

ATUMUN SOMMERCAMP 2025

United Nations Human Rights Council

UNHRC



STUDY GUIDE

Safeguarding journalists

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Welcome from the secretariat

Esteemed delegates,

We are delighted to welcome you to this year's Sommercamp MUN, and the United Nations Human Rights Council!

We are looking forward to discussing how journalists best can be safeguarded throughout the world. Journalists and journalism is under pressure from multiple sides, both physically in areas of conflict but freedom of the press is also increasingly lowered in parts of the world. We are looking forward to establishing how journalists can best be safeguarded from state- as well as nonstate-actors.

This study guide will provide an introduction to the committee's topic - Safeguarding journalists - as well as a quick overview of the key issues regarding this topic.

We do, however, strongly encourage you to do further research to fully understand and comprehend the various aspects of this topic. Furthermore, doing your own research will make sure you are as well prepared as possible for the session. Feel free to utilise the resources provided in the Further Reading section.

We hope you find this study guide helpful, and are as excited for the MUN sessions as we are. If you have any questions regarding the committee, the topic, or a similar matter, we will be in the Sommercamp Facebook groups, where you are more than welcome to post your questions. We will also be answering questions at atumunsekretariat@gmail.com.

We are looking forward to meeting all of you and to a wonderful debate!

Sincerely, your secretariat,

Dicte Havmøller Møberg, Lucca Dybtved Kjærgaard, Nicoline Meng Aagaard Andersen, and Simon Mosgaard Jørgensen

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Abbreviations

NGO - Non Governmental Organisation

OHCHR - The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN - United Nations

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNHRC - United Nations Human Rights Council

RSF - Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters Without Borders)

SLAPP - Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation

Key definitions

Journalism - *“the work of collecting, writing, and publishing or broadcasting news stories and articles”*[Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.).]

Journalist - A person performing journalism.

Freedom of the press - The right to perform journalism without being controlled by external actors.

Introduction to the committee

The United Nations Human Rights council (UNHRC) was established by the UN General Assembly in 2006, as a replacement of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR¹) from 1946[UNHRC, n.d.-a], and is the main intergovernmental body within the UN responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. Thus providing a multilateral forum to address human rights violations and country situations. Furthermore, the UNHRC responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations on how to better implement human rights.

The UNHRC consists of a rotation of 47 Member States elected directly and individually by the majority of the 193 states of the UN General Assembly. The council benefits from substantive, technical and secretarial support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)[UNHRC, n.d.-d] and operates with different mechanisms and entities such as; The Universal Periodic Review (UPR); which calls for each Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records, The Advisory committee; which serves as the committees “think-tank” and helps set its directions on thematic issues, and the Complaint Procedure; which allows individuals, groups and NGOs to bring forth human rights violations to be addressed by the UNHRC[UNHRC, n.d.-b].

¹ The acronym UNHRC is presently used for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee.

Introduction to the topic

Journalists are present in conflict areas all over the world. Ensuring pictures and stories from the affected areas are spread around the world. This makes them a powerful tool in promoting different narratives and perspectives of events. The threat of violence is present, not only in areas of conflict, but in non-violent zones too. Censorship and harassment are some of the threats against freedom of the press.

Since 1993, 1600 journalists have been killed in the line of duty. The attacks against journalists primarily affect people who belong to minorities. In nine out of ten cases, the murder of a journalist remains unsolved[United Nations, n.d.].

In 2012, the UN made the UN Plan Of Action On The Safety Of Journalists And The Issue Of Impunity (henceforth “the UN Plan of Action”)[United Nations, 2012] and welcomed it in the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and UNESCO[UNHRC, n.d.-c]. The UN Plan of Action aims to prevent, protect and prosecute. Other councils have also been involved in the works to promote and raise awareness of the issue. UNESCO works to promote the safety of journalists and combat impunity of those who attack them by training judicial actors. Investigative corruption and human rights violations all put journalists’ lives at risk. It not only tries to silence them or make them report fake news, but also puts the investigation into their murders at risk.

Freedom of the press is an important tool to combat ignorance and fake news. How we view the world is heavily influenced by the information we have. Ensuring journalists can provide an (close to) objective world view is crucial. An example of what can happen if misinformation is spread among the general public was seen in 2020 with Covid-19. The *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* published an article detailing the consequences of misinformation regarding Covid-19. In three months, almost 6000 people had been hospitalised worldwide, and at least 800 had died, due to misinformation regarding the pandemic[UNESCO, n.d.-a].

The current state of journalists’ security

Despite progress in journalists' security, the issue still remains highly relevant. The UN is far from the only actor interested in furthering the safety of journalists. Both state and non-state actors (NGO's) have an interest in promoting the safety and security of journalists worldwide [Global Investigative Journalism Network, 2022]. Global Journalist Security is one in many organizations who, like the UNHRC, promotes human rights. They contribute by safety training and consulting journalists as well as human rights defenders and NGO's who operate in hostile areas [*Our Approach – GJS*, n.d.].

The threat is not only present in areas with unrest or countries with censorship. On the 5th of July 2021, Dutch journalist Peter De Vries was shot and killed on a busy street in Amsterdam. Nine men were charged in connection with the murder[Associated Press, 2024], however, this is rarely the case for murdered journalists.

Murder is not the only risk faced by journalists. Prosecution and imprisonment are also used as a tool by several states to silence critics. In April 2025, four journalists were convicted of links to an anti-corruption group in Russia. The journalists themselves pleaded not guilty, stating that they were only doing their jobs as journalists. “*The closed-door trial was part of a crackdown on dissent that*

has reached an unprecedented scale since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022."[Associated Press, 2025]

The first resolution to protect journalists was written at The UN General Assembly in 1970. The resolution specifically wanted a solution for protecting journalists in areas of armed conflict. As it states: *"Being aware, however, that these provisions do not cover categories of journalists engaged in dangerous missions and do not correspond to their present needs. Convinced of the need for an additional humanitarian International instrument to ensure the better protection of journalists engaged in dangerous missions, particularly in areas where an armed conflict is taking place"*[Protection of journalists engaged in dangerous missions in areas of armed conflict, 1971]. The provisions mentioned are articles from the Geneva Convention regarding humanitarian needs in armed conflict. The resolution's main goal was to start working on a solution and a future resolution regarding the protection of journalists in areas of conflict.

In 2012 the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was implemented, aiming at strengthening worldwide peace, democracy, and sustainable development by creating a free and safe environment for journalists. The Plan includes six main actions which includes raising awareness, standard setting and policy making, monitoring and reporting, capacity building, research, and coalition building. The main point of the plan is to raise awareness where the focus is to make the problem more known for the public and stakeholders. One of the ways the plan spreads awareness is through international days such as World Press Freedom Day.

The action standard setting and policy making aims to ensure that both national and regional bodies ensure the safety of journalists and take the right steps towards freedom of speech. This is done through stakeholders that can bring governments and the like together to discuss policies and standard setting. Monitoring and reporting are to keep track of the worldwide state of press freedom and to make it possible to investigate attacks and the like on journalists. The plan's action for capacity building involves training for journalists, security forces, etc. to act within the legal frameworks and assist the government to develop favourable frameworks for freedom of speech. Research is also in the plan, including the need for investigating and identifying solutions and creating opportunities for journalists in areas of danger. Lastly, the coalition building invites the creation of a safe environment for journalists through coalitions between stakeholders and the UN to better implement the full Plan of Action.[UNESCO, n.d.-b]

With the war in Ukraine and a new need to emphasise the safeguarding of journalists, UNHRC implemented a new resolution on the tenth anniversary of the UN Plan of Action that further emphasised on the prevention, protection, and prosecution that further safeguards journalists and gives them further access to justice. This resolution further reinforced the framework from the UN Plan of Action.[UNESCO, 2021]

Timeline of events

1970 - The UN General Assembly Resolution on the Protection of journalists engaged in dangerous missions in areas of armed conflict.

2012 - The UN Plan of Action.

July 2021 - Dutch journalist Peter De Vries murdered.

2022 - The UNHRC adopts a new resolution in 2022.

April 2025 - Four journalists convicted of corruption in Russia.

Key issues

Protection of journalists in areas of conflict

Protection of journalists in areas of conflict is one of the major issues regarding the safety of journalists. Journalists are protected as civilians in the Geneva Convention although are also acknowledged as “*persons who accompany the armed forces without actually being members thereof.*”[*Protection of Journalists*, n.d.] In the Protocol 1 amendment to the Geneva Convention, journalists in dangerous areas are explicitly acknowledged as civilians so long as they do not take any actions against this status, such as taking up arms. This protocol also provides an identity card which may be issued to journalists attesting their status as such. Although, this does not create a special status for journalists, as the increase in the number of specially recognised statuses and persons holding such tends to devalue the already existing statuses[*Protection of Journalists*, n.d.].

In spite of these explicit protections in the Geneva Convention several journalists have been killed in areas of conflict in recent years, UNESCO reports that at least 42 journalists were killed in areas of conflict in 2024. This figure has been alarmingly high in the past few years compared to the decade or so prior[UNESCO, 2024]. By far the most prominent location for these killings was the UN observer state Palestine, with 18 out of the 42 killings happening there. According to some sources, this number might be much higher[*Explore CPJ's Database of Attacks on the Press*, n.d.; *Israel's War on Gaza Deadliest Conflict Ever for Journalists, Says Report*, 2025]. It is evident that journalists are not always granted the protection they deserve. The UN could play a significant role in addressing this issue by ensuring such protections are upheld and by working to strengthen or expand existing safeguards.

Economic and Political Threats

One of the growing and often underestimated threats to press freedom is the economic factor. This poses a particular risk to local journalism, which is more susceptible to economic challenges than larger media organisations. The economic challenge forces news outlets to rely more on advertising revenue, in turn forcing them to create so-called “clickbait-y” journalism in order to gain more online traffic and to shy away from politically controversial stories that might scare off potential advertisers. This challenge is only increased with governmental defunding, e.g. the American government’s abrupt end to funding for the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

The funding cut has affected multiple newsrooms such as *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* and *The Voice of America* - effectively depriving over 400 million people worldwide of access to reliable news information. Defunding of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has also proven a threat to many news outlets worldwide [*RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025*, 2025]. Furthermore, the American government barring certain news outlets such as the Associated Press from White House events can be considered a political threat to the freedom of the press [Manuel & Martin, 2025]. Choosing to grant fewer interviews to journalists while favouring politically biased podcasts

and influencers, who are not held accountable for the accuracy of their reporting, undermines the foundation of independent and critical journalism [Nielsen, 2024].

Politically based selection of which news outlets to support and allow access to such events is a trend seen worldwide. In countries such as Hungary and Georgia, the press is highly regulated by the authorities through government-controlled regulatory agencies as well as through harassment and intimidation of critical journalists[*Georgia | RSF, 2025; Hungary | RSF, 2025*]. In countries like Lebanon, India, Armenia, and Bulgaria, the main funding of many outlets is conditional and from persons close to the political or business world, which can be considered a threat to the impartiality of news outlets.[*RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025, 2025*]

Political Persecution and Surveillance of Journalists

In recent years, almost all countries have increased surveillance on their populations - this is argued to be in order to guarantee increased security for both citizens and the nation. However, it also makes it possible for authorities to gain insight into the political opinions and actions of citizens. In Vietnam, media outlets are strictly controlled by the authorities, and the only source for non-government-controlled news is social media and independent journalists. However, many journalists experience legal persecution as a result of sharing news and opinions online[*Vietnam | RSF, 2025*]. Similarly, China has a strict governmental hold on the country's media industry and has imprisoned more journalists than any other country. In China, critical journalists also often experience surveillance and harassment [*China | RSF, 2025*].

As of December 2024, at least 361 journalists worldwide were imprisoned [Getz, 2025]. Some countries will argue that this is to protect their citizens from polarisation and “fake news” - other countries again, will argue that this news is not “fake”, just critical of the government. The latter also encourages freedom of the press and allows a larger diversity of opinions in society; democratic values that some organisations claim are then counteracted by the increased surveillance [Rigaud, 2024].

Criminal and Civil Infringements on Journalistic Freedoms

It is not only state actors who commit crimes against journalists and journalistic freedoms. There are also a number of other actors that are known to commit such crimes and can, in many areas, present a greater threat to freedom of the press than the state. One prominent example is the criminal organisations in Mexico, where at least 141 journalists were killed between 1992 and 2024, with at least 61 deaths having a direct relation to their work [‘Killings of Journalists under State Protection in Mexico’, 2024]. Furthermore, 8 journalists were killed between 2017 and 2024 whilst enrolled in the Mexican government programme to protect journalists. A similar profile can be seen in Colombia, where 148 journalists were killed between 1986 and 2024, and only 20% of these killings resulted in convictions [Kasper, 2024].

Criminals killing journalists represent a severe threat to freedom of the press and risks cutting areas seeped in crime and civil conflict off from news coverage. Thus, only worsening transparency and responsibility. Another issue challenging press freedom is the actions of private individuals, often through the legal system. One of the most prominent actions being, the SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), a lawsuit leveraged by a powerful corporation, organisation, or individual to silence and harm those critical to them [Verza, 2018]. Often, the goal of a SLAPP is not

to actually gain conviction or damages, but instead to burden their target with a lengthy and expensive court case. Some countries have enacted legislation to protect against such frivolous lawsuits, but many still have not. This is especially the case in many European countries. A study found that one of the major challenges of such lawsuits is the so-called “chilling effect” which causes the target of the lawsuit and other journalists to become more fearful and act with more caution [Kerševan & Poler, 2024]. It should be no surprise that SLAPPs mainly harm independent and smaller-scale news organisations rather than large organisations that can more readily afford the cost of fighting such lawsuits.

Major bloc positions

Countries in support of further protection of journalists by the international community

The countries in support of journalists receiving more protection in areas of conflict are often concerned by censorship of the media. The countries in this bloc, such as Iceland, France, Germany, and the Netherlands [Government of Iceland, 2024], generally look positively on an intervention by the international community in areas of conflict. Looking at the laws governing journalistic freedom and protection in these countries, they have few to no restrictions on their media, and often have a government that is transparent with its actions through media coverage [*Index | RSF*, n.d.].

Countries who believe the protection of journalists is a national agenda

This bloc is made up of countries who do not see the further protection of journalists as a priority. They see the protection of journalists as an affair of the sovereign state, one that requires no intervention from the rest of the global community. The governments of these countries, such as the USA [*Trump’s War on the Press*, 2025], Vietnam, Kenya, China, Algeria, and DR Congo, often have a tighter hold on media censorship laws [*Index | RSF*, n.d.], wishing to control the spreading of misinformation and political polarisation. As a result, they resist external involvement in what they see as domestic media governance.

Questions a resolution could answer

- How can journalists be safeguarded in areas of conflicts?
 - Should journalists be prevented from going to areas of conflict?
 - Can journalists be protected in areas of conflict?
 - How can journalists be better protected in accordance with the Geneva Convention?
 - Should it be changed to better reflect modern society?
- How can freedom of the press be ensured?
 - Can we ensure no one is forced to provide a false story?
- How can journalists be protected in non-conflict areas?
 - From the civilian population.
 - From companies and non-state actors.
 - From state actors.
 - Hereunder, how can minorities in the profession be protected from discriminatory actions?

Further Reading

These sources are recommended by our wonderful writers as being important and of great use if you wish to do some further research.

10 recommendations for strengthening press freedom:

<https://ipi.media/strengthening-press-freedom-at-home-and-abroad-10-recommendations-for-the-worlds-democracies/>

2022 UNHRC resolution regarding the protection of journalist

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3992428?v=pdf>

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