



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
16 August 2019

Original: English

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## Seventy-fourth session

Item 72 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

## **The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution [72/175](#), provides an overview of the current situation in relation to the safety of journalists and of the actions undertaken by Member States, regional organizations, the United Nations system and civil society organizations.

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\* [A/74/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution [72/175](#), the present report provides an overview of the current situation in relation to the safety of journalists and of the action taken at the international, regional and national levels, including by the United Nations, taking into account the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

2. In the preparation of the present report, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), on behalf of the Secretary-General, sought contributions from Member States; international and regional organizations; national human rights institutions; and non-governmental organizations.<sup>1</sup> In addition to information received from these actors, the report draws on a range of public sources.

## II. Current situation

3. Freedom of expression and free media are essential to fostering the understanding and dialogue needed to advance overall efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In recent years, however, there has been a rise in the scale and number of attacks against the physical safety of journalists and media workers, as well as of incidents affecting their ability to exercise freedom of expression, including threats of prosecution, arrest, imprisonment, denial of journalistic access and failure to investigate and prosecute crimes against them (see resolution [72/175](#)).

4. According to the recent report of the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the safety of journalists and the danger of impunity,<sup>2</sup> legal impunity for perpetrators is still the norm for most killings of journalists, with less than 1 in 10 cases leading to a conviction. The report further states that between January 2017 and June 2019, 207 journalists were killed, of whom 117 were in countries not currently experiencing armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> Many of those journalists were reporting on organized crime, local politics and corruption, and many had received threats prior to the attacks on them.

<sup>1</sup> As at 8 August 2019, contributions had been received from Albania, Austria, Bahrain, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo and Ukraine; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), OHCHR, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Department of Global Communications of the Secretariat; Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain; and the International Civil Society Coalition on the Safety of Journalists, which includes the ACOS Alliance (A Culture of Safety Alliance), Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the European Journalism Centre, Free Press Unlimited, Freedom House, Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, the Global Forum for Media Development, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, IFEX, the International Federation of Journalists, International Media Support, the International News Safety Institute, the International Women's Media Foundation, Internews, the International Press Institute, the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Media Foundation for West Africa, the Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms, Open Society Foundations, PEN America, PEN International, the Rory Peck Trust, Reporters Without Borders, the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKeyes Centre for Media and Cultural Freedom) and the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, with the contribution of IFEX members the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, the Digital Rights Foundation, Espacio Público, Freedom Forum Nepal, the Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda, the Pakistan Press Foundation and the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, document CI-18/COUNCIL-31/6/REV.2.

<sup>3</sup> For data on killings of journalists published in the UNESCO observatory of killed journalists, see <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory>.

5. According to UNESCO data, during the same period, 90 journalists were killed in countries experiencing armed conflict. A number of those journalists fell victim to suicide bombings and attacks by militant groups. Some of those journalists were said to have been reporting on issues such as civilian displacement, the plight of civilians in the conflict zones and military attacks by parties to a conflict.<sup>4</sup>

6. In addition to these worrying trends, the media landscape has evolved. New forms of media and communication have emerged, and new technologies are fuelling the rapid spread of targeted disinformation and smear campaigns. This not only has contributed to making the issue of safety and free media increasingly complex, but also has contributed to an erosion in the public trust in journalism.<sup>5</sup> Journalists are also facing more intimidation through misuse of laws as well as efforts and/or measures taken by those in public leadership positions to discredit their work.<sup>6</sup> The proportion of women among fatalities has also risen,<sup>7</sup> and women journalists are facing increased gender-specific attacks, such as sexual harassment (including online), sexual violence and threats of violence.<sup>8</sup>

### III. International, regional and national action

7. Following a multi-stakeholder consultation held by OHCHR and UNESCO in 2017 on ways to strengthen the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, steps to be taken were suggested for the United Nations, Member States, regional intergovernmental organizations, civil society, the media, Internet companies and academia with a view to strengthening the safety of journalists and combating impunity.<sup>9</sup> Since then, States, the United Nations, regional organizations and civil society have carried out a range of activities and initiatives in that regard.

#### A. States

8. In resolution [72/175](#), the General Assembly called upon States to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers. It urged Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence, threats and attacks, to ensure accountability, to bring perpetrators to justice and to ensure that victims and their families have access to appropriate remedies.

9. In addition, the outcome document of the multi-stakeholder consultation held by OHCHR and UNESCO in 2017<sup>10</sup> lists steps that may be taken by Member States for the safety of journalists. They include joint action, such as enhancing multilateral

<sup>4</sup> See Committee to Protect Journalists, “Journalists killed”. Available at <https://cpj.org/data/killed/> (accessed on 16 August 2019).

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018* (Paris, 2018), pp. 105 and 106.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 38, 45, 46, 117 and 148.

<sup>7</sup> In 2017, UNESCO recorded 11 women journalists killed. In 2016, 10 women journalists were recorded killed compared with 5 in 2012. The percentage of women among journalists killed amounted to 14 per cent in 2017, compared with 10 per cent in 2016 and 4 per cent in 2012. See UNESCO, document CI-18/COUNCIL-31/6/REV.2, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, document CI-18/COUNCIL-31/6/REV.2, pp. 10 and 11, and *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, pp. 17 and 63.

<sup>9</sup> See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Strengthening the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity: consultation outcome document, 16 August 2017”. Available from [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Journalists/OutcomeDocument.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Journalists/OutcomeDocument.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

engagement and coordination; giving priority to national implementation of the standard-setting framework of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity; and enhancing reporting by States, including in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations human rights bodies and monitoring by UNESCO of the judicial follow-up to killings. Steps may also include individual action, such as integrating the safety of journalists into national development frameworks under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and taking steps to ensure a safe and enabling environment for media freedom and access to information.

10. To further enhance multilateral engagement and coordination at the international level, States have engaged in joint action, including through Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, both at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and at UNESCO in Paris, which regularly meet and exchange experiences with the United Nations system and civil society. States have established a regional group of friends at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna.<sup>11</sup> Further, in June 2019, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, members of the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO, on the initiative and under the leadership of the Chair of the Group of Friends and in cooperation with the UNESCO Communication and Information Sector, organized a conference on combating online harassment of women journalists. In its contribution, Canada noted its organization, together with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the Global Conference for Media Freedom, which was held in London in July 2019.<sup>12</sup> In their contributions to the present report, States referred to their cooperation with the United Nations system, in particular UNESCO, to address the safety of journalists.<sup>13</sup> This includes, according to one State, the successful coordination among member States of UNESCO in the adoption by the UNESCO Executive Board at its 206th session of a decision on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, some States report on their active engagement at the Human Rights Council on the safety of journalists.<sup>15</sup>

11. A number of States are engaged at the regional level, including at the African Union through the regional working group on the safety of journalists.<sup>16</sup> Some States indicated that they engaged on the issue of the safety of journalists during their Chairmanship-in-Office of OSCE;<sup>17</sup> through their support for the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media;<sup>18</sup> and through financial support for OSCE initiatives pertaining to the safety of journalists.<sup>19</sup> Some States referred to their engagement through the Council of Europe platform to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists;<sup>20</sup> and as Chair of the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Media and Information Society.<sup>21</sup>

12. At the national level, many States referred to the existence of a legal framework for the protection of journalists, particularly with respect to freedom of expression, opinion and the media. Those rights are enshrined in and guaranteed by a number of

<sup>11</sup> Contributions of Austria, Canada, Sweden and Switzerland.

<sup>12</sup> Contribution of Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Contributions of Canada, Colombia, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Togo and Ukraine.

<sup>14</sup> Contribution of Austria.

<sup>15</sup> Contributions of Austria, Sweden and Switzerland.

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, "Strengthening national reporting mechanisms for the safety of journalists in Africa", 20 December 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Contributions of Austria and Ireland.

<sup>18</sup> Contributions of Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland.

<sup>19</sup> Contributions of Sweden and Switzerland.

<sup>20</sup> Contributions of France, Ireland and Ukraine.

<sup>21</sup> Contribution of Switzerland.

constitutions<sup>22</sup> and through laws or regulations protecting journalists and the freedom of expression and the media,<sup>23</sup> including their right to access information and to carry out their work without the threat of reprisals, interference or intimidation, and their digital rights.<sup>24</sup> A few States reported on laws and procedural rules pertaining to the protection of journalists and sources during court proceedings,<sup>25</sup> the prohibition of censorship,<sup>26</sup> the right to political asylum for journalists<sup>27</sup> and labour rights.<sup>28</sup> A number of States indicated that, pursuant to national legislation or legal policy, targeted journalists have the right to an effective investigation and accountability.<sup>29</sup>

13. A number of States mentioned that they had adopted national action plans on the safety of journalists,<sup>30</sup> including a prevention-oriented national plan.<sup>31</sup> Some States indicated that they had continued to identify threats to journalists and referred to strengthened protection and accountability mechanisms and measures.<sup>32</sup> These mechanisms and measures comprise the establishment of a working group for the legal protection of journalists;<sup>33</sup> police protection for journalists facing online and offline threats, including through a protection database or the nomination of a coordinator for protective action;<sup>34</sup> and measures for the protection of journalistic sources and the professional autonomy of journalists.<sup>35</sup>

14. Several States reported having enhanced reporting through the adoption of initiatives to monitor threats or attacks against journalists.<sup>36</sup> Such initiatives included a coordination centre for permanent monitoring within the Ministry of the Interior,<sup>37</sup> a study on the possibility of setting up a monitoring centre<sup>38</sup> and membership in regional monitoring organizations that are concerned with media freedom and respect for freedom of expression.<sup>39</sup>

15. Other steps mentioned to ensure a safe and enabling environment for journalists and access to information included the provision of training to journalists to promote independent journalism and on the protections under international humanitarian law,<sup>40</sup> special training for working in war zones<sup>41</sup> and the development of training on covering mass gatherings and large demonstrations.<sup>42</sup> They also included training for

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the contributions of Albania, Bahrain, Georgia, Lebanon, Qatar, Romania, Senegal and Slovakia.

<sup>23</sup> Contributions of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Italy, Lebanon and Senegal.

<sup>24</sup> Contributions of Bahrain, Georgia, Qatar, Romania, Serbia and Togo. On pending legislative proposals, see contributions of Bahrain and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>25</sup> Contribution of France.

<sup>26</sup> Contribution of Croatia.

<sup>27</sup> Contribution of Qatar.

<sup>28</sup> Contribution of Senegal.

<sup>29</sup> Contributions of Georgia, Ireland and Romania.

<sup>30</sup> Contributions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia and Sweden.

<sup>31</sup> Contribution of Sweden.

<sup>32</sup> Contributions of Colombia, El Salvador, France, Ireland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden and Togo.

<sup>33</sup> Contribution of Slovakia (a temporary working group).

<sup>34</sup> Contributions of El Salvador, France, Romania and Slovakia.

<sup>35</sup> Contributions of France and Serbia.

<sup>36</sup> Contributions of Colombia, El Salvador and France.

<sup>37</sup> Contribution of Italy.

<sup>38</sup> Contribution of Sweden.

<sup>39</sup> Contributions of France, Ireland and Ukraine.

<sup>40</sup> Contribution of Sweden.

<sup>41</sup> Contribution of the Russian Federation.

<sup>42</sup> Contribution of Romania.

judges,<sup>43</sup> information officers,<sup>44</sup> security forces<sup>45</sup> and police officers,<sup>46</sup> taking into account the gender dimensions of the safety of journalists.<sup>47</sup>

16. Some States stated that they supported national and international projects relating to the protection of journalists, including by supporting organizations working on the freedom of expression and collaborating with universities to develop support services and monitoring mechanisms.<sup>48</sup>

## B. United Nations

### Security Council and General Assembly

17. A number of my special representatives continued to raise the issue of the safety of journalists in their briefings to the Security Council (see [S/PV.7905](#) and [S/PV.8112](#)), and both the Council and the General Assembly continued to call upon all parties to conflict to comply fully with their obligations under international law (see Council resolution [2449 \(2018\)](#), eighth preambular paragraph) and to end restrictions to the freedom of expression and the harassment, intimidation and persecution of journalists and their families (see General Assembly resolutions [73/174](#), para. 12; [73/180](#), para. 2 (a) (v); [73/181](#), para. 15; and [73/182](#), para. 11).

### Human Rights Council and its mechanisms

18. On 27 September 2018, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution [39/6](#) on the safety of journalists. On 5 July 2018, the Council adopted resolution [38/5](#), which addresses discrimination and violence against women in digital contexts, including the impact on their freedom of expression (see Human Rights Council resolution [38/5](#), paras. 10 (g) and 11 (a)).

19. The Council further addressed the issues of harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, prosecution, torture, extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance of journalists in a variety of geographic contexts (see Human Rights Council resolutions [37/28](#), para. 1 (a); [37/29](#), para. 19; [37/31](#), para. 1; [37/32](#), paras. 19 and 21; [37/35](#), eleventh preambular paragraph; and [39/14](#), para. 2). I have continued to raise concerns, together with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, about the safety of journalists in various reports to the Council ([A/HRC/37/3](#), [A/HRC/37/3/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/37/3/Add.2](#), [A/HRC/37/23](#), [A/HRC/37/24](#), [A/HRC/37/45](#), [A/HRC/40/3/Add.1](#), [A/HRC/40/3/Add.2](#), [A/HRC/40/3/Add.3](#), [A/HRC/40/24](#), [A/HRC/40/45](#) and [A/HRC/40/47](#)). Violations of the rights of journalists are also being documented by international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions mandated by the Council and supported by OHCHR (see [A/HRC/30/48](#) and [A/HRC/30/48/Corr.1](#), paras. 51, 155–158 and 178 (j), [A/HRC/31/68](#), paras. 114 and 155 (g), [A/HRC/33/37](#), paras. 78 and 81, [A/HRC/36/54](#) and [A/HRC/36/54/Corr.1](#), paras. 15 and 52, [A/HRC/37/71](#) and [A/HRC/37/72](#), para. 44).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Contribution of France.

<sup>44</sup> Contribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina (pursuant to its national action plan for human rights education for journalists and media professionals, which the Council of Europe is ready to support).

<sup>45</sup> Contribution of Senegal (as part of the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity by OHCHR and UNESCO).

<sup>46</sup> Contributions of Georgia and Slovakia.

<sup>47</sup> Contributions of Senegal, Sweden and Switzerland.

<sup>48</sup> Contributions of El Salvador and Sweden.

<sup>49</sup> See also Marzuki Darusman, Chair of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, statement at the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 12 March 2018.

20. Special procedures mandate holders sent 15 communications to countries in 2017 in relation to the rights of journalists, 22 in 2018 and 10 between January and April 2019.<sup>50</sup>

21. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression has continued to report to the General Assembly on the rights of journalists, including on the ability of journalists to access information and report on international organizations (A/72/350), as well as on the impact of artificial intelligence on media diversity and independent voices (A/73/348). He has reported to the Human Rights Council, including on the role of digital access providers and the ability of private actors to inhibit journalists' work (A/HRC/35/22), as well as on the surveillance of journalists (A/HRC/41/35). In June 2019, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions published a report on the death of Jamal Khashoggi (A/HRC/41/CRP.1).

22. The issue of the safety of journalists continued to be raised in the context of the universal periodic review. In their specific recommendations, States, inter alia, recommended the release of journalists held for exercising their freedom of expression; the removal of libel and defamation as criminal offences; the investigation and prosecution of all allegations of the torture and ill-treatment of journalists; and the modification of legislation to repeal criminal responsibility for exercising freedom of expression, particularly online, and to protect journalists from harassment (see A/HRC/36/3, A/HRC/38/10, A/HRC/39/12, A/HRC/39/14, A/HRC/40/4, A/HRC/40/5, A/HRC/40/6, A/HRC/40/8, A/HRC/40/11, A/HRC/40/17, A/HRC/41/14 and A/HRC/41/17).

#### **Human rights treaty bodies**

23. During the reporting period, treaty bodies have continued to raise concerns and make recommendations about the safety of journalists in their concluding observations in the context of reviewing State reports. The Human Rights Committee expressed concern regarding reports that journalists are subjected to intimidation, harassment and ill-treatment as a result of the exercise of their profession (CCPR/C/MDG/CO/4).

24. The Committee against Torture similarly expressed deep concern about reports of journalists being subjected to threats, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, arbitrary detention, forced disappearance and killings, and recommended that necessary measures be taken to ensure investigation, accountability and effective remedies for victims (CAT/C/AFG/CO/2 and CAT/C/PAK/CO/1). Further, the Committee recommended that journalists be protected from reprisals for their work (CAT/C/AFG/CO/2).

<sup>50</sup> Communications related to the death of journalists (MLT 2/2017, IRQ 1/2017, BGD 1/2017, RUS 10/2018, SOM 1/2018, SVK 1/2018 and GHA 1/2019); the arrest, detention or prosecution of journalists (EGY 4/2017, OMN 1/2017, OTH 28/2017, MMR 7/2017, SOM 1/2018, EGY 10/2018, RWA 1/2018, BGD 7/2018, NGA 1/2018, EGY 1/2018, TUR 14/2018, TJK 1/2018, SDN 2/2019, IND 32/2018, MOZ 1/2019 and MMR 1/2019); attacks or use of force against journalists (JPN 7/2018, MNE 1/2018 and SDN 1/2019); targeting or intimidation of or threats or reprisals against journalists (AZE 5/2017, IRN 29/2017, PAK 6/2017, SDN 2/2017, RWA 1/2017, AZE 5/2017, TTO 1/2017, IND 26/2018, IND 10/2018, MOZ 1/2018, PAK 2/2019 and BLR 1/2019); the disappearance of journalists (SAU 12/2018, SAU 6/2019 and EGY 1/2019); emergency powers resulting in the dissolution of institutions, including media institutions (TUR 4/2017); the withholding of journalists' tweets at the State's request (OTH 70/2018); government interference in the investigation of the killing of a journalist (MLT 1/2018); and journalists in the Syrian Arab Republic (SYR 2/2018).

## United Nations Secretariat departments and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes

### *Advocacy and awareness-raising*

25. In 2018, UNESCO supported the African Union Commission in organizing an interregional forum on national mechanisms for the safety of journalists. In 2018 and 2019, UNESCO signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, formalizing their cooperation to promote freedom of expression and the media, as well as with the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States to strengthen freedom of expression and the media and the safety of journalists in West Africa.

26. OHCHR and UNESCO, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and country teams, advised on setting up and operating protection mechanisms, including in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda and the State of Palestine.

27. In June 2019, OHCHR organized two informal consultations on the safety of journalists with UNESCO and civil society organizations, on the one hand, and representatives of several Member States, on the other hand. The participants discussed how to effectively prevent or respond to attacks on the rights of journalists and considered responses within the United Nations system and at the regional, national and local levels.

28. UNESCO has continued to raise awareness on threats faced by women journalists, online and offline, including through workshops and conferences on the online harassment of women journalists under the theme "Journalists too – women journalists speak out".

29. UNESCO organized dedicated sessions during the celebration of World Press Freedom Day in 2018 and 2019. The main World Press Freedom Day event, held in Accra on 3 May 2018, was accompanied by events in more than 80 countries. In 2019, the flagship World Press Freedom Day celebration was held in Addis Ababa from 1 to 3 May. UNESCO and the Department of Global Communications of the Secretariat organized the observance of World Press Freedom Day 2019 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Many United Nations actors organized and contributed to over 100 events worldwide for the Day.

30. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) also worked with media organizations. In support of chapter IV, section J, of the Beijing Platform for Action, on women and the media, UN-Women facilitated the "Step it Up for Gender Equality" media compact, a pro bono alliance of media organizations that are committed to playing an active role in advancing gender issues and the Sustainable Development Goals. The news media outlets are implementing the compact by promoting gender equality in the newsroom and placing a focus on covering gender equality issues.

### *Monitoring and reporting*

31. In 2018, under Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.10.1, OHCHR, UNESCO and the International Labour Organization released a global count of killings of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists (see [E/2018/64](#)). The *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019* contains the data for killings between 1 January 2015 and 31 October 2018.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.6.



32. Reporting by UNESCO includes the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017–2018* and the 2018 report of the Director General of UNESCO on the safety of journalists and the danger of impunity. UN-Women tracks global progress on chapter IV, section J, of the Beijing Platform for Action through an international study that takes stock of the status of the media industry by means of the Global Media Monitoring Project.

*Training and development of tools*

33. OHCHR, UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UN-Women, as well as the Department of Global Communications of the Secretariat, have conducted various training activities and contributed to the development of tools in this regard.

34. In November 2018, OHCHR organized a study visit workshop for media professionals from eight States in the Middle East and North Africa. The workshop covered topics such as the international human rights mechanisms, the universal periodic review and reporting on human rights in the media in the framework of the mechanisms, as well as how to address stereotyping and silencing. In partnership with the Association of Journalists of North Macedonia and the United Nations Development Programme, OHCHR trained journalists in North Macedonia on non-discriminatory reporting about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. In 2019, OHCHR co-organized two workshops on the media and the rule of law in Nouakchott and held a training session in Rabat on legal advocacy before courts in cases relating to freedom of expression for Moroccan lawyers.

35. UNESCO introduced safety modules in training for media professionals, including on conflict-sensitive reporting in South Sudan; on media management in Jordan; on covering elections in Cameroon, Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania and Pakistan; on fact-checking in Senegal; and on investigative journalism and other training for media professionals in Fiji, Lebanon, Tajikistan and Yemen. UNESCO launched a project to promote the safety of women journalists in India, Mali, Senegal and Sri Lanka. A specific training session on digital safety for women journalists was organized in Central America.

36. UNESCO produced manuals in several languages, including the latest edition of the *Safety Guide for Journalists: a Handbook for Reporters in High-risk Environments*, prepared with Reporters Without Borders. With the support of Switzerland,<sup>52</sup> UNESCO also launched a massive open online course for the judiciary in Africa on journalists' safety and freedom of expression. Developed in partnership with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, its English edition involved 900 justice system workers from 42 African countries.

37. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime supported the establishment of the Cell Norbert Zongo for Investigative Journalism in West Africa, as well as the launch of its online platform in May 2018. The Cell Norbert Zongo is a project for data collection and cross-border investigation that brings together over 50 journalists from West Africa and works towards strengthening the capacities of investigative journalists. The work of this network resulted in the publication of over 45 investigative reports since 2018, exposing corruption cases, illicit financial flows, organized crime and trafficking, under the hashtag #WestAfricaLeaks. Some stories triggered the interest of national investigative bodies.

38. In the context of the special information programme on the question of Palestine mandated by the General Assembly, the Department of Global Communications holds the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, which was held

<sup>52</sup> Contribution of Switzerland.

most recently in September 2018 in Moscow, and the annual training programme for Palestinian journalists. It worked with the New America Open Technology Institute, based in Washington, D.C., to organize a workshop for Palestinian journalists focusing on digital safety and online protection.

#### *Coordination*

39. In 2017, the Secretary-General re-established an enhanced United Nations network of focal points, co-chaired by UNESCO and OHCHR, as foreseen in the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. The network works towards increasing awareness and prevention actions within the United Nations system and towards promoting enhanced engagement with regional bodies.

### **C. Regional initiatives**

40. In November 2017, the African Union adopted the Addis Ababa resolution on the creation of an African Union working group on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in Africa. The working group's mandate is informed by the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and includes supporting and promoting the safety of journalists, tackling impunity and encouraging African Union member States to monitor and condemn attacks on journalists. The African Union partnered with UNESCO to develop the working group into an operational, multi-stakeholder framework<sup>53</sup> comprising, inter alia, representatives of Governments, the Federation of African Journalists, African regional journalists' associations, media owners and media development partners and civil society organizations.

41. In its 2018 annual report, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights noted with extreme concern the increase in violence against journalists, their disappearance and orchestrated attacks against them by States.<sup>54</sup> The report highlighted the reluctance of journalists to investigate and disseminate information of great public interest owing to the risk of reprisals and recommended that States adopt mechanisms and measures to ensure the security of those exercising their freedom of expression and investigate and prosecute violations against journalists. The Office released a thematic report on women journalists in 2019, highlighting the specific risks they face.<sup>55</sup>

42. In December 2018, in its decision No. 3/18 on the safety of journalists, the Ministerial Council of OSCE called on participating States to fully implement their OSCE commitments and international obligations with respect to freedom of expression and media freedom.<sup>56</sup>

43. The Council of Europe published a report on freedom of expression in 2018,<sup>57</sup> detailing the surge in the vilification and prosecution of journalists in some countries and an uptick in the number of attacks on the physical safety and integrity of journalists. The partners of the Council of Europe platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists published its annual report for 2019, entitled "Democracy at risk: threats and attacks against media freedom in Europe". The report underlines the rise in attacks on journalists' physical safety and integrity and in death

<sup>53</sup> UNESCO, "Strengthening national reporting mechanisms for the safety of journalists in Africa", 20 December 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, document OEA/Ser.L/V/II Doc. 210/18 v.2.

<sup>55</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, document OEA/SER.L/V/II CIDH/RELE/INF.20/18.

<sup>56</sup> See OSCE, document MC.DEC/3/18.

<sup>57</sup> Council of Europe, "Freedom of expression in 2018", April 2019.

threats, the normalization of impunity, repressive legislation and the arbitrary detention of journalists.<sup>58</sup> In June 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved a report by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights on the assassination of the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, which calls upon the national authorities to establish an independent public inquiry within three months.<sup>59</sup>

## D. Civil society

### Advocacy

44. Civil society organizations and coalitions, including through the creation of the International Civil Society Coalition on the Safety of Journalists, reportedly increased external coordination of their advocacy, especially in relation to the United Nations mechanisms, with a view to achieving change at the national level.

45. According to their contributions,<sup>60</sup> organizations, including Article 19, IFEX and International Media Support, provide input or coordinate advocacy in relation to resolutions of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council on the safety of journalists.

46. To assist civil society organizations in their advocacy, Article 19 said that it had created an online platform, the “Reporting Attacks on Expression” network, to coordinate the submission of communications to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council.

47. Civil society organizations and coalitions such as Article 19, IFEX and the Pakistan Press Foundation reportedly engaged in advocacy or supported and collaborated with partners in relation to reviews by the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Civil society organizations are working towards standardizing and mainstreaming the issue of the safety of journalists and accountability in all universal periodic review processes. According to contributions received, different partnerships, collaborations and support involving, inter alia, Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Free Press Unlimited, IFEX, International Media Support, the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, the Digital Rights Foundation, the Pakistan Press Foundation and national and international partners led to joint submissions, advocacy, consultations and contributions on media freedom, the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in relation to a number of universal periodic reviews.

48. According to contributions, civil society organizations and coalitions such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, IFEX, Free Press Unlimited and the Pakistan Press Foundation conduct and coordinate advocacy in relation to the reporting by States on the safety of journalists and impunity to the Director General of UNESCO, including by engaging with members of the Groups of Friends and with local partners.

<sup>58</sup> Council of Europe, “Democracy at risk: threats and attacks against media freedom in Europe”, February 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, document No. 14906.

<sup>60</sup> The International Civil Society Coalition on the Safety of Journalists submitted joint contributions reporting on the activities of individual civil society organizations taking into account the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

**National implementation mechanisms**

49. International Media Support stated that, in cooperation with regional and national partners, it continued to develop national safety mechanisms, encompassing a formal State-led system and/or an informal civil society-led system. The mechanisms include reactive measures, such as assistance to journalists in distress, and preventive measures, such as advocacy, training and a focus on ending impunity through effective judicial measures. Over the past two years, International Media Support has also reportedly been developing new and comprehensive safety action plans in a range of countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines and Somalia.

50. According to contributions, civil society organizations have developed mechanisms such as a cyberharassment helpline providing legal assistance and digital security support, developed by the Digital Rights Foundation and operated with the help of international partners. International Media Support stated that it worked with national partners in Afghanistan, where, since 2009, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee is said to have established a comprehensive educational, physical, psychological and legal support programme for women journalists. The programme includes the appointment of female coordinators on the safety of women journalists in Kabul and in Afghan provinces.

51. The Pakistan Press Foundation stated that, as a result of advocacy, the Sindh Information Department had appointed a focal point responsible for monitoring crimes against journalists and media houses. According to Article 19, coordination among civil society organizations and government institutions resulted in the creation of focal points on the safety of journalists within law enforcement, the judiciary and the Government in Kenya. The Human Rights Network for Journalists – Uganda said that it had formed a national working group, which it co-convenes with the National Union of Journalists in Uganda under the auspices of UNESCO.

**Training and development of tools**

52. Civil society organizations, at times in partnership with United Nations agencies, conduct training for the judiciary, members of law enforcement and parliamentarians. Under the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and in coordination with UNESCO, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported having held training in Colombia, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia. International Media Support cooperates with a range of national and regional partners to improve media practices and coverage in the media of elections in Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, with an approach based on collaboration between the media, the police and government electoral entities coupled with a focus on the safety of journalists, election media monitoring and fact-checking.

53. In Pakistan, the Digital Rights Foundation said that it conducted workshops with female journalists regarding the specific gendered threats that they face, and held capacity-building sessions and developed partnerships with media houses in relation to digital security and the development of an anti-harassment code of conduct. In Nepal, Freedom Forum said that it had made recommendations to media houses on the safety of women journalists.

54. Associations of media employers also provided training on the safety of journalists, including the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, which, in collaboration with the ACOS Alliance (A Culture Of Safety Alliance), developed a news organizations safety self-assessment as a resource helping news outlets to review and improve their current safety practices and protocols.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew Heslop (World Association of News Publishers), “Launching the news organizations safety self-assessment”, 28 March 2019.

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European Broadcasting Union regularly organized hostile environment security training for media staff and supported the creation of a network of security officers among its member media outlets.

#### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

**55. During the reporting period, progress in the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity has been made by the United Nations, States and civil society and media organizations, including at the regional and national levels. Actors have scaled up the coordination of activities, including advocacy, monitoring and reporting, training and the development of tools, and have cooperated in standard-setting and on safety and accountability mechanisms. International and regional intergovernmental bodies and mechanisms and civil society addressed the safety of journalists in particular States and individual situations.**

**56. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes should continue to engage actively in the implementation of the Plan of Action and assess how further impact can be achieved through their actions. The United Nations should continue to integrate the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in its strategies at the country level, including through integration into the development plans under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**

**57. States are strongly encouraged to continue to develop and to assist other States in developing national action plans on the safety of journalists, taking into account the gender dimensions, and to integrate the safety of journalists into national sustainable development strategies under the 2030 Agenda. States are also encouraged to strengthen national institutions and collaboration with civil society organizations, drawing on internationally agreed standards and methodology, to collect data on attacks against journalists and to ensure an enabling environment for them to perform their work.**

**58. Civil society organizations are encouraged to continue their engagement with the United Nations and States and to pursue their activities, with particular attention to women journalists.**