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Co-Sponsor a **High-Level and interactive Panel Discussion**

“Ending Impunity: Upholding the Rule of Law”

MONDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2014

1.15 – 2.45 PM, ECOSOC Chamber, UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

On the occasion of the
1st International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists
(2 November)

Panellists:

- **AMBASSADOR MICHEL SPINELLIS, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GREECE TO THE UNITED NATIONS;**
- **MR GETACHEW ENGIDA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO;**
- **MR JOEL SIMON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (CPJ);**
- **DR AGNES CALLAMARD, DIRECTOR, GLOBAL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & INFORMATION, SPECIAL ADVISER TO THE PRESIDENT, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY;**
- **MS NADIA BILBASSY-CHARTERS, FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT, AL-ARABIYA NEWS CHANNEL AND MBC TV, BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S MEDIA FOUNDATION .**

A Concept Note is enclosed

For more information: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/EndImpunity>

Hashtag: **#EndImpunity**

Concept Note

OVERVIEW

The United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution [A/RES/68/163](#) at its 68th session in 2013 which proclaimed 2 November as the 'International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists' (IDEI). The Resolution urged Member States to implement definite measures countering the present culture of impunity. The date marks the assassination of two French journalists in Mali on 2 November 2013, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon.

This landmark resolution condemns all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers. It also urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability, bring to justice perpetrators of crimes against journalists and media workers, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.

The focus on impunity of this resolution stems from the worrying situation that over the past decade, more than 700 journalists have been killed for bringing news and information to the public. These figures do not include the many more journalists who on a daily basis suffer from non-fatal attacks, including torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Furthermore, there are specific risks faced by women journalists including sexual attacks.

According to the UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity, to be discussed in Paris on November 21, 2014, records show that **less than six per cent of the 593 cases of killings of journalists from 2006-2013 have been reported as resolved**. A quarter of these cases are considered as "on-going" referring to their continued investigations over the various stages of the judicial system. In 60 per cent of the cases, no information on the judicial process was made available to UNESCO notwithstanding the Director-General's requests in this regard.

When attacks on journalists remain unpunished, a highly negative message is sent that reporting the "embarrassing truth" or "unwanted opinions" will get ordinary people in trouble. Furthermore, society loses confidence in its own judicial system and perpetrators of crimes against journalists are emboldened.

In its recent Resolution [A/HRC/RES/27/5](#), adopted on 25 September 2014, the **UN Human Rights Council** gives special attention to the lack of accountability for violence and attacks against journalists. It strongly condemns that the vast majority of crimes against journalists go unpunished and emphasizes that ensuring accountability for crimes committed against journalists is a key element in preventing future attacks. It calls upon States to develop and implement strategies for combating impunity and lists a number of concrete measures and good practices in this regard, such as the creation of special investigative units, the adoption of specific protocols and methods of investigation and prosecution, or the establishment of an early warning and rapid response mechanism to give journalists, when threatened, immediate access to protective measures.

It is in recognition of such far-reaching consequences of impunity, especially of crimes against journalists, that the UN has declared 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI). This is a major opportunity to intensify action by international organizations, governments, media and other actors, to give heightened attention to strengthening the safety of journalists and to bringing their killers to justice.

ENDING IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS IS LINKED TO THE RULE OF LAW AND DEVELOPMENT

It is widely recognized that the rule of law is a prerequisite for, as well as an outcome of, a successful development agenda. The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda noted that "the rule of law, freedom of speech and the media, open political choice and active citizen participation, access to justice, non-discriminatory and accountable governments and public institutions help drive development and have their own intrinsic value. They are both means to an end and an end in themselves".

The rule of law is fundamental to the stability and smooth functioning of society. Only when the rule of law is respected can citizens have confidence in democratic process and invest in the sustainable development of their society. Security must be especially guaranteed for those UNESCO describes as “journalists, media workers, and social media producers who generate a significant amount of public-interest journalism”. When these persons suffer crimes committed on account of their use of freedom of expression, the authorities must react swiftly and the perpetrators must be brought to justice in accordance with proper judicial process.

It is not possible to speak of good governance and development when some of the most visible members of society, those who are responsible for bringing information and news to the public, are murdered on average at the rate of one each week. Development therefore needs to be an environment where attacks, intimidations, harassments, abductions, arbitrary imprisonments, threats and killings of journalists are rare exceptions and not the norm, and where any violations are properly dealt with under the rule of law.

Addressing impunity for the killings of journalists is directly related to the Sustainable Development Goal proposals made by the UN Open Working Group, and especially the proposed **Goal 16: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”** Progress in the sphere of crimes against journalists can catalyse progress in society more broadly, such as in the following targets contained in Goal 16:

- 16.1** significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.3** promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, and ensure equal access to justice for all
- 16.a** strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacities at all levels, in particular in developing countries, for preventing violence and combating terrorism and crime

Dealing with the “visible journalistic tip of the iceberg” of impunity will also contribute to achieving the aspirations of target **16.10**, which aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”.

MARKING THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL DAY TO END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS

UNESCO has been tasked by the UN General Assembly through Resolution [A/RES/68/163](#) to coordinate the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity as well as to facilitate the implementation of this new International Day in collaboration with governments and relevant stakeholders.

Acting upon this responsibility, UNESCO is co-organizing the present High-Level panel discussion on “**Ending Impunity: Upholding the Rule of Law**”, focusing on combating impunity as one of the prerequisites of the rule of law and democratic governance.

UNESCO is also convening the **3rd UN Inter-Agency Meeting on the Safety of Journalists and The Issue of Impunity** on 4 November 2014 in Strasbourg, France. This multi-stakeholder meeting is co-hosted by the Council of Europe and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and is part of the series of regular meetings led by UNESCO on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

Additionally, a **Seminar and Inter-regional Dialogue on the Protection of Journalists** is being co-organized by UNESCO, Council of Europe, Centre for Freedom of the Media, and the European Lawyers’ Union on 3 November 2014 at the European Courts of Human Rights (<http://www.inter-justice.org/>). The Seminar will provide a forum for an intensified interregional dialogue among representatives of regional human rights courts and intergovernmental organizations in Europe, the Americas and Africa, together with other experts and concerned parties, to examine the progress of each of the multilateral systems as well as significant gaps in protection.

These events are linked to the on-going **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists** and the Issue of Impunity, another important factor on the international stage of high significance to the problems of journalism

safety and impunity. The Plan, endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) in April 2012, has the specific goal of mobilizing the UN family of agencies as well as other stakeholders including governments, regional organisations, NGOs and media houses to collaborate in creating a safer environment for journalists. For more: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/EndImpunity>

CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA COMBAT IMPUNITY

For many years, organizations within international civil society have been active in the fight against impunity. For example, the **International Freedom of Expression Exchange** (IFEX), a global network of free expression organizations, is organising a global campaign to combat impunity. The **Committee to Protect Journalists** (CPJ) is releasing a new report as part of its activities that include the website, www.speakjusticenow.org, which features interactive tools showing that journalists murdered around the world were reporting primarily on politics, corruption, conflict, crime, and human rights. CPJ also produces the Impunity Index which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population.

The **International Federation of Journalists** (IFJ), the umbrella group for over 600,000 journalists worldwide is also urging authorities of the countries with the highest death tolls of journalists to investigate these killings and bring their perpetrators to justice. **Reporters without Borders** (RSF), with representatives around the world, runs targeted campaigns in countries where impunity is a major issue for freedom of the press. The **Inter American Press Association** (IAPA) targets their impunity campaigns in the region of Latin America through their Impunity Project and partnered organizations such as the Knight Foundation and International Association of Broadcasting (IAB) in their campaigns.

Other international NGOs such as Article 19, Freedom House, Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), International Press Institute (IPI), World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), and PEN International will also contribute work on combating impunity to the IDEI 2014. Activity is also expected from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), and over 3,000 companies, and broadcast organizations.

CONCLUSION

IDEI provides a strategic opportunity to all stakeholders to focus public attention on the importance of ending impunity for crimes against journalists. It also opens new possibilities to draw in constituencies whose primary interests may be wider than the safety of journalists. For example, given the symbolic significance of journalists to the wider issue of impunity and justice, all of those who work in the rule of law system, such as people involved in legal and judicial processes, can be reached out to. Others who are concerned with public participation and citizen's rights to speak out on various issues such as corruption or domestic violence will also share an interest in the resolution on combating impunity of attacks on journalists, who by definition are actors in the public eye, and whose situation sends a signal to society at large.

As the first time that the UN officially marks this new day on the international calendar, it is important that the International Day becomes widely known and is positioned for an ever-expanding impact in coming years. The date in 2014 is thus of great significance to UN bodies, governments, the media, and to civil society as well as to potential new stakeholders where hitherto there have not been occasions to connect issues in mutual synergy. IDEI is therefore a very promising platform that can make a valuable contribution to the safety of journalists in the interest of societal development as a whole.