

The OSCE Representative
on Freedom of the Media

Safety of Journalists: An imperative for free media



Violence against journalists

Journalists' safety is rapidly deteriorating in many countries in the OSCE region. In recent years, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has intervened in some 200 cases dealing with journalists' safety annually, including hundreds of criminal investigations launched by authorities against critical voices.

Harassment and intimidation have reached unprecedented heights with acts of violence against journalists taking place nearly every day throughout the OSCE region and beyond.

Since 1997, more than 220 journalists have been killed in the line of duty in OSCE participating States. Despite the vital role they play in the creation and support of any truly democratic society, the job of a journalist has become exceptionally dangerous.



Information from the conference in June 2017 can be found at osce.org/fom/314201. Photo: Christian Bonatesta

Violence against journalists takes many forms, including:

- Murder and physical assault;
- Psychological pressure, including threats to their lives and those of their families;
- Unlawful detention;
- Online harassment and threats of violence, including sexual violence, especially against female journalists and bloggers;
- Arrests on unfounded or baseless charges;
- Destruction of private and professional property, including vandalism and arson;
- Arbitrary raids on editorial offices and journalists' homes.

These acts are attempts to silence journalists and other media workers and are blatant violations of OSCE commitments on media freedom.

Impunity from prosecution



The vast majority of attacks on journalists worldwide result in impunity, with no conviction made. Photo: OSCE.

In addition to violence, intimidation and harassment of journalists there is a staggering lack of prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes.

On average, only one in 10 investigations into murders of journalists result in prosecution. Statistics like this prove that journalists' safety must become a higher priority for governments that claim to support the work of the media and uphold OSCE commitments.

Governments have a key role to play in bringing about much-needed change. Political commitments to protect media freedom are important. But without effective and timely prosecution and punishment of all those responsible for crimes against journalists, nothing will change.

In short, politicians and authorities must support OSCE commitments with political will and action.

This means:

- Government authorities and law enforcement must send out a clear message that attacks against journalists will not be tolerated;
- Swift and efficient investigations must be conducted every time a journalist is the victim of an attack;
- Evidence must be taken in a professional manner with the goal of prosecuting all responsible parties;
- Prosecutors need to be trained to understand the nature of media work and how this work renders members of the media vulnerable to harm, intimidation and harassment;
- Judges must apply criminal sanctions and sentences for these crimes in full accordance with the law and proportionate to the offenses committed.

International commitments on safety of journalists

Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE

—3 October 1991, Moscow

“The participating States will adopt, where appropriate, all feasible measures to protect journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions, particularly in cases of armed conflict, and will co-operate to that effect. These measures will include tracing missing journalists, ascertaining their fate, providing appropriate assistance and facilitating their return to their families.”

Budapest Document: Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era (Summit of Heads of State or Government)

—5-6 December
1994, Budapest

“The participating States reaffirm that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a basic component of a democratic society. In this respect, independent and pluralistic

media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. They take as their guiding principle that they will safeguard this right.

They condemn all attacks on and harassment of journalist and will endeavour to hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable.”

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/163 on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity

—18 December
2013, New York

In addition to proclaiming 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, this resolution “condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations”.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2222 on the protection of journalists

—27 May 2015, New York

The resolution, adopted unanimously, condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in conflict areas. The Resolution, put forward by Lithuania, also calls upon all parties in armed conflict to bring an end to such practices. “Recognizing the importance of ...protecting journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in armed conflicts..

Strongly condemns the prevailing impunity for violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict, which in turn may contribute to the recurrence of these acts.”

Vulnerability of female journalists



Female journalists are increasingly being targeted and attacked online. Photo: iStockphoto.

Violence against journalists has, in recent years, taken a dangerous gender-specific turn.

Female journalists and bloggers are increasingly subjected to threats of sexual violence and are, now more than ever, especially vulnerable.

The gendered nature of this harassment goes beyond traditional vitriol, using threats of rape and graphic violence to silence women. The phenomenon has a

devastating and wide-ranging impact on media as a whole as female journalists and bloggers are more likely to engage in self-censorship.

Threats and fear of being verbally or physically abused may have a significant impact on what and how news stories are reported.

Any effort to silence female journalists must be regarded as a direct attack on freedom of the media and must be addressed as a top priority by the global community.

“...acknowledging the specific risks faced by women journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in conduct of their work, and underlining in this context the importance of considering the gender dimension of measures to address their safety ... ”

(from UNSCR 2222 (2015))

The fight must continue



“ Countries committed to democratic principles must protect the freedoms of speech and expression as cornerstones of society. ”
Harlem Désir

Facts and figures

220
total
deaths

Approximately 220 journalists have been killed in the OSCE region since 1997.

10%
of murders
solved

Impunity prevails, less than 10% of murders of journalists are solved.

Follow the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media



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