Addis Ababa Resolution on the Creation of AU Working Group on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in Africa

15 November 2017

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Background

There exist many normative frameworks and instruments on safety of journalists and end to impunity at the international, regional and national levels. These include resolutions, declarations, conventions, general comments and other statements related to the protection of journalists, which are yet to be translated into tangible impact in reducing the crimes against journalists and the end to impunity in Africa.

In spite of many efforts by stakeholders to address safety of journalists concerns, media violations have increased at an alarming rate worldwide. In Africa, post-conflict and countries in conflict are most affected.

According to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012, crimes against journalists are multifaceted and cannot be addressed by a single institution. The Plan advocates for a coordinated, strategic approach to tackling these issues. A recent multi-stakeholder consultation process to review implementation of the Plan highlighted the need to translate the progress achieved at the international level into national policies and practices. One of the concrete actions proposed to Member States to achieve this is the setting up of national mechanisms on the safety of journalists. The stakeholders included in such mechanisms can include representatives of the three branches of government (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary), associations of journalists and media workers, lawyers associations, civil society/human rights defenders, journalism training and research institutions, media regulatory bodies, NGOs, INGOs, relevant United Nations Agencies, Programmes and Funds, bilateral and international media development partners and other friends of the media. The scope of action of such mechanisms can be to **prevent** violence against journalists, **protect** journalists in danger and **prosecute** the perpetrators, and monitor developments in these areas.

Such monitoring is also relevant within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 16 requires all countries in Africa and globally, to

demonstrate progress in ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms, which include the right to freedom of expression. Safety of journalists is explicitly recognised as an indicator of progress. In addition, to realise the objectives of Agenda 2063 - The Africa We Want, an African continent that has the capability to realise her full potential in development, culture and peace and to establish flourishing, inclusive and prosperous societies, securing the safety of journalists and the health of the media sector in Africa is essential.

Challenges

At the African continent level, the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) resolutions relating to the protection and safety of journalists remain largely unimplemented. These instruments and provisions are contained in section XI of the "Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa" of October 2002, the "Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and Media Professionals in Africa" of 12 May 2011 of the ACHPR, and also in the Pan-African Parliament's Resolution on "Press Freedom for Development and Governance: Need for Reform" of 18 October 2012, Section XII on the Protection of Journalists.

There is also insufficient coordination between media stakeholders with only pocket and uncoordinated interventions at the national, regional or continental levels, many times only focusing on one element that relates to safety of journalists. Greater involvement of the three arms of government as well as law enforcement actors is also needed to ensure sustainable protection of journalists and prosecution of the perpetrators of physical, psychological and/or digital attacks against all media workers.

Additionally, more efforts could be made to strive towards progressive legal and regulatory frameworks that promote a preventative environment that enables freedom of expression, press freedom, access to information and safety of journalists.

Further capacity development is also required to strengthen journalism education and training institutions, as well as associations. Continuous support to journalists can help ensure that they are well equipped to undertake safety measures and adhere to high professional standards. There is a need to support the institutionalization of safety of journalists training in Africa, including newsrooms policies and protocols, rather than ad hoc workshops that many times are not sustainable and have little impact on the ground.

Proposed way forward

To meet these challenges and ensure the issue of safety of journalists in Africa is addressed comprehensively, the African media meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 15 November 2017 under the umbrella of the Federation of the African Journalists has recommended the following:

1. Adopt the 14 November 2017 Nairobi Declaration on establishment of National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists in African countries as step towards the implementation of the relevant resolutions and declarations on safety of journalists, and of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

2. National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists should comprise of representatives from the three branches of government (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary), associations of journalists and media workers, media owners, lawyers associations, civil society/human rights defenders, journalism training and research institutions, media regulatory bodies, NGOs, INGOs, relevant United Nations Agencies, Programmes and Funds, bilateral and international media development partners and other friends of the media with each contributing within their mandate and respective roles and authorities.

3. Request the African Union to establish a Working Group on Safety of Journalists to be convened by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR); the Working Group shall be comprised of the following representatives:
   (i) Representatives of Government acting as focal persons on the safety of journalists and to the issue of impunity (as has been requested by UNESCO in various countries).
   (ii) Representatives of the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ).
   (iii) Representatives of African regional journalists' associations.
   (iv) Representatives of media owners and media development partners with the mandate of promoting media freedom and safety of Journalists in Africa such as UNESCO.
   (v) Representatives of the civil society organisations/human rights defenders on the African continent.

Expected role of the African Union Working Group on Safety of Journalists and Ending impunity
1. Support and promote the safety of journalists and tackle impunity for crimes committed against them on the African continent through encouraging Member States to establish

national mechanisms, drawing on multi-stakeholder co-operation, for securing the safety of journalists.

2. Draw attention of African Union Member States to the indicator for the safety of journalists within the 2030 Development Agenda, and encourage them to monitor and report accordingly.

3. Encourage African Union Member States to monitor and condemn attacks on journalists, and ensure follow-up on implementation of the relevant declarations, resolutions and protocols on safety of journalists and end to impunity.

4. Integrate journalists' safety in Africa as a standing agenda item in the relevant AU commissions and summits.