WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2015
CONCEPT NOTE

Let Journalism Thrive!

Towards Better Reporting, Gender Equality, & Media Safety in the Digital Age

World Press Freedom Day 2015
Jointly Organized by UNESCO and the Government of Latvia
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Dates: 2-4 May 2015

Overview

"The free flow of ideas by word and image"--70 years ago, the founders of UNESCO crafted these elegant words into the Organization's Constitution. They put great store on the need for information and communication within and between nations.

UNESCO was created at the end of World War II, at a time when it was recognized that a controlled media could be used to indoctrinate populations for war. World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) 2015 falls in the 70th anniversary year of UNESCO. It is therefore an opportunity for the Organization and all its partners to reaffirm its vision of free expression as essential for peace, and its relevance to journalism in current times.

The year is also one in which the UN will adopt the Sustainable Development Agenda, raising the question of media's relation to the objectives of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and its potential contribution to Goal 16, to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Significantly, 2015 also marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which concerns gender equality in society and the media.

Relevant to this broad backdrop, WPFD 2015 will examine three inter-related issues:

* free and independent journalism, and quality reporting, in the context of the digital age. This subject covers how media concentration impacts on media's role, self-regulation issues, the challenges to investigative journalism, hate-speech and Media and Information Literacy.

* The issues of women in media management and portrayal of women in the media. .

* The safety of journalists, including in hotspots, and the protection of journalists' sources from digital disclosure.

Better Reporting and Independent Journalism in the Digital Age

In some ways, the digital age has helped move us closer to the goals of independent, free, and pluralistic media environment as stated in the landmark Windhoek Declaration of 1991 which is also the origin of WPFD. On the flip side, the ease of individual publishing has also created more fragmented audiences, more partisan reporting and uneven standards of accuracy, and verification amongst the array of actors now contributing to journalism. In many instances, the proliferation of online news is being met with increased blocking, filtering, and licensing or registration requirements for those wishing to publish.

Today, there is also the specter of private censorship, and privatized censorship through Internet intermediary companies. Although businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, the Internet intermediary companies do not always uphold online freedom of expression in operating across a range of jurisdictions, circumstances, technologies, and business models.

The growing influence of commercialization and concentration of media enterprise ownership, often in a way that lacks transparency, also impacts upon the independence and quality of journalism on all platforms. Studies have found that governments and politicians continue to have too much influence over who owns, operates and regulates the media and that many media markets continue to exist with monopolistic practices, corruption, or non-transparent methods. As a result, the public is given only the same limited number of ideas, views, and facts that are repackaged and recycled. In this context, self-regulation can provide a defence for the integrity of journalism, but it is uneven. Furthermore, it exists today in juxtaposition to systems operated by Internet intermediary companies which do not come from a freedom of expression background, and it is unclear which sector has the optimum model for self-regulation.

All these features add up to pressure on independent journalism and on its quality. While there is no universal set of criteria for quality journalism, the subject can be assessed in terms of adherence to professional standards and integrity, including the independence of the journalism in service of public interest. Indicators of such quality may possibly be numbers of awards, audience share, the resources available for newsroom, audience responses and participation, and self-assessments. What is clear, however, is that investigative journalism, in particular, relies on the qualities of accurate, verified, in-depth, and critical reporting on matters of special public concern. This is work which often requires long and difficult research to bring key information to light. The business basis for such quality journalism is increasingly coming under stress.

The issue of better news reporting is also being challenged by complexities in the reporting on hate and hate speech. Compounding this are user-generated comments, whereby hatred is being expressed directly on the media's platforms, often bypassing any editorial process. Deleting this kind of speech may drive those who espouse it into echo-chambers elsewhere online where these individuals or groups can express their views without challenge. At the same time, allowing such content to remain online in the interests of playing the role of a public sphere may alienate other parts of the audience, and it may also violate laws on hate. These challenges point to the need for media policies to maintain a quality and professional role in the face of hate.

More and more it is becoming evident that quality and independent journalism needs to be paralleled by the empowerment of users of digital communications. Such users need to know their rights online, and how to be ethically-reflective in their digital engagements. How to recognise online rumour, and how to find and identify verified news content are additional skills needed for the digital era. How to self-protect against viruses on the one hand, and on the other, how to combat online hate speech, cyber-bullying and digital defamation are other capacities needed. In this regard, Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is crucial in enhancing users' critical thinking skills and fosters an enabling environment for quality-driven reporting. However, schooling systems have been slow to integrate MIL into their curricula.

All the points above impact significantly on the potential role of media in regard to sustainable development. To contribute to peaceful, accountable and inclusive societies, there is a need to

address online freedom of expression, media pluralism, self-regulation, the business model for quality journalism, investigative journalism, online hate-speech and MIL.

Questions:

- What are the new ways to maintain editorial standards in the digital age?
- What can be done to verify accuracy in journalism?
- How to ensure quality journalism amongst social media producers of news?
- How useful are the so-called 'transparency reports' issued by Internet intermediaries?
- Are international and national laws and media policy adequately addressing the power of intermediaries to support press freedom and avoid blocking legitimate news media content?
- What are the impacts of media concentration and commercialization on the editorial independence of editors and of journalists?
- What business model can support quality journalism, and how to reinforce investigative journalism in particular?
- Can media and Internet self-regulation systems learn anything from each other, and how can standards be raised that will protect and promote online journalism at the same time as providing accountable redress to persons concerned with apparent violations of their rights?
- What are the good practices in reporting hate, and dealing with user contents that are hateful?
- Can Media and Information Literacy indirectly help to strengthen independent and quality journalism?
- What needs to be done to get the composite package of Media and Information Literacy skills into the education system?

Gender and Media (With Special Focus on the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Change)

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. In 1995, the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) aimed at "removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making". Two of Beijing Declaration's explicit goals, under Objective J, are to "increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication" and "promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media".

While some achievements have been observed, the overall progress has been slow and gender-based discrimination remains a prevalent issue. Obstacles are still present in today's media industry, ranging from imbalanced access to information and under-representation of women to insufficient media coverage of gender issues and outright violence against female

journalists.[1] Furthermore, women remain marginalized and limited by the "glass ceiling", preventing them from attaining and occupying key positions. The 2011 Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media, a 59-nation study of women's employment in more than 500 newsrooms, found that women only represent a third of the entire workforce.[2] In addition, the glass ceiling is evident by positions in top-level management and governance where men take up three-quarters (72.7% and 74.1%, respectively) of the available jobs. This lack of professional mobility differs from region to region, but in general women remain underrepresented in key management positions in the media.

By the same token, this underrepresentation of women correlates with their portrayal within the media. Gender issues remain largely under the radar, propagating the gender bias and its resulting inequality.

In addition, safety of women journalists also continues to be an issue: the 2014 *Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture*[3] survey stated that almost two-thirds (or 64.8%) of the self-selected respondents to research the had been intimidated, threatened or abused whereas one out of five (or 21.6%) had been physically assaulted in relation to their work. Sexual harassment was encountered by approximately half (or 47.9%) of the respondents, with sexual assault happening in 14.3% of all incidents. Furthermore, aggression and intimidation are not reserved for assignments in the field: co-workers, supervisors, and managers constitute a substantial amount as perpetrators at the workplace, encumbering the victim's capability to report it.

UN Women, the United Nations entity promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, recognizes the powerful potential of media to "change or reinforce social mores and behaviours, and mobilize citizens".[4] In this regard, it advocates gender-sensitive reporting through workshops and toolkits, including the creation and dissemination of specific manuals.[5]

As one of its global priorities, UNESCO aims to overcome the gender divide through its Priority Gender Equality Action Plan – 2014-2021. Together with other stakeholders, UNESCO reached a milestone in the promotion of gender-inclusive media on the Global Media Forum in Bangkok, Thailand in December 2013 with the creation of the Global Alliance on Media and Gender

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[1] Berger, G. (2014). UNESCO Foreword. In A. Vega Mortiel (Red.), *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender.* Paris: UNESCO, 7.

[2] Byerly, C. (2011). *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media.* Washington, DC: International Women's Media Foundation, 23.

[3] Barton, A., & Storm, H. (2014). *Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture.* Washington, DC & London: International Women's Media Foundation & International News Safety Institute.

[4] See UN WOMEN's mission statement on gender and media at http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/media

[5] Together with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) UN WOMEN published Llanos, B., & Nina, J. (2011). *Election Coverage from a Gender Perspective: A Media Monitoring Manual.* Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

(GAMAG)[6]. This network is an attempt to accelerate change in favour of gender equality in and through the media.

Questions:

- It has been 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted, what are some of the reflections in terms of achievements and of the challenges that lies ahead?
- What are the challenges for women in reaching higher managerial position in a media company?
- What can media regulatory bodies such as broadcasting licencing authorities do to promote gender equality in the boards of licensed institutions?
- Do public service media have a particular role and possibility in terms of gender equality issues?
- Safety of women journalists continues to be an under researched topic, what could be done to improve research in this area and ultimately to improve safety of women journalists?
- How to address the issue of online harassments, threats and hate speech, including those against women?

Towards Better Digital Safety for Journalists and Their Sources

The work of journalists often puts them at specific risk of intimidation, harassment and violence. Some suffer kidnapping, torture, abduction, and arbitrary detention. These risks become particularly visible when a journalist is killed in a highly publicized manner such as the beheading of James Foley and Steven Sotloff in armed conflict situations and hotspots. When the danger is posed by non-State actors such as terrorist groups and criminal organizations, ensuring the safety of journalists becomes even harder. There are distinct challenges for journalists and editors reporting from hostile and dangerous environments.

Safety also has a digital dimension and not only for mainstream journalists. As more actors take up the mantle of participating in journalism and contribute to informing public opinion, they also become subjects of interest to actors wishing to control the flow of information. According to a report on the safety of journalists from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in July 2013: "As the number of online journalists has increased, so have attacks against them, such as illegal hacking of their accounts, monitoring of their online activities,

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[6]*Framework and Plan of Action for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG).*(sd). Retrieved September 15, 2014, from UNESCO:
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/Events/framework_and_action_plan_gamg_05_02_2014.pdf, 3.

arbitrary arrest and detention, and the blocking of websites that contain information critical of authorities".[7]

The threats facing all actors doing journalism in the digital age include: location tracking; software and hardware exploits without the knowledge of the target; phishing attacks; fake domain attacks; man-in-the-middle (MitM) attacks; denial of service (DoS) attacks; website defacement; compromised user accounts; intimidation and harassment; disinformation and smear campaigns; as well as confiscation of journalistic work product.

On 18 December 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/68/167 on the right to privacy in the digital age[8] which called for reviews to ensure that surveillance operations in terms of independent oversight and transparency. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection human rights and fundamental freedoms earlier stated in his report to the UN General Assembly that "measures justified by States' duties to protect against the threat of terrorism should never be used as a Trojan horse to usher in wider powers of surveillance for unrelated governmental functions."[9] The 2014 African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms contains 12 key principles including the right to security on the Internet and to be protected from harassment, stalking, people trafficking, identity theft and misuse of one's digital identity and data.

Both UNESCO and the Human Rights Council have adopted resolutions making particular reference to the importance of protection of journalists' sources in this context. Elsewhere, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its declaration adopted on 30 April 2014, also noted that "surveillance of journalists and other media actors, and the tracking of their online activities, can endanger the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression if carried out without the necessary safeguards and can even threaten the safety of the persons concerned. It can also undermine the protection of journalists' sources".[10]

It should be noted that surveillance is often governed by many secret and ambiguous laws, which can sow confusion among journalists and their sources about how closely they might be monitored.[11] This lack of information makes it more difficult for journalists and their sources to

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[7] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1 July 2013.) "The Safety of Journalists: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights." http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/24/23 (Accessed 24 July 2014.)
[8] http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/167
[9] See http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/545/19/PDF/N1454519.pdf?OpenElement
[10] See https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Decl(30.04.2014)2&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383
[11] Bell, E., Coronel, S., Stray, J., Schudson, M., and Zuckerman, E. (4 October 2013.) Comment to Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies Regarding the Effects of Mass Surveillance on the Practice of Journalism. http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Letter-Effect-of-mass-surveillance-on-journalism.pdf (Accessed 3 April 2014.)

try to shield themselves from undue surveillance. If communications between journalists and sources cannot be kept confidential, then it is possible that sources will stop talking[12].

UNESCO's General Conference, the highest deliberating body of the organization adopted Resolution 52 at its 37th Session in November 2013 which requested the Director-General to prepare a comprehensive study of the Internet-related issues within the mandate of the Organization, including access to information and knowledge, freedom of expression, privacy, and ethical dimensions of the information society. The resulting study deals inter alia with journalism safety issues, and the draft findings will be shared at WPFD 2015.

Questions:

- What more can be done to assist journalists' safety in "hotspots" – is there a role for the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity?
- What are the gaps in journalistic practice that could better safeguard privacy and security of data?
- With ever more sophisticated surveillance by diverse actors, how can we reinforce protection of journalists' sources? What are the consequences of public trust for journalists is surveillance becomes ever more pervasive?
- Are established limitations of surveillance, indicated in various international instruments, sufficient in addressing the boundaries between the right to privacy and authorities' justifications to surveillance?
- How can media itself contribute to improving individuals' levels of digital security? What are the specific MIL competencies that every journalist practitioner should develop?

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[12] Bell, E., Coronel, S., Stray, J., Schudson, M., and Zuckerman, E. (4 October 2013.) Comment to Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies Regarding the Effects of Mass Surveillance on the Practice of Journalism. http://towcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Letter-Effect-of-mass-surveillance-on-journalism.pdf (Accessed 3 April 2014.)