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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Reporters Sans Frontiers International - Reporters Without Borders International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Protecting Journalists and other news providers

Reporters Without Borders, an international NGO that defends freedom of information, is very concerned about the scale of the dangers and abuses to which journalists and other news providers are exposed.

In repressive countries or countries embroiled in civil or external wars, professional and citizen journalists are often the only sources of first-hand information about human rights violations by governments, warlords, religious extremists and others. By covering the plight of their fellow citizens and reporting abuses by leading officials, they expose themselves to the possibility of very violent reprisals. Many news providers flee abroad every year to escape physical attacks, death threats, arrest and arbitrary jail sentences. They often get no further than neighbouring countries where they continue to be exposed to reprisals and must confront the inadequacies of international protection mechanisms.

Protection of news providers in wartime

The rules of humanitarian law prohibit deliberate attacks on civilians by either state or non-state actors, and news providers are civilians. Under the Geneva Convention and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738, member states are also required to protect journalists and combat impunity for those responsible for violence against them. So the problem is not a legal void but the failure to monitor whether member states respect their obligations. Since the start of the conflict in Syria, a total of 36 news providers, including 26 citizen journalists, have been killed in connection with their reporting activities.

Reporters Without Borders therefore asks the UN Human Rights Council to take up this issue and to:

- Appoint a group of independent experts with the task of monitoring respect by member states for UN Security Council Resolution 1738;
- Work towards the adoption of a resolution enshrining the obligation of member states to protect all professional and non-professional news providers in wartime, on the lines of Security Council Resolution 1738;
- Ask member states to cooperate in criminal investigations in order to punish those responsible for attacks on news providers.

Protection of local news providers

News providers who are exposed to threats and dangers often lack the resources and support necessary to guarantee their safety. Reporters Without Borders therefore asks the Human Rights Council to try to reinforce the "human rights offices" of UN missions so that they are able to provide rapid and adequate protection to news providers who are threatened because of their activities.

Protection of news providers forced to flee abroad

Many news providers have to flee abroad every year because they are unable to get adequate protection in their own country. More than 70 journalists fled into exile in 2011. But the mere fact of being abroad does not necessarily mean they are safe. As they have signed articles and have been on radio and TV, their names, voices and faces are known to their oppressors and they remain at their mercy because the countries where they seek refuge and register with UNHCR usually adjoin their own countries. It has been established that the Rwandan, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Iranian governments, Somalia's Al-Shabaab militia and Latin America's drug traffickers follow journalists who flee into exile.

Nonetheless, there is still no adequate mechanism for protecting journalists, citizen journalists and human rights defenders who have to flee abroad. Too many western governments just point to the existing overall resettlement quotas, although more than 260 journalists have been killed in connection with their work in the past five years and around 300 news providers are currently detained.

Reporters Without Borders therefore also asks the Human Rights Council to:

- To create a special alert mechanism within each national and/or regional office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, consisting of a designated referral officer who coordinates closely with UNHCR and who can be reached quickly at any time by organizations that defend news providers and human rights defenders.
 - Ensure that a fast-track procedure is established for handling the requests for protection that news providers and human rights defenders submit at UNHCR offices.
 - Ensure that adequate protective measures are adopted for defenders of journalists and other human rights defenders who have to flee abroad, including a programme of urban shelters separate from refugee camps, safe houses, alert mechanisms and emergency protection mechanisms.
 - Publicly recognize the inadequacies of the UN protection and resettlement procedures for news providers and human rights defenders who are in danger in transit countries and urge members states to redress these inadequacies by creating specific entry and resettlement procedures for them.
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