**Topic: The issue of press freedom in times of war**

Introduction

The right to freedom of expression and information constitutes one of the essential foundations of democratic society. In conflict situations and wars, the role of the media is critical in providing the public with accurate and timely information. Trustworthy news and images can contribute to the protection of civilians and conflict prevention, bring to the attention of the international community the horrors and reality of conflict and expose violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. As a consequence, the work of journalists in conflict zones is fraught with dangers: denial of access, censorship, harassment, arbitrary detention and attacks are alarmingly frequent. As others who decide to work in conflict areas, journalists take consciously a special risk by working there. However, they are considered civilians and, as such, should not be targeted. Member states should recognize the crucial importance and role of journalism and the media – and ultimately individual journalists – in times of conflict and aggression. Safety of journalists in conflict areas is instrumental to that end.

Background Information

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) warns that political pressure is increasingly threatening journalism and the public’s right to know. In its 2024 World Press Freedom report RSF finds that the political indicator, one of five metrics used in compiling the index, has fallen the most, an average drop of 7.6 points across the globe. Overall, RSF’s World Press Freedom Index rated conditions for practicing journalism as satisfactory in only one quarter of 180 countries ranked around the world.

Journalists reporting from crisis- and conflict-zones face severe threats in carrying out their critical work. While from 2017 onwards UNESCO recorded gradual decreases in media workers killed in conflict zones, more recently the trend has been reversed. UNESCO's monitoring in 2023 recorded more than 50% of journalist killings occurred in crisis- and conflict-zones, with continuously high numbers in the first half of 2024. In its programming, UNESCO and its partners focus on providing holistic support to the safety of journalists, covering physical, psychological and digital safety, promoting access to lifesaving, humanitarian information for local populations affected by crises and conflicts and supporting journalists that have been forced into exile. While short-term interventions focus on immediate assistance, including establishing hotlines for safety advice, provision of protective equipment or direct financial support, so journalists, their crews and fixers can keep working with some level of safety, more long-term interventions are focused on fostering the resilience of media outlets in conflict-affected countries.

During armed conflict, the right to freedom of expression and access to information becomes more important than ever. Yet, parties to an armed conflict typically try to control the flow of information at the expense of the right to freedom of expression and other related human rights. While disinformation and State propaganda activities during conflicts can have many harmful consequences for those most affected by the hostilities, the legal framework applicable to such forms of information manipulation and the question of what responses can counter disinformation in an appropriate and effective manner is not always clear.

Suggested solutions

1**.Condemns** the targeting of journalists, media outlets, and press infrastructure during armed conflicts, and calls for the immediate cessation of any violence or intimidation directed at journalists and media professionals;

* a. **Demands** accountability for all individuals or entities that engage in the deliberate targeting of media personnel or facilities, including through legal means and international tribunals;
	+ i. **Recommends** the establishment of specific provisions in international law to classify attacks on journalists as war crimes;
	+ ii. **Supports** the creation of an international tribunal to prosecute individuals or groups responsible for killing or injuring journalists during conflict.
* b. **Supports** the establishment of a global task force to investigate and prevent attacks on journalists and ensure that perpetrators face justice.
	+ i. **Encourages** the creation of a rapid-response mechanism that can deploy to conflict zones to investigate attacks on media workers;
	+ ii. **Calls for** collaboration between states and NGOs in providing resources for investigating and documenting crimes against journalists.

2. **Calls upon** member states to provide legal protections for journalists working in conflict zones, including the enforcement of international law that prohibits the arbitrary detention, torture, and execution of journalists, as well as restrictions on their ability to report;

* a. **Urges** states to adopt national legislation that provides clear protections for journalists, including immunity from prosecution for reporting on matters of public interest during conflict;
	+ i. **Supports** the adoption of specific anti-harassment laws that safeguard journalists from physical and psychological harm;
	+ ii. **Recommends** the creation of legal mechanisms within each state to address and remedy violations of press freedom and journalist protection.
* b. **Encourages** the establishment of safe channels for journalists to report threats or abuse to international bodies that can intervene if necessary.
	+ i. **Calls for** a centralized, independent body that receives complaints and provides emergency legal aid for journalists facing persecution in conflict zones;
	+ ii. **Recommends** that this body work in coordination with human rights organizations to offer diplomatic intervention in severe cases.

Work cited

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