

DAWN

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Safety of journalists

TODAY, on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the world jointly highlights the worrying situation of journalists worldwide. It is a situation that includes a culture of impunity against crimes towards journalists and media workers, which poses a threat to our open societies. Today, we highlight the need to protect those who face violence and harassment in the line of duty. Both UNESCO and Sweden are committed to working with partners worldwide for this important cause.

The proclamation of this international day, adopted through a resolution by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, came as a response to the disturbing statistics of the past decade, when at least 827 journalists had lost their lives. The resolution calls on all member states to ensure the protection of journalists and media workers through establishing and implementing an efficient accountability system that brings perpetrators of crimes to justice. Last year, the right to access information was also included in the Sustainable Development Agenda, with all countries in the United Nations in agreement.

In Sweden, media freedom was first guaranteed in 1766, when the Swedish parliament passed the world's first Freedom of the Press Act. This act remains valid in Sweden, and Finland, to this day. In addition to defending the freedom of expression, the act has made a fundamental contribution to the development of our modern and innovative society. But, as we celebrate this 250 year anniversary, we are increasingly reminded that the media landscape transforms through the use of new media and becomes increasingly global. This calls for enhanced efforts to promote freedom of expression and media freedom, including promotion of media literacy and increased support to free and independent media around the world.

Journalists and media workers are facilitators for citizens to access information, and ensuring their security means guaranteeing that citizens are informed about matters of vital importance in their lives and have the opportunity to voice opinions.

Timely and thorough investigations of crimes against journalists are important measures.

Impunity is the failure to guarantee justice and — when it prevails — an invitation for more crime to occur. Therefore, timely and thorough investigations of crimes against journalists are important measures to be taken by states in order to set a precedent for other cases.

Over the past decade, more than 800 journalists have been killed worldwide in the line of duty. Last year alone, 105 journalists, media workers and social media producers were murdered. According to UNESCO's figures, based on information from member states, only eight per cent of the over 800 cases have been resolved. The high percentage of unresolved

murders of journalists sends a message that freedom of expression is not protected, and hence, the right to information is not ensured.

In Pakistan, an improvement has been observed in media freedom over the last few years, but the country still ranks 147 out of 180 states in the Reporters without Borders Index. Hence, Pakistan remains a dangerous country for journalists and media workers to work in.

On Nov 17, the UNESCO director general's latest report on the safety of journalists will be discussed in Paris at a meeting of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication.

Figures in the report show that 51 killings in Pakistan have been registered by UNESCO in the past 10 years. Based on submissions from the government of Pakistan, the report classifies 16 cases as ongoing or unresolved. It also signals that no information has been received in a total of 35 cases.

The adoption of a bill on the safety of journalists in Pakistan could be a very important step forward to ensure the protection of journalists.

UNESCO — in collaboration with member states, media institutions and civil society organizations — is raising awareness about the need for improving safety of journalists around the world. The UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted in 2012, focuses on building an extensive cooperation to enhance safety and end impunity.

UNESCO Pakistan has been supporting journalists with capacity-building initiatives on physical and digital safety and awareness-raising through advocacy events such as the World Press Freedom Day. Furthermore, an assessment study based on UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators was carried out in the country in 2014, which reviews the role of state, national and international civil society organizations, academia, media and United Nations agencies. We can all do more to stop the impunity of attacks on journalists. UNESCO and the Swedish embassy stand ready to work with all partners in support of the government's efforts to protect journalists and end impunity.

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