



# Safety Policy

Creating a safe working environment for journalists





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## Introduction

Free Press Unlimited strongly believes that all people are entitled to have access to unbiased, reliable and timely information. This enables them to assess and influence their living conditions and make informed decisions. Freedom of the press and freedom of information are fundamental to the gathering and spreading of reliable, unbiased information. The media play a crucial role in providing people with free and unrestricted access to information that fosters development and allows the public to monitor authorities. If media professionals are unable to do their work without risking harm, they will be unable to function as watchdogs; exposing crimes and injustice and providing reliable information and independent news to the public. Therefore, ensuring a safe environment for media professionals is imperative. Free Press Unlimited's approach to the issue of safety is based on the belief that safety is an absolute precondition, 'sine qua non', for media to function properly and serve the public. Safety of journalists and

media organisations is therefore central in achieving Free Press Unlimited's core objective; for the media and journalists - as independent players in society - to constitute a diverse and professional media landscape and act as change agents.

Around the world, the safety of journalists is rapidly worsening. All recent press freedom indexes indicate more than a decade of decline across all aspects of safety; with more killings, threats and arbitrary detentions of media professionals, diminishing media independence and a shrinking space for dissent. The media have fallen victim to an increase in polarisation in many societies, as they act as public interpreters of diverging opinions. Extremist groups also increasingly view journalists as targets, because of the role the media play in influencing public opinion. More recently, unprecedented threats against the media have been observed even in major democracies. The dangerous environment created by these various threats makes

it difficult for journalists and media workers to report freely, leading to self-censorship. The sensitivity of certain topics or regions can even result in so-called 'media dark areas', where independent and critical reporting is lacking entirely. Such restrictive environments have a similar impact on journalists' sources, as they will be more hesitant to step forward with critical information in fear of reprisals.

The worsening situation on the ground notwithstanding, there has been increasing international attention for journalist safety. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which was adopted in 2012, has contributed to the adoption of nine resolutions by different UN fora (Security Council, General Assembly, Human Rights Council and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)). The global standards set by these resolutions provide a framework for the development of regional and national policies dealing with journalist safety.

A commitment to safety cuts across all of Free Press Unlimited's activities, both in the Netherlands and abroad. This means mainstreaming the application of safety tools and procedures, while improving the management and mitigation of risks. Through this policy paper Free Press Unlimited seeks to reinforce this commitment and outline the organisation's objectives and standards in relation to safety. The policy paper will incorporate aspects of safety within programmes and partnerships; in cooperation with others, within the organisation itself and in its external communication.

This Safety Policy provides Free Press Unlimited and its partners with a framework in which to structure and develop operational plans, instruments and tools, that are linked to safety-related results and targets. All staff members are responsible for the implementation of the principles and standards presented in this policy. Free Press Unlimited commits to review the policy on a regular basis, based on input from its partners and relevant developments in the field of security.

# A comprehensive approach to safety

Free Press Unlimited considers safety as a comprehensive concept that covers physical, psycho-social, digital and legal safety; aspects which should not be viewed in isolation of each other. Safety should be approached holistically; with solutions that are not stand-alone interventions, but are embedded within a wider safety framework – taking local conditions and stakeholders (state, business, armed groups) into account.

## Physical safety

Physical violence against journalists comes in many different forms: from assault to abduction and at its most extreme, killing. Regarding physical safety, two major trends can be observed. The first is that, while journalists operating in war zones are undeniably particularly at risk, the majority of journalist killings between 2006 and 2013 occurred outside of situations



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of armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> In the majority of cases, journalists were killed following the publication of investigations exposing corruption or malpractices of corporations, governments and criminals. Secondly, the media professionals that are most vulnerable to violence are those working within their own country, whereas this used to be international correspondents reporting from front lines.<sup>2</sup> In the last ten years, local journalists made up 95 per cent of the media professionals killed. Only five per cent were foreign correspondents coming, mostly, from Western countries. Of all the journalists killed in this period, almost twenty per cent were freelancers. This group is particularly exposed to risks as they usually work alone and rarely get the same level of protection and assistance that staff reporters receive.

### **Digital safety**

There is a growing list of safety risks within the digital domain, including surveillance, digital attacks and a lack of access to the technology that enables safe and secure communication. Digital threats often come from states, that gather extensive information about journalists such as their whereabouts, networks or sources. Authorities can then use this intelligence to intimidate the media. Journalists and media organisations often lack the awareness and capacity to effectively protect themselves, their information and their sources. Another threat to digital safety comes in the form of online harassment, which can range from direct harassment, such as being trolled, to invasion of privacy, such as being hacked. Online harassment has a gendered component, as female journalists are more often subject to online harassment. Additionally, they tend to be subject to different and more severe forms of online harassment, such as sexual harassment.<sup>3</sup>

### **Psycho-social safety**

An increasingly threatening environment and exposure to violence can lead to journalists suffering from fear, trauma and paranoia. Most media organisations and journalists are ill-prepared for the psycho-social risks they are exposed to. Many young and inexperienced journalists are exposed to threats as a consequence of their work. Online smear campaigns – often in retaliation of critical reporting, exposing injustices such as corruption – have in recent years become an additional source of psycho-social stress and trauma for journalists.

### **Legal safety**

Despite enjoying legal protections on paper, media professionals increasingly face prosecution. This has become a primary method of restricting and intimidating journalists. Arbitrary arrests, trumped-up charges, criminal libel, defamation and blasphemy laws, and lack of due process create a restrictive environment. As a result, media professionals often start self-censoring, and some may even be forced to flee their own country in fear of prison sentences or fines. To prevent litigation, media houses are spending large amounts on legal fees for lawyers to screen investigative stories pre-publication. The matter is further exacerbated by a lack of awareness and absence of legal experts and lawyers specialised in media legislation.

1. UN OHCHR. (2015). Conference on Journalists' Safety, Media Freedom and Pluralism in Times of Conflict, remarks by Ivan Šimonović, <https://www.osce.org/fom/165486?download=true>.
2. UNESCO. (2018). World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018, <https://en.unesco.org/world-media-trends-2017>.
3. Digital Rights Foundation. (2019). Female Journalists in New Media, <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Female-journalists-in-new-media-experiences-challenges-and-a-gendered-approach.pdf>.



# Safety as precondition for a **healthy media** environment

Crimes against media professionals create a climate of fear and self-censorship. In the past ten years hundreds of journalists have been murdered, but in nine out of ten cases the killers go unpunished. This culture of impunity for crimes against journalists obstructs access to information and public debate, leading to an unhealthy political environment. For these reasons, safety should be addressed at all levels and become an intrinsic part of the journalistic profession. However, the issue of safety is very complex. The origins of threats vary per country and cooperation between a wide range of actors is required to create a safe working environment both locally and internationally. Free

Press Unlimited will direct its efforts to address safety along the following four pillars, at both the local and international level.

## **1. Emergency response**

Media professionals are often confronted with violence, prosecution and harassment while conducting their work. This may lead to suspension of work or the inability to continue a journalistic career. For these reasons, it is important to provide support to journalists in distress, so they can get back to work as soon as possible. Free Press Unlimited believes that media professionals in need should be assisted with the funds,

equipment and coaching required to mitigate medical, legal, psycho-social and physical emergencies. This will guarantee the continuity of journalistic work, especially in volatile and repressive environments.

## **2. Capacity development**

To conduct their work safely, media professionals in repressive environments need to be able to mitigate risks and foster a safe working environment. However, around the world – and particularly in restrictive societies – media professionals have limited access to quality education on issues relating to safety. This lack of knowledge places them in a position where malicious actors can easily intimidate, harass and attack the media. Free Press Unlimited believes it is important to develop the capacity of media professionals in the fields of digital, physical and psycho-social safety by providing (online/offline) training and coaching, and fostering knowledge exchanges. This will contribute to a more sustainable and resilient media environment.

## **3. Tools and resources**

Media professionals often lack the tools and resources to do their work safely, especially in repressive societies. Without equipment and knowledge to better protect themselves from interference by adversaries, media professionals remain vulnerable. Free Press Unlimited will therefore contribute to the development and dissemination of safety tools and resources for media workers in challenging environments, ranging from technological innovations to research papers and training materials. These include, for example, the TOTEM digital security online training courses and the online database of safety resources.

## **4. Lobby and advocacy**

Over the years numerous resolutions and declarations have been passed by international organisations regarding the safety of media professionals (see the frame below). These documents are often the foundations of national and international regulatory frameworks, which seek to establish a safe working environment for media professionals. It is important to translate these international standards into real progress at national and local level by strengthening cooperation and solidarity. Free Press Unlimited, with its knowledge, expertise and extensive network of 100+ partners in over 40 countries, regards itself well-placed to translate local needs and realities into concrete policy recommendations that feed into the international agenda. By initiating, shaping and actively participating in the dialogue around media safety, Free Press Unlimited aims to contribute to a safe media environment, locally and internationally. At the same time, to offer media professionals better protection on the ground, commitments need to be implemented (nationally and internationally) and those in power must be held to account. To this end, Free Press Unlimited will continue to monitor and implement policies that contribute to an environment of accountability.

## Key international commitments on the safety of media workers

**International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).** Article 19 prescribes the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression; article 6 prescribes the right to life; and article 9 prescribes the right to liberty and security of one's person.

### **Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1977.**

Humanitarian law provides for a special status for journalists in situations of international armed conflicts, which entails that journalists are entitled to all the protections afforded to civilians in times of conflict. An intentional attack against civilians, including journalists, constitutes a war crime.

### **UN Human Rights Council resolutions 21/12 (2012), 27/5 (2014) and 33/2 (2016) on the safety of**

**journalists.** These resolutions acknowledge the particular role played by journalists in matters of public interest and strongly condemn all kinds of attacks against journalists. They underline the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists, and call for independent investigations to bring perpetrators to justice. These resolutions task the High Commissioner to prepare an overview of available avenues for obtaining assistance on the regional or international level, with a view to providing an analysis of the effectiveness of these avenues.

### **UN General Assembly resolutions 68/163 (2013), 69/185 (2014) and 70/162 (2016) on the safety of**

**journalists and the issue of impunity.** These resolutions set forth measures that states should take to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment, both in law and in practice, and to ensure accountability. The 2013 resolution proclaimed November 2nd as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The 2016 resolution furthermore acknowledges the role of non-traditional information providers, online as well as offline.

### **UN Security Council Resolution 2222, on the protection of journalists, media professionals and**

**associated personnel in armed conflicts (2015).** This resolution recalls that journalists, media professionals and associated personnel engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians and shall not be the object of attack or reprisals. The resolution also urges the immediate and unconditional release of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel who have been kidnapped or taken hostage in situations of armed conflict.

**Goal 16, target 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 Agenda.** This goal aims to ensure public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. An important indicator to measure progress towards SDG 16.10 (being indicator 16.10.1) sets out that all verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates are to be reported by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNESCO. As such, it constitutes an important monitoring mechanism for journalist safety.

# Free Press Unlimited's goals for **media safety**

In the next five years, Free Press Unlimited will work towards the following five goals to enhance the safety of media professionals:

1. Media professionals supported by Free Press Unlimited programmes are able to deal effectively with interference and threats at a physical, digital, legal and psycho-social level.
2. The majority of Free Press Unlimited's partners makes demonstrated efforts to address safety in the context of their work (awareness, organisational safety policies, protocols etc.); particular attention will be given to the different safety needs of male and female workers.
3. All staff members of Free Press Unlimited understand the importance of holistic safety, are able to use relevant instruments and tools to enhance safety in their work, and share this information with their partners.
4. All Free Press Unlimited lobby and advocacy interventions relating to safety are aimed at collaboration and solidarity with key stakeholders – to enforce and implement national and international conventions and resolutions – and at holding national governments and judiciaries to account for investigating, prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators of crimes against journalists.
5. All of Free Press Unlimited's external communication takes into account the safety of those mentioned and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to increasing journalist safety.



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# Free Press Unlimited's safety standards

Free Press Unlimited has set a number of standards that contribute to achieving its goals for media safety. These standards also act as benchmarks to measure progress towards these goals. These safety standards cover five areas:

- Plans, projects and programmes;
- Partnerships and cooperation;
- Organisational structures, systems and policies;
- Lobby and advocacy;
- External communication.

## Area 1 - Plans, projects and programmes

Free Press Unlimited will make sure that safety and security are an intrinsic part of all plans and programmes, by implementing the following standards:

- A safety and security analysis will be made before the start of any plan, project or programme, taking into account the approach to safety defined in this policy;

- Monitoring of the safety environment – and appropriate mitigation strategies – will be included in all plans, projects or programmes;
- Activities for awareness raising on safety-related topics will be included in all plans, projects or programmes;
- Allocation of human, financial and physical resources to address safety issues, including mitigation instruments, insurance and tools.

## Area 2 - Partnerships and cooperation

Free Press Unlimited undertakes activities and programmes with a variety of media organisations, networks and individual actors. Its standards for partnerships and cooperation are:

- Assessing the level of commitment of (potential) cooperating organisations and actors towards media safety, and of their achievements in creating

change concerning media safety, both at policy and programme level;

- Cooperation with like-minded organisations and actors, including civil society organisations, in terms of adherence to media safety practices and promoting change in this respect;
- Creating awareness, knowledge and interest among (potential) cooperating organisations and actors towards media safety;
- Explicit consent will be obtained from partners before sharing sensitive information with third parties (e.g. donors).

### **Area 3 - Organisational structures, systems and policies**

Free Press Unlimited will work to ensure that its structures, systems and policies facilitate the above standards, as well as the implementation of the safety policy as a whole, by implementing the following standards:

- Free Press Unlimited aims to practice what it preaches and strives for a similar level of safety within the organisation as prescribed to partners;
- Organisational policies for secure data exchange and communication with colleagues and partners will be made available and operational;
- Regular staff training/coaching on safety, and how to implement mitigation strategies into daily work practices, will be provided;
- Adequate human and financial resources to implement workplace-related actions needed to support the implementation of the safety policy, including mitigation instruments, insurance and tools.

### **Area 4 - Lobby and advocacy**

Free Press Unlimited actively lobbies and advocates on national and international level to keep the safety of media professionals and the issue of impunity on the agenda. Its standards for lobby and advocacy are:

- Empowering national actors to lobby and advocate for the safety of journalists and positive change on the ground;
- Collaborating, whenever possible, with other (national) civil society actors to ensure maximum effect;
- Contributing to the development and effective implementation of the international normative framework for the protection of journalists.

### **Area 5 - External communication**

Through its external communication, Free Press Unlimited has the opportunity to increase awareness of the importance of media safety. Its standards for external communication are:

- Free Press Unlimited's commitment to media safety is communicated and reflected in its campaigns, fundraising and media messages, especially around World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2nd;
- All external communication is executed in line with this policy and in relevant cases prior permission will be sought from internal and external stakeholders.

# Monitoring and Evaluation

Free Press Unlimited monitors progress towards media safety in its programmes, partnerships and within the organisation. In relation to its programmes, monitoring and evaluation includes safety context analyses, the collection of data on incidents, the identification of risk areas, and the monitoring of third-party sources dealing with journalist safety. It will also include mechanisms for collecting and sharing lessons learned relating to safety. In relation to its partnerships, Free Press Unlimited will develop instruments to monitor progress made in raising awareness among partners of issues relating to the safety of media professionals. Internal progress will be measured based on the outcomes of a safety self-assessment, which reviews the awareness of procedures

and practices within an organisation. Safety (self-) assessments will be instrumental in setting a baseline for assessing progress on the objectives and standards outlined in this policy.



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