Forum:	**Human Rights Council**
Question of:	**Addressing the shrinking safety of the press**
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Position:	**Co-Chair**

I. Description of the Issue

Freedom of the press, and the safety to exercise it, are the pillars of a functioning democratic society and government. Journalism gives a society its own voice by questioning those in power, exposing corruption, combating misinformation, and encouraging open discussion. It keeps a society informed and able to hold its government accountable, rather than depend on it. Without a free and safe press, transparency decreases and human rights violations often remain hidden.

Despite this importance, and despite press freedom being recognised as a human right under international law, journalists worldwide continue to face hardships in carrying out their profession. UNESCO and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) have reported that 186 Journalists were killed between 2022 and 2025 while reporting on issues such as armed conflicts, corruption, organised crime or political unrest. Many more are subjected to imprisonment, arbitrary detention, censorship, digital surveillance and harassment.

These alarming statistics stem from several global developments. The rise of authoritarian governance has led to stricter state control over media organisations and growing restrictions on independent reporting. Especially in conflict zones such as Ukraine, Gaza or Sudan, journalists are confronted with extreme physical danger simply by documenting events on the ground. At the same time, new digital technologies have reshaped the landscape of threats the press face: cyberattacks, doxxing, and coordinated hate campaigns increasingly target the press, with female and minority journalists disproportionately affected. Legal systems are, too, increasingly being weaponised against the media. Through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), powerful individuals, corporations and state actors file costly, often merit less lawsuits against journalists and outlets to intimidate them into silence or drain their resources through ongoing litigation, rather than through direct violence or censorship.

A further and especially pressing concern regarding safe journalism is the persistently high rate of impunity surrounding these abuses. According to UNESCO, nine out of ten murders of journalists remain unresolved. It is therefore not only the number of journalist killings that is

alarming but so is the near-total abscesses of accountability for them, a pattern that creates a continued cycle of violence.

The Human Rights Council therefore faces the challenge of balancing the protection of freedom of expression with concrete measures against the threats journalists face today, such as digital insecurity, physical danger in conflict zones, legal harassment through SLAPP suits, arbitrary imprisonment or other forms of violence.

II. Definition of Key Terms

Freedom of the Press

The right of journalists and media organisations to gather, produce and distribute information without censorship, intimidation or undue government interference.

Freedom of Expression

A fundamental human right protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), guaranteeing everyone the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

Censorship

The suppression, alteration or prohibition of information by governments or other authorities to limit public access to certain content.

Arbitrary Detention

The imprisonment or detention of individuals without a fair legal basis or due process, often used against journalists reporting critically on governments.

Digital Surveillance

The use of digital technologies to monitor journalists' communications, locations or activities.

Impunity

The failure to investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for crimes committed against journalists.

SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation)

An abusive legal tactic used by powerful entities, such as corporations or public officials, to censor and intimidate critics.

Model United Nations Vocabulary

Amendment

A suggested change to a resolution. During the debate, delegates can propose adding, removing, or rewording part of a resolution, and the room then votes on whether to accept the change.

Co-Submitter

A delegate who signs a resolution so that it is allowed to be debated. Signing only means "I think this is worth discussing," and does not mean the delegate actually agrees with it.

Delegate

A participant who represents a country or organisation and works with others to solve the issues on the agenda. If you are reading this as a participant, this is you.

Lobbying

The stage before formal debate, where delegates talk through their ideas, combine their draft resolutions into stronger ones, and gather enough co-submitters for a resolution to reach the floor. It can be thought of as the negotiation phase.

Main Submitter

The delegate who leads a resolution, presenting it to the room and giving the first speech in its favour. Unlike a co-submitter, the Main Submitter has to actually support it.

Operative Clause (OC)

The "action" part of a resolution. These are the numbered clauses near the end that state what should actually be done about the problem.

Position Paper

A short document a delegate writes before the conference, setting out what their assigned country thinks about an issue and which solutions it would support.

Preambulatory Clause (PC)

The "background" part of a resolution. These opening clauses describe the problem and point to relevant facts, past actions, or treaties, before any solutions are proposed.

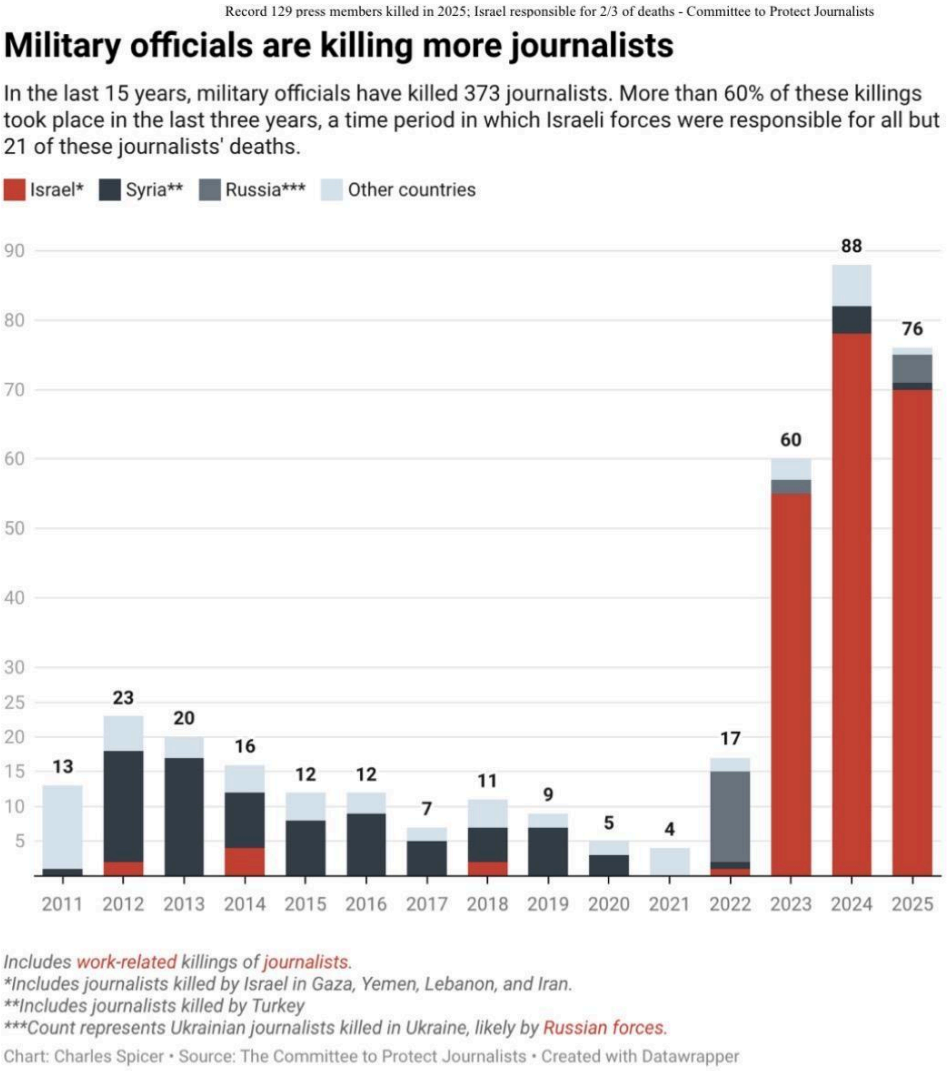
Resolution

The main document of an MUN debate. It is built from preambulatory clauses (which describe the problem) and operative clauses (which propose the solutions), and it is what delegates ultimately vote on.

III. Background information

Global Scale of Violence against Journalists

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 2025 has been the deadliest year for journalists so far, with 129 journalists and media workers having been killed globally. This marks the second consecutive year of of record breaking killings, following 2024's previous record of 124 journalist fatalities. Responsible for two-thirds of all of these press killings in both 2024 and 2025 was Israel, as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has committed more targeted killings of journalists than any other government's military since the CPJ began it's documentation in 1992.



Furthermore, in 2023 the CPJ have started documenting the rates of drone killings of journalists with only two documented cases in total that year. Those number have however risen to 39 cases in 2025. Out of these 39 cases a total of 33 of the drones were confirmed or thought to be military drones. Beyond the number of killings, the CPJ has also recorded a near-record number of journalists imprisoned in 2025. While the statistic dropped to 330 from it's record of 384 jailed journalists in 2024, it still marks the fifth consecutive year that global journalists incarcerations have exceeded 300.

Press Freedom in Decline

The RSF World Press Freedom Index is an annual report by the Reporters Sans Frontières, which documents and compares the level of journalistic freedom and safety in 180 countries and territories. Exactly this index is currently, for the first time, experiencing a 25-year low. Over half of the world's countries are now deemed in "difficult" or "very serious" conditions of press freedom. This directly reflects the political climate of most countries that are a part of these low press freedom rate statistics. Notably, the United States has fallen seven places and other countries in America, such as Ecuador and Peru, have plummeted in the ranking.

Another alarming factor is that out of the five indicators used to assess press freedom worldwide, which determine the economic, legal, security, political and social environments for journalism, the legal indicator has faced the sharpest decline this year. These statistics reflect the fact that the alarming decline in press freedom cannot be downplayed as mere coincidence but rather as a systematic weakening of journalists' power through the criminalisation of journalism and the misuse of emergency of national security legislation, leading to the infringement of journalists' human rights.

Conflict Zones as the Deadliest Environment

Part of our global political situation are no doubt the ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). These territories remain the most dangerous regions for journalists, as they have been for 25 years. However the risks for journalists are no longer defined as "getting caught in the crossfire" but rather as active, intentional targeting. The MENA region is currently rated the lowest globally for press freedom according to the 2026 RSF Index, with 18 out of 19 countries classified as "very serious" (11) or "difficult" (7). Low rated regions like these are characterised by their targeted drone killings of the press and the zeroing on the "PRESS" Insignia, designed under the Geneva Conventions to signal civilian neutrality. In modern conflicts however, this insignia has been converted into a target marker, leading to intense debates over whether reporters should stop wearing them entirely.

What follows these fatalities is not justice and legal consequences, but rather a high rate of impunity. Globally, 85% of all journalist killings remain entirely unsolved or unprosecuted, according the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists. In active conflicts zones, this number effectively reaches 100%. Overall, in almost none of journalist killing cases has anyone been held accountable, despite all of them violating international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, Impunity is not limited to conflict zones. Countries like Mexico, India and the Philippines continue to see journalists killed without arrests or convictions. This persistent impunity is widely regarded as a root for future violence, because the absence of consequences signals to potential perpetrators that attacks on the press carry no real cost.

Indication to Broader Human Rights Decline

When press freedom declines in a country, it rarely happens on its own. Instead it usually comes in combination with a wider decline in human rights and democracy. The RSF has pointed to this connection directly by attributing this global decline to the high number of authoritarian states, political leaders who are either complicit or fail to act, harmful economic interests and under-regulated online platforms. These are the same forces that also weaken judicial independence and limit civic freedoms like protest and assembly. Importantly, this is not just a problem in authoritarian states: 100 out of 180 countries have experienced a decline in their press freedom score. For example the United States are slipping in ranks due to growing political pressure, showing that no political system is fully protected from this pattern.

That is precisely why this issue is so urgent for the Human Rights Council to discuss. Press freedom acts like an early warning sign, when it drops sharply, it usually means that human rights protections more broadly are also staring to weaken. With 2025 being the deadliest year for journalists ever recorded, and the 2026 RSF Index showing press freedom at its lowest point in 25 years, this Council isn't just dealing with a problem affecting one profession. It is facing a symptom of a much bigger, faster-moving crisis in global human rights.

IV. Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Primary Countries

Israel: Israel was responsible for roughly two-thirds of all journalist killings in both 2024 and 2025. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has committed more targeted killings of journalists than any other military since CPJ began documentation in 1992.

Russian: Russia holds 48 journalists imprisoned as of April 2026, therefore classified as the "second-largest prison for journalists globally". The Russian government is also characterised by it's criminalisation of reporting, repressive legal labels such as "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" , and it's strict digital censorship.

China, Iran: China is among the most structurally repressive media systems worldwide, with even lower press freedom rankings than Russia. China is the world's largest prison for media professionals, with 121 journalists currently documented in jail. It is also known for the "Great Firewall", meaning the state's complete control over the internet, and it's exporting censorship, that reaches beyond Chinese borders in order to make international platforms avoid topics that could compromise the Chinese government.

Sudan: The civil war in Sudan has driven a rise in journalist killings and abductions, with 9 press members killed in 2025 amid a conflict marked by abduction, sexual violence and forced displacement of journalists by paramilitary forces.

Mexico: Mexico possesses a persistently high impunity rate including at least one journalist killed every year for the past decade despite the introduction of a dedicated federal protection

mechanism. These killings are largely driven by the hindering of the documentation of organised crime or corruption.

Secondary Countries

United States: The United States have dropped seven places in the 2026 RSF Index because of growing political pressure on media, proving the possibility of backsliding in press freedom even in established democracies.

Ukraine: Amid local conflicts, journalists deaths rose due to an increased amount of killings mainly because of military drones.

Syria: Showed the sharpest positive movement of any country in the 2026 Index, climbing 36 places following the fall of the Assad regime.

Iran, Yemen: Among the deadliest MENA states alongside Israeli-linked killings. Part of the regions rated as the most catastrophic globally for press freedom.

IGOs

UN Human Rights Council (HRC): The primary forum for resolutions and debate on journalist safety.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): Tasked with monitoring and reporting on violations.

UNESCO: The UN's designated lead agency on safe journalists. Maintains the Observatory of Killed Journalists and issues the Director-General's biennial reports.

NGOs

Reporters Without Borders (RSF): Publishes the annual World Press Freedom Index and poses as the leading global monitor and advocate for press safety.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) : Tracks killings, imprisonments and disappearances, and has been publishing annual data since 1992.

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ): Global trade union federation for journalists. Known for advocacy and solidarity actions.

V. Timeline of events

Time	Event
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights - The United Nations adopts Article 19 which guarantees the global right to hold opinions and seek, receive and impart informations
1966	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted - Turns the right to freedom of expression into binding treaty law for ratifying states, giving press freedom legal, not just moral, weight for the first time
2006	Armed conflicts increasingly target journalists directly - a wave of deliberate attacks on media workers in conflicts (e.g. Iraq War) prompts the UN Security Council to formally recognise journalists as a distinct at-risk civilian category for the first time (S/RES/1738(2006))
2012	UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists launched - Following years of rising, uncoordinated violence against journalists globally, UNESCO leads the creation of a UN-wide framework tasked with the systematic tracking of killings (the future Observatory of Killed Journalists)
2013	International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists established - UN designated November 2 as an annual day to highlight the unpunished violence against journalists
2018	Assassination of Jamal Khashoggi - A high-profile, state-linked killing that becomes a global reference case for accountability debates
2021	Nobel Peace Prize awarded to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov -

	For the first time since 1935 the Prize honours journalists, recognising press freedom as a pillar of global peace
2023	Escalation of the Gaza War - The escalating conflict in Gaza started a sudden surge in journalist deaths
2025	The Deadliest year for journalist on record - The CPJ documents 129 journalists killed worldwide, marking the highest annual amount since tracking began in 1992
2026	RSF Index records a 25-year global low for press freedom - As of this year, over half of all countries now rank “difficult” or “very serious” for press freedom, confirming a structural, global crisis

VI. Previous attempts to solve the issue

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

This Plan included six areas: raising awareness, standard setting and policy making, monitoring and exporting, the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection and prosecution.

European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) in the EU

This includes legal safeguards against political interference in media, however several European Union member states are still inconsistent in their implementation.

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

Proclaimed by the UN General Assembly to take place annually on November 2 as a permanent day of recognition, giving the crisis of impunity sustained global visibility

National journalist protection mechanisms

Such mechanisms created by one nation for itself (e.g. Mexico’s federal protection mechanism) aim to provide risk assessments, safe houses and bodyguards however they are often highly criticised due to their proven ineffectiveness.

VII. Possible solutions

(for delegates to develop further)

- Strengthening international investigative mechanisms for crimes against journalists, potentially through an independent UN-mandated task force
- Establishing binding reporting requirements on the status of journalists safety and the investigations into journalist killings
- Targeted sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for attacks on the press
- Expanding national witness- and journalists-protection programs
- Regulating the misuse of national-security legislation and anti-terrorism laws to prosecute journalists
- Legal frameworks against SLAPP lawsuits
- Digital protection measures
- Enhanced protections for journalists in armed conflict zones

VIII. How to prepare as a delegate

We encourage all delegates to start their research by understanding your countries position and involvement in ongoing debates on this topic. Find out the RSF ranking of your country, if it has any specific national protection mechanisms and if they are acted out accordingly. Furthermore it's always useful to find out which countries view this topic in a similar light, in order to make yourself a picture of the future alliances you could form during the conference. When looking at resolutions on the topic, it is also recommended to check how your country has voted on them and find out if there is a certain pattern behind these votes, so that you may maintain that pattern during voting procedures in our conference.

Also essential to understanding your countries position is looking at its broader interests. Beyond the topics of our debate you should be aware of your country's relationships with other nations and its economic interests.

Furthermore, all delegates are obligated to write **at least one draft resolution** and a **minimum of two, preferably three, position papers** so that all topics of the forum are fully covered. The deadline to send in these documents is **27.08.26**. Beyond this deadline, no

documents will be corrected by Student Officers and cannot be included in any considerations for delegate awards later on.

Questions delegates should consider during research

- How does your country's press freedom record compare to global trends described in this report?
- Which specific threats to journalists are most relevant and common in your country (physical violence, imprisonment, digital surveillance, SLAPP lawsuits, impunity)?
- Is the state of press freedom in your country tied to armed conflict, authoritarian governance, legal weaponisation or economic pressures on media?
- How can this Council create affective new methods to combat crimes against journalists (without infringing on state sovereignty)?
- What financial or technical support or funding is needed to provide such protections of the press and who should provide it?
- How can the misuse of national security legislation and such laws in order to silence journalists be separated from legitimate national security?

IX. UN resolutions

UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Safety of Journalists (51/9)
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3992428?ln=en&v=pdf

General Assembly Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/820875?ln=en&v=pdf

UN Security Council Resolution 1738
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/589659?ln=en&v=pdf

X. Useful links

Reporters Without Borders
https://rsf.org/fr

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

European Center for Press and Media Freedom
https://www.ecpmf.eu/

Human Rights Research Center
https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/the-decline-of-press-freedom-globally

UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists
https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/observatory

International Federation of Journalists
https://www.ifj.org/

XI. Sources

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