

Berlin Declaration

6 November 2000

Journalists in Danger – How We Can Help

On 6 November 2000, leading media professionals and officials from OSCE participating States, from the United Nations and the Council of Europe met in Berlin at a Round Table organised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss protection of journalists in conflict areas:

“The discussion of the Berlin Round Table underlined that the reality of conflict has changed considerably over the past years. During the last two decades, most journalists killed became casualties of internal conflicts. This type of “terror warfare” has considerably changed the conditions on the ground not only for military personnel but also for civilians, including journalists. Many participants stressed that the global media market puts “pressure of presence” on journalists by the demand of the media market to produce news in real time. This increasingly placed journalists in harm’s way.

In 1991, the OSCE participating States committed themselves in Moscow to protect journalists particularly in cases of armed conflict. The United Nations, on several occasions, also expressed its strong support for measures to protect journalists.

The Round Table in Berlin is the second step taken by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. He held a meeting with journalists and non-governmental organisations (ngo’s) in London in September 1999.

However, more can still be done to provide support to journalists covering conflict areas. Already training sessions are organised by media companies and ngo’s. Protection gear is available as well as insurance. A number of international organisations in post-conflict areas offer a hotline for journalists in trouble. Although deliberately killing a journalist in time of war, as with any other civilian, can be classified as a war crime, little had been done to bring perpetrators to justice. This issue may be discussed as part of the ongoing debate on the International Criminal Court. Nevertheless, governments could enhance their efforts to investigate the murders of journalists and to cooperate to this end. Governments should make it also clear within international organisations that the killing of journalists is not acceptable for the international community.

The participants commended leading media companies, among them Reuters, AP, CNN, BBC, as well as ngo’s for developing universal guidelines related to the safety and protection of journalists. However, these guidelines could not become excuses for governments to exclude journalists or restrict coverage. The participants underlined that OSCE participating States should consider the idea that all journalists, including freelancers and local journalists, had access to safety standards and financial assistance in times of need. But most critical is that news organizations must assume responsibility for the safety of those who work for them, be it staff or freelancers.

Regarding distinctive signs for journalists, it was stressed that this was an issue for journalists themselves to decide but that an open discussion of physical threats against journalists was needed.

The participants agreed that the discussion on journalists in conflict areas should continue in the framework of the OSCE, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other relevant international organisations and ngo's.”