



Forum: Human Rights Council
Question of: Re-engaging the discussion of freedom of speech of journalists, concentrating on the countries that have not yet established such frameworks
Student Officer: Sophia Poletaykina
Position: Vice Chair

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I. Description of the Issue

The freedom of speech for journalists is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. But there are still many nations around the world without strong legal systems or other measures that protect journalists from violence, intimidation, and censorship. This problem is especially urgent in countries where the government severely restricts or controls the press, or where reporters who cover sensitive subjects or criticize authority are threatened or intimidated.

In addition, the absence of these protections often comes along with an abuse of power. This can lead to a situation where those in power can control the narrative and suppress dissenting



voices, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability. This is not just a threat to the journalists themselves, but also a threat to the society at large. When the free press is undermined, it becomes difficult for the public to stay informed and for democracy to function effectively.

II. Definition of Key Terms

Freedom of Speech

The right to express information, ideas, and opinions free of government restrictions or intimidation where restriction is based on content and subject only to reasonable limitations.

Journalist

An individual who collects, writes or distributes news or other current information to the public.

Press Freedom

The principle that communication news and expression of opinions through various media including print, broadcast, and digital platforms, should be free from government censorship or control.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

A multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly that commits its parties to respect the civil and political rights of individuals.

Censorship

The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc. that are e.g. considered obscene, politically unacceptable or a threat to security.

Transparency

The condition of being transparent in terms of being open, honest, and straightforward. Applied to businesses or governments it means that information e.g. over decisions are open to the public.



Democratic Society

A form of government in which the people have the authority to choose their governing legislation by election of the government.

World Press Freedom Index

An annual ranking of countries compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders based upon the organization's assessment of the countries' press freedom records.

Legal Action

An action brought in a court of law to enforce a particular right.

Authoritarian Governments

A form of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms.

Political Instability

A situation where the uncertainty among the government structure expands due to some political factors such as riots, demonstrations, war, etc.

Bill of Rights

The first ten amendments to the US Constitution, ratified in 1791 and guaranteeing such rights as the freedoms of speech, assembly, and worship.

Corruption

Misuse of entrusted power for private gain, typically involving bribery.

Constitutional Law

The body of law (constitution) which defines the relationship of different entities within a state, namely, the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary.



III. Background information

In a democratic society, transparency, accountability, and the free exchange of information depend on journalists' capacity to report without fear. The suppression of important information, the spread of false information, and the decline in public confidence in institutions can all result from the intimidation or silence of journalists. Only 8% of people worldwide, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF)' 2024 World Press Freedom Index, live in nations where there are no restrictions on the freedom of the press, whereas over 50% reside in nations where there are very serious restrictions on the press.

In numerous countries journalists face threats to their freedom of speech, including legal action, imprisonment, and violence. The social, political, and economic impacts of these restrictions are profound, and the effects of a less informed public and a more controlled media landscape are leading to more totalitarian governments.

III.I Short Historical Background:

When:	What:
1644	The concept of a free press in the English-speaking world can be traced back to John Milton's <i>Aeropagitica</i> , a speech written in response to the British Parliament's passage of a law, requiring government approval of all books prior to publication.
1695	Freedom of the press was formally established in Great Britain with the lapse of the Licensing Act.
1766	Sweden became the first country to introduce a constitutional law where censorship was abolished and the freedom of the press guaranteed. The Law on the Freedom of Printing of 1766 was written by a committee of the parliament, during the Swedish Age of



	Liberty.
1791	The First Amendment to the US Constitution, which protects freedom of the press, was adopted as part of the Bill of Rights.

Despite these legal protections, threats, intimidation, and violence against journalists persist even in nations with robust legal protections. Journalists often face increased risks when covering topics related to conflicts, corruption, or human rights violations. For instance, at least 20 percent of the more than 1200 journalists killed in the line of duty since 1992 covered corruption. Therefore, it is crucial to continue advocating for the protection of journalists and press freedom worldwide.

<https://rsf.org/en/index>

In recent years, particularly in countries like the Czech Republic and Malta, there has been a decline in press freedom in Western nations. This trend underscores the ongoing need for vigilance and advocacy to protect the rights of journalists and the integrity of the free press. It serves as a reminder that the struggle for press freedom is a global issue that requires constant attention and action.

IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Countries lacking frameworks for journalistic freedom often have authoritarian governments or are experiencing political instability. Organizations like RSF and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) actively monitor and report on these issues.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF):

RSF is an international non-profit organization that promotes and defends the freedom to be informed and to inform others throughout the world. RSF defends the right of every human being to have access to free and reliable information. It supports multiple initiatives to obtain the unblocking of censored websites, support online media, and provide guarantees for freedom of opinion and expression in the global space for information and communication.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ):

CPJ is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. CPJ's work is based on its research, which provides a global snapshot of obstructions to a free press



worldwide. CPJ denounces press freedom violations, meets with heads of state and high-ranking officials, spearheads or advises on diplomatic efforts, and works with other organizations to ensure that justice prevails when journalists are imprisoned or killed.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

UNESCO is continuously supporting the national and international media partners through its initiatives and projects under the communication and information sector to establish a safer, sustainable, and reliable media environment for the journalists, media professionals and the community. UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication supports media development within developing countries, countries in transition, and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Countries with significant press freedom challenges include:

China:

In 2024, China's press freedom index was at 23.36 points, a slight improvement compared to the previous year. The press freedom index is used as an indicator to measure the level of freedom to journalists in the country. China continues to be ranked among the lowest rungs of the global press freedom index as it was placed 172nd among 180 countries in the latest World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders.

Russia:

Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index in Russia in 2024 was recorded at 29.86 points, having decreased compared to the previous year. That corresponded to a deterioration of the media freedom situation, according to the index methodology. Thus, Russia was placed 162nd in the global ranking of 180 countries and one of the lowest in Europe.

Turkey:

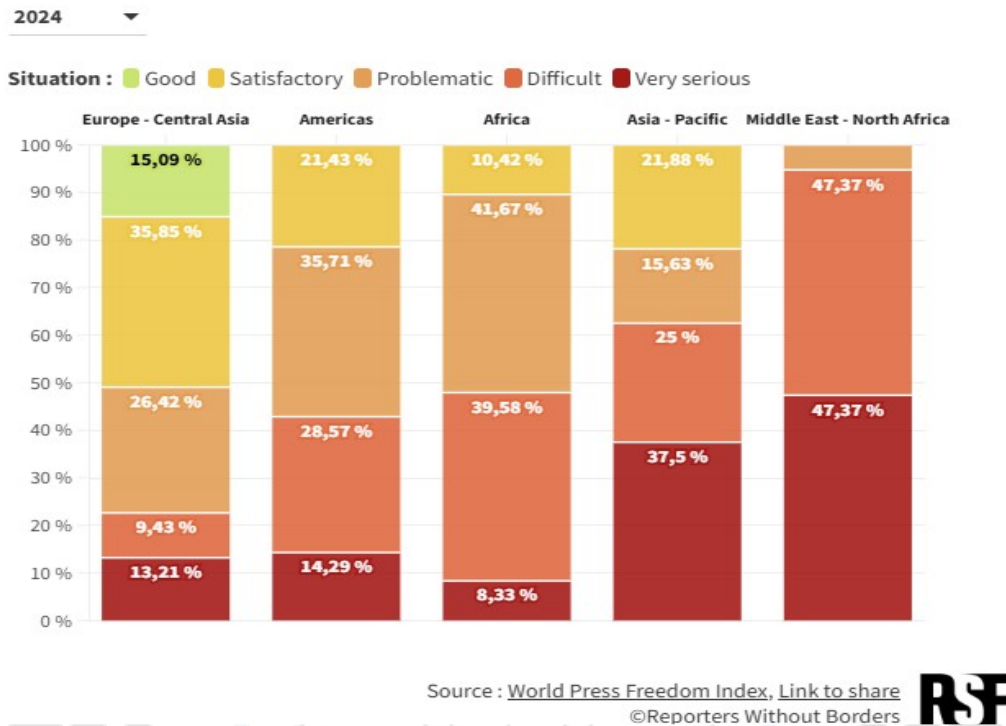
Turkey's local elections on Sunday were competitive and gave citizens many options but took place in a "starkly polarized environment" where more needs to be done to ensure freedom of expression, a European group of observers said. According to Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index, Turkey is among the lowest-ranked countries globally, holding position 166 out of 180 countries assessed in 2024.



Saudi Arabia:

According to Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index, Saudi Arabia is among the lowest-ranked countries globally, holding position 166 out of 180 countries assessed in 2024. The kingdom ranked 170th in 2023 and 166th in 2022, reflecting its ongoing repressive practices aimed at silencing dissenting voices and stifling press freedom.

Press freedom in the world’s five regions in 2024



V. Timeline of events

When:	What:
1556	The government of Venice first published the monthly Notizie scritte (“Written notices”) which cost one gazzetta, a Venetian coin of the time, the name of which eventually came to mean “newspaper”. These were handwritten newsletters used to convey political, military, and economic news quickly and efficiently throughout Europe.
1609	The first regularly published newspapers appeared in German



	cities and in Antwerp.
1622	The first English newspaper, the Weekly Newes, was published.
1702	One of the first daily newspapers, The Daily Courant, appeared.
1830s	The advent of cheap mass-circulation magazines aimed at a wider and less well-educated public, as well as illustrated and women's magazines.
1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This landmark document affirms freedom of expression and opinion as fundamental human rights in Article 19. It sets a global standard for human rights that all member states are expected to uphold.
1966	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is adopted by the United Nations. This treaty legally binds states to protect freedom of expression, among other civil and political rights. It reinforces the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and gives them legal force.
1993	The UN General Assembly designates May 3rd as World Press Freedom Day. This annual observance is a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. It is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics.
20th Century	The advent of radio, television, and the Internet broadened the use of the term journalism to include all printed and electronic communication dealing with current affairs.
2012	The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board. The plan aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers around the world. It calls for action to prevent violence against journalists, ensure justice for crimes against journalists, and promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference.



2018	The murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul sparks global outrage and renewed calls for the protection of journalists. Khashoggi's death highlights the extreme risks that journalists can face, even in locations where they might expect to be safe. His murder leads to increased international scrutiny of Saudi Arabia's human rights record and prompts renewed discussions about the importance of protecting journalists and freedom of speech.
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VI. Previous attempts to solve the issue

The UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council have adopted multiple resolutions and declarations calling on states to protect journalists and uphold press freedom. These include the 2021 UN General Assembly resolution on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (A/RES/76/173), and the 2020 Human Rights Council resolution on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/RES/45/18).

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

This plan was established to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy, and development worldwide. It addresses the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection, and prosecution.

UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)

The IPDC promotes media development within developing countries, countries in transition, and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. It acts as a laboratory for ideas on emerging and pressing media policy issues.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

RSF defends the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal. It supports multiple initiatives to obtain the unblocking of censored websites, support online media, and provide guarantees for freedom of opinion and expression.



Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

CPJ promotes press freedom worldwide. It monitors and reports on press freedom violations and attacks on journalists; conducts diplomatic and legal advocacy on behalf of detained journalists; and provides emergency financial and relocation assistance to journalists in need. It also works on key campaigns like the Campaign Against Impunity, #FreeThePress, and the Freelancer Safety initiative.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

A document that represents the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled. It was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN at December, 12th, 1948.

VII. Possible solutions

1. Strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect journalists from harassment, censorship, and violence.
2. Promoting media literacy and public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of a free press in democratic societies.
3. Encouraging international cooperation and solidarity among journalists, media organizations, and civil society groups to advocate for press freedom and support journalists at risk.
4. Providing training and resources to journalists, particularly in conflict zones or areas with high levels of press freedom violations, to enhance their safety and security.
5. Holding perpetrators of violence against journalists accountable through robust investigations and prosecutions.
6. Encouraging the adoption and implementation of international conventions and treaties related to press freedom and the protection of journalists.

VIII. How to prepare as a delegate

In preparation for the upcoming debates, it's crucial to have a deep understanding of the issue at hand. This includes the historical context, the current situation, and potential future implications. Extensive research using reliable sources is encouraged.



Each delegate is required to write at least one draft resolution and a minimum of two, preferably three, position papers. These documents should comprehensively cover all topics of the forum and this requirement should be included in your research report.

Consider the alliances your country has with other nations and how these relationships might influence your stance on the issue. Reflect on your country's involvement in the issue. Has your country been directly affected? What actions has your country taken so far?

During your research, consider the following questions:

- What are the specific challenges faced by journalists in countries without established frameworks?
- How can international organizations effectively advocate for freedom of speech in these regions?
- What measures can be taken to ensure the safety and protection of journalists, particularly in conflict zones or areas with high levels of press freedom violations?
- How can the international community effectively address the issue of impunity for crimes against journalists and hold perpetrators accountable?
- What role can media literacy and public awareness campaigns play in promoting press freedom and the importance of a free press in democratic societies?
- How can international cooperation and solidarity among journalists, media organizations, and civil society groups be strengthened to advocate for press freedom and support journalists at risk?
- What steps can be taken to encourage countries with restrictive media environments to adopt and implement legal frameworks that protect press freedom and the rights of journalists?

Please note that the deadline to submit these documents is **21.09.24**. After this date, corrections or feedback will not be provided.

IX. UN resolutions

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 19

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Article 19

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>

UN General Assembly Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (A/RES/72/175)

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/456/40/pdf/n1745640.pdf?token=KgWycASqbe8nFUfmAZ&fe=true>

UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication

<https://www.unesco.org/en/international-programme-development-communication/ipdc-governance>

X. Useful links and sources

2021: a grim year for journalists and free speech in an increasingly turbulent and authoritarian world (theconversation.com)

Ensuring media freedom and safety of journalists requires urgent concrete action backed by political will: UN expert | OHCHR

Authorities Escalate Clampdown on Media, Freedom of Expression [press release] (msn.com)
Freedom of speech in our times - Manila Standard

Freedom of the press – Wikipedia Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index:
<https://rsf.org/en/index>

Committee to Protect Journalists: <https://cpj.org/>



UNESCO's Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists:

[\[https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists\]](https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists)(<https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists>)

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity:

[\[https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists\]](https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists)(<https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists>)

Amnesty International's Press Freedom Resources:

[\[https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/press-freedom-under-attack-globally/\]](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/press-freedom-under-attack-globally/)
(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/press-freedom-under-attack-globally/>)

Reporters Without Border Press Freedom Index

<https://rsf.org/en/more-half-world-s-population-live-countries-coloured-red-rsf-s-press-freedom-map>