com, September 24, 2022, https://youtu.be/_rXwrUeY_lk.

⁵² Jack Benjamin, “Press Freedom Index: ‘Intense’ Increase in Polarisation - the Media Leader,” Mediatel Group, May 3, 2022, <https://the-media-leader.com/press-freedom-index-intense-increase-in-polarisation/>.

⁵³ Sarah Repucci, “Media Freedom: A Downward Spiral | Freedom House,” freedomhouse.org, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>.

resulting in information and culture wars, or occupational hazards for journalists like doxxing, hate speech, and abuse.⁵⁴ Delegates in this capacity must perform the dual role of championing journalistic freedom and safety around the world, as well as enact further protections for journalistic safety within their own countries.

⁵⁴ Jenn Henrichson and Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, “The Dangers of Journalism Include Getting Doxxed. Here’s What You Can Do about It,” Poynter, May 19, 2015, <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2015/the-dangers-of-journalism-include-getting-doxxed-heres-what-you-can-do-about-it/>.

Potential Solutions

The issue of protecting journalistic safety is extremely complex and multifaceted, given the diverse range of stakeholders and interests involved in the discussion of this issue. Keeping this in mind, delegates must propose solutions which are feasible in garnering the support of other delegates, with careful consideration that any successful solutions will be implemented on an international level. Also important to note is that UNESCO is not a legally binding international body – as aforementioned, it is incapable of enacting hard laws or enforcing any such laws. With that in mind, there are three potential solutions delegates can consider.

International Legislation

International legislation could be enacted in the form of soft laws. Soft law includes recommendations, guidelines, codes of conduct, and standards to be proposed by delegates in UNESCO. While not legally binding, such legislation serves as an indication of the international expectations with regards to protecting journalistic safety and the human rights of journalists worldwide. Furthermore, soft laws by the UN, the foremost international organisation, have a powerful symbolic and political impact which can be used to further protections to journalistic safety.

Delegates can refer to previous soft laws proposed by both UNESCO and the General Assembly on the issue of journalistic rights. UNESCO spearheaded the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in 2021, whereas the General Assembly passed Resolution 74/157 recently with regard to protections of journalistic rights and freedoms.⁵⁵ Examples of measures that were taken include setting up an inter-agency mechanism to handle issues related to the safety of journalists. However, a lack of hard enforcement due to negligible support from UN bodies that possess greater powers and are capable of holding offending states accountable has resulted in limited progress when it comes to the issue at hand. Hence, delegates could consider updating these precedents, as well as proposing new legislation to account with the ever-changing journalistic profession, and the dangers it poses. The draft resolution proposed by delegates should, ideally, spearhead actual change in regards to the present environment.

The specifics of legislation are largely up to the delegates' discretion. Some recommendations could include the commitment to implementing workable international infrastructure through which journalists can operate safely no matter where they are. Alternatively, the council could create an external body with a focus on understanding the current situation of journalists' rights and safety, regularly reviewing international norms and standards with regard to the safety of journalists, and making recommendations to update the protections of journalistic safety. However, the creation of a

⁵⁵ UNESCO, "Resolution 157 'The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity'", December 2019, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/428/62/PDF/N1942862.pdf?OpenElement>

universal framework would likely be opposed by nations who have differing interests from the intents of the framework, and nations that place a strong emphasis on sovereignty such as Russia and China will be extremely opposed to what would be viewed as an infringement upon domestic affairs.^{56 57}

Partnerships with External Bodies

Additionally, the council could consider working with parties outside of UNESCO, namely member states and civil society. While the jurisdiction of UNESCO itself may be limited, by partnering with external parties, the jurisdiction and scope it indirectly possesses increases exponentially. This is because member states are able to enact hard laws to protect journalistic safety, whereas civil society organisations are incredibly active in this sphere.

UNESCO can assist member states in developing legally-binding internal legislation and mechanisms guaranteeing journalistic safety by recommending courses of action and highlighting certain aspects of the issue, including the duty for states to prosecute crimes which violate the human rights of journalists. Furthermore, the council can support member states in fully and conscientiously implementing existing international UN guidelines, such as the UN Plan Of Action On The Safety Of Journalists And The Issue Of Impunity. The function of such a solution is thus for UNESCO to encourage member states to adopt an active role in the prevention of attacks against journalistic safety.

In terms of how UNESCO can support civil society organisations, the council can build and strengthen relationships with international and domestic civil society organisations dedicated to protecting journalistic safety, in the process sharing information and methods to combat attacks on journalism. The council could also consider increasing funding or aid for civil society organisations protecting journalists. By partnering with civil society organisations, UNESCO is able to expand its reach of influence in tackling the issue of journalistic safety.

However, delegates must also be cognisant of the reality that not all countries will be willing to cooperate with UNESCO, particularly those which are adamant in restricting journalistic freedoms and rights. Furthermore, not all civil society organisations hold significant influence in their countries, and some maximum governments such as North Korea do not even allow for the existence of civil society. To circumvent these challenges, one area delegates could potentially consider are partnerships

⁵⁶ Philip Remler, "Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty, and Legitimacy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 22, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/22/russia-at-united-nations-law-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-pub-80753>.

⁵⁷ Carrai, Maria Adele. *Sovereignty in China: A Genealogy of a Concept since 1840*. Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. doi:10.1017/9781108564861.

with media outlets, and equipping journalists from media outlets with the necessary protections when reporting abroad from these more dangerous territories.

Improving Journalistic Quality

Delegates could consider improving the quality of journalism around the world by establishing international standards of quality and partnering with journalist training agencies to upgrade the capabilities of journalists.

Such a programme should ensure that journalists are trained to meet certain benchmarks of *quality*, such as credibility (by using a variety of sources), proper verification, impartiality, balanced perspectives, and accuracy of documentation.⁵⁸ Granted, any measure of quality (including the metrics cited above) should be properly defined and, to as great of an extent as possible, be able to be objectively determined. This not only minimises the loopholes in legislation that journalists may be unfairly prosecuted by, but also encourages journalists and major news outlets to ensure that any potential conflicting interests (such as revenue, or beliefs) do not interfere with their responsibilities as journalists. By implementing these standards on an international level, governments will find it more challenging to justify the unfair persecution of journalists.

Such a solution works best in countries which are facing a rising trend of sensationalist and/or partisan reporting which results in the reduced accuracy and reliability of journalism, such as the U.S. or the United Kingdom.^{59,60} By improving the quality of journalism in these countries, governments are less likely to intervene in the journalism space, thereby preserving journalistic freedoms. Furthermore, this solution strengthens media trust among citizens, which may precipitate greater backlash to the government from the population in the event the government interferes in the media industry.⁶¹

Delegates should be mindful that this solution is likely less effective in authoritarian regimes, as the regimes would not regard the increased quality of journalism as a significant factor in limiting journalistic freedoms. This solution may even have a counterproductive effect in such countries, as

⁵⁸ News Literacy Project. “Seven Standards of Quality Journalism”. (n.d.) <https://newslit.org/educators/resources/seven-standards-quality-journalism/>

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Gottfried and Jacob Liedke, “Partisan Divides in Media Trust Widen, Driven by a Decline among Republicans,” Pew Research Center, August 30, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/30/partisan-divides-in-media-trust-widen-driven-by-a-decline-among-republicans/>.

⁶⁰ Pew Research Center, “News Media and Political Attitudes in the United Kingdom,” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project (Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, May 17, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/fact-sheet/news-media-and-political-attitudes-in-the-united-kingdom/>.

⁶¹ Marius Dragomir, Eva Boggar, and Robert Nemeth, “Strengthening Quality News and Independent Journalism in the Western Balkans and Turkey | CMDS,” cmds.ceu.edu, 2019, <https://cmds.ceu.edu/projects/strengthening-quality-news-and-independent-journalism-western-balkans-and-turkey>.

nations would seek to censor journalists who are able to compose more accurate and well-written pieces which may be contrary to the government's interests. Crucially, improving journalistic quality is a solution that cannot be implemented in isolation – its effect is indirect and is stronger when used as an ancillary measure to the above solutions.

Case Studies

Myanmar

According to the Reporters Without Borders Index, Myanmar ranks 176 out of 180 countries.⁶² When the junta took power following the 1 February 2021 military coup, the media landscape was shattered and the junta issued a list of media outlets that were banned. This included the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, an independent local media group which began fighting for press freedom in Myanmar in the 1990s.⁶³

The junta, officially known as the State Administrative, has reestablished the old system of censorship and prevents the media from reporting on any alternative narrative, openly promoting a policy of terror towards journalists who do not conform to the state narrative.⁶⁴ The generals often invoke the vaguely worded Section 505(a) of the penal code, under which “false information” is punishable by 3 years in prison.⁶⁵ Another such example is Section 66(d) of the telecommunications law, which criminalises defamation and can be used to imprison journalists for 3 years.⁶⁶

With the high risk of being jailed, tortured or murdered, journalism is an extremely dangerous profession in Myanmar, with no assurance for the safety of journalists. In fact, Myanmar has become the world's second biggest jailer of journalists, only behind China.⁶⁷

The regime detained journalists covering pro-democracy, anti-coup street protests, many harshly sentenced under 505(a). Among those jailed was American journalist Danny Fenster, the managing editor of Myanmar Frontier who was arrested in May 2021; after months in pre-trial detention, he was sentenced to 11 years in prison on 3 separate criminal charges of breaching immigration law, unlawful association and encouraging dissent against the military.⁶⁸ The case of Fenster illustrates the lack of safety for journalists in Myanmar, where press freedom is curtailed and journalists are often imprisoned for merely doing their job.

⁶² Reporters Without Borders. “Myanmar.” <https://rsf.org/en/country/myanmar>.

⁶³ “How Myanmar became the world's second-worst jailer of journalists.” 8 Dec. 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/12/myanmar-second-worst-jailer-journalists/>.

⁶⁴ “Myanmar: Junta Escalates Media Crackdown | Human Rights Watch.” 27 Jul. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/27/myanmar-junta-escalates-media-crackdown>.

⁶⁵ “Myanmar: Post-Coup Legal Changes Erode Human Rights.” 2 Mar. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/02/myanmar-post-coup-legal-changes-erode-human-rights>.

⁶⁶ “Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law | Burma Campaign UK.” <https://burmacampaign.org.uk/take-action/free-political-prisoners/section-66-d-of-the-telecommunications-law/>.

⁶⁷ “Number of journalists behind bars reaches global high.” 9 Dec. 2021, <https://cpj.org/reports/2021/12/number-of-journalists-behind-bars-reaches-global-high/>.

⁶⁸ “Danny Fenster: US journalist freed from Myanmar jail - BBC News.” 15 Nov. 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59290412>.

Denmark

Nordic countries traditionally top the Press Freedom Index, with Denmark hailed as one of the world's top countries where freedom of expression flourishes.⁶⁹ This is upheld through various means, including ensuring editorial and political independence.

In Denmark, the arm-length principle scribes the ideal of keeping editorial and political independence while receiving subsidies from the government.⁷⁰ While traditionally a term rooted in international taxation law, the term is used in culture and media politics to metaphorically describe the relationship between the state as the donor of subsidies and the beneficiary, in which the state does not intervene in the way the money is used.⁷¹

A high degree of trade union organisation also helps to protect journalists, by defending journalists' rights, safety and economic well being. Nordic countries like Denmark with their democratic tradition are role models for that, and in contrast, governments leaning towards autocracy are usually suspicious of any potent organisation not affiliated with the ruling party. The Danish Union of Journalists (DJ) represents 18,200 journalists and media workers, and the large membership contributes to the organisation's political weight, making it nearly impossible to circumvent it in any negotiation concerning the working conditions in the media sector.⁷²

Co-regulatory frameworks promoting and safeguarding ethical journalism have also been put in place. The Press Council guarantees an independent and public forum promoting ethical journalism and dealing with complaints with regards to the Press Ethical Rules.⁷³

⁶⁹ "Nordic countries top 2021 World Press Freedom Index." <https://studyindenmark.dk/news/nordic-countries-top-2021-world-press-freedom-index>.

⁷⁰ "Independence and arms-length principle | Diversity of Cultural" <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/independence-arms-length>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "MEDIA FREEDOM MADE IN SCANDINAVIA." https://www.ecpmf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ECPMF-FFM-Scandinavia_2020.pdf.

⁷³ Ibid.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. What is considered journalism?
2. What universal rights do journalists and journalistic works possess?
3. To what extent should the international community allow press freedoms?
4. What threats are there to journalistic safety around the world?
5. In what geo-political circumstances do journalists face the most danger?
6. What measures will UNESCO take to protect journalistic safety in different contexts?
7. What are the flaws within existing frameworks, and how can they be resolved or improved upon?

Conclusion

Ensuring the safety of journalists is a matter of great concern that requires urgent and immediate action. Through ensuring transparency and accountability for public and governmental authorities, journalists serve to safeguard democracy. In the digital age, balancing between media freedom and controlling the spread of fake news has become an ever more imperative issue. Delegates need to find ways to ensure that the safety of journalists will not be compromised.

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