



Human Rights Council: Protecting Rights of Journalists and Free Speech

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I. Key Terms

1. **Natural Rights:** Rights that are inherent by virtue of human nature. There are three natural rights: life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.
2. **Social Contract:** When the government fails to secure citizens' natural rights or satisfy the best interests of society, citizens can withdraw their obligation to obey, or change leadership through elections, other means also include violence.
3. **Article 19:** States that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".
4. **Metadata:** A set of data that describes and gives information about other data. For example, the time and place you made a phone call, the length of the call, the recipient, or the web browser you visited and for how long.

II. Background Information

In 1946, the UN Commission on Human Rights was the main international unit care for the protection and promotion of human rights, until the Human Rights Council replaced it in 2006. The HRC is composed of 47 member-states who are elected for three-year terms and together investigate and solve problems related to the violation of human rights.

Due to post World War II worries, in 1948, the first lady of the United States at the time, Eleanor Roosevelt requested the United Nations to organize a document in which every human right was established. This resulted in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*. Even though this document is not legally binding, it has inspired a thread of legally binding human rights treaties and laws that make sure the declaration is protected. Within the articles, one of the most important is Article 19. This article cares for the right to freedom of speech and free press; both defined as the right to express opinions without censorship.

III. Historical Timeline

1948: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly. It promotes human rights, including freedom of speech.

1958: Two Concepts of Liberty, by Isaiah Berlin,

1964: The Free Speech Movement began in California, US, when some college students were not allowed to discuss political views on campus.

1989: Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader, puts the fatwa, Islamic law, against liberty, it was lifted in 1998.

1990's onward: The internet makes it easier for citizens to express their opinions.

1992: Noam Chomsky: "If you're in favor of free speech, then you're in favor of views you despise."

2001: After the 9/11 attacks, The Patriot Act, which allows for government agencies to investigate citizens' privacy to detect and prevent terrorism attacks.

2005: The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act bans protest from within 1km from the British Parliament.

2013: Edward Joseph Snowden, an American computer professional, comes forward as a source of leaks calling out systematic government surveillance.

IV. Present Situation

The right to freely express our opinions is a fundamental right considered indispensable to the development of ourselves and society as a whole. Without freedom of expression we would not be able to exercise other rights such as freedom of assembly and association or our right to vote. "The right to vote is compromised in a society that does not have a free exchange of ideas and information on public and political matters between citizens, candidates and elected representatives." That being said, free speech is not an absolute right therefore it can be limited where necessary. The problem lies in the manner in which it is limited.

Apparently, in Turkey, in 2016, a group of journalists and citizens had planned a coup d'état that failed. Now, two years later the government has sentenced six journalists to life

imprisonment for being part of the failed coup. All journalists denied they had anything to do with it, yet they are being charged for crimes against the state. Just hours before this, another journalist, Deniz Yucel, a German-Turkish reporter, had been released thanks to the German Chancellor's, Angela Merkel, involvement and meeting with the Turkish prime minister. According to *The Washington Post*, Turkey is the number one journalist-jailer, with more than 70 journalists or media workers in prison. The Turkish government has been using this tactic to instill fear in all journalists who decide to report on them.

A fundamental tenet of journalism is the ability to access information while simultaneously keeping sources safe and confidential. Currently trending in western democracies is a both new and alarming increase in *metadata* retention laws. Metadata can reveal an enormous amount of details about a person's habits, private and social lives. Therefore, laws that aid the retention of this form of data jeopardise both free speech and free press and could dissuade people from sharing information on matters of public interest.

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers", reads Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the UN today, practical support for such a strong and unqualified defense is awfully low. It is now common to affirm support for free speech while simultaneously pushing for restrictions on hate speech. This position is contradictory in itself due to the subjectivity of hate speech and to the fact that freedom of speech was proposed in order to safely voice unpopular viewpoints.

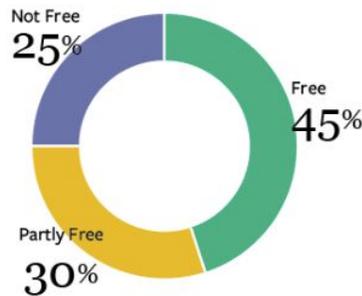
Free speech is currently under attack around the globe and the freedom in one country depends on the freedom for all. Due to globalization, our fates are interlinked. The autocratic regimes in Russia and China go by the ideal that the only way for them to maintain power at home is to squelch open debate, pursue dissidents, and compromise rule-based institutions beyond their borders. Government-imposed limitations like these are neither legal, necessary nor proportionate and everyday, journalists, bloggers, government critics, and minorities of all sorts are being targeted because they seek to exercise their right to free expression. That is why, in

order to preserve our freedoms, the citizens and leaders of democratic countries must defend the rights of their counterparts around the globe.

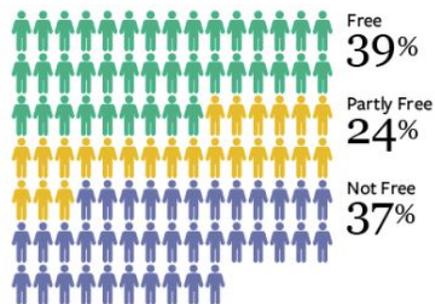
Annually, Freedom House launches a survey in which they analyze and rate every country on a series of freedom indicators, thus providing a comprehensive view of the global state of freedom to the general public. According to *Freedom House's* report on freedom of the press, 13 percent of the global population enjoys a free press, with another 45 percent living in countries where the media environment is managed by the government. Moreover, in their most recent report on Freedom in the World, it is brought to our attention that 2017 marked the 12th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.

Freedom in the World 2018 Status by Population and Country

Global: By Country



Global: By Population



V. Authoritarian Governments and Their Threat to Free Press

Other than guaranteeing many fundamental human rights, the UDHR stipulates that these must be exercised according to “the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.” This clause has been used by authoritarian governments to abrogate some of the guaranteed rights in other articles.

Article 19 gives humans the right to transparent press and free speech. This right is intertwined with the democratic ideals many countries abide by and is therefore threatened by authoritarian governments that look to keep their social capital, eliminating every source of information or person who speaks against them since press serves only as public relations for

what the regime wants to achieve. Most governments that look for controlling a citizen's personal life are authoritarian governments. These are, most likely, the biggest threat to free press.

The key example of an authoritarian government that limits freedom of press, is Russia. From 1912 to 1991, there was only one newspaper, Pravda, and it was sponsored by the government. With the fall of the USSR and the formation of the Russian Federation, the Russian government has allowed independent newspapers, yet they have been driven out of business or brought under state control. The government uses anti-terrorism laws to investigate citizens. Violence against journalists is mostly seen in the Chechnya region against pro-independence journalists. Oleg Strelkov is a journalist borned in Ukraine who founded a small media group based in Moscow. Later, in 2008, he founded an independent media organization. They had an internet portal newspaper and later a television channel. For a long period of time Oleg Strelkov was investigating government and police corruption. In 2014, the Russian police found out about his pro-Ukrainian talks, which resulted in Strelkov fleeing to Germany. Time later, armed men wearing masks, searched his mother's home without a warrant. Out of nowhere his life took a dangerous turn; he now is a fugitive who hides abroad.

Apart from the most well-known authoritarian regime, Russia, one must acknowledge the situation inside Ukraine. In February of this year, Arkady Babchenko was reported dead by the Ukrainian authorities, yet less than 24 hours later he showed up to a press conference. His wife reported that he arrived home late at night with his back covered in bullet wounds, and supposedly died in a ambulance on his way to the hospital. Still, no one has been able to find the culprit. On June 1, Ukrainian authorities said they found a Russian hit-list of 47 media workers. While the situation in Ukraine is only escalating, the international community is failing to ameliorate the problem, or offering protection to journalists, or bother in finding out who is causing the issue.

Ever since the beginning of authoritarian rule, this system has based itself on promoting the military and on limiting freedom of speech. Most of the time, these governments see free speech as an enemy, instead as something great for all. The problem with this is that governments have laws that prohibit free speech, which leads to violating Article 19.

VI. Journalists in War Zones

Journalists are the key to raising awareness on the cruel reality of war zones; which is why journalists play such a critical role in the international community. The media is under an ongoing threat and in the past 25 years, nearly 3,000 media staff and journalists have been killed trying to report in war zones like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine. These conflict zones are dangerous for all journalists, specifically freelancers; who do not have the money to take hostile environment and medical training courses and unlike journalists under contract with media organizations, are left without choice and work without comprehensive insurance.

Authoritarian countries, such as Turkey and Egypt where “media-phobia” is now so obvious that journalists are constantly being accused of terrorism and those who don’t offer their loyalty are imprisoned, are no longer the sole activists towards media hostility. It is now common for democratically-elected leaders to see the media as an adversary, instead of it being part of democracy’s foundation. Respect towards media persons is rapidly descending. President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines is constantly insulting reporters and has even gone as far as to warn them that they “are not exempted from assassination.” Hate speech targeting journalists is shared on social networks often by troll armies in India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pay. In Slovakia, then Prime Minister Robert Fico called journalists “filthy anti-Slovak prostitutes” and “idiotic hyenas.” A Slovak reporter, Ján Kuciak, was shot dead in his home in February 2018, just four months after another European journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, was killed by a targeted car-bombing in Malta.

When reporting on a war zone, journalists need to be alerted on the unsafe environment they’re in and on how the government may target them for the content they publish. The Syrian Civil War started in 2011, and ever since there have been around 400,000 reported casualties, 211 of those being journalists. The war has caused that Syria becomes one of the world’s deadliest countries for journalists. Arrests, abductions and murders are some of the things citizen-journalists go through just for opening a new outlet on the reality of war. In 2013, the amount of kidnapping of journalists reached its peak with almost one journalist kidnapped each week. Jason Stern, one of the senior associates for the Committee to Protect Journalists, when

understanding. In 2012 they issued the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Some of the objectives of this plan of action are: to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers both in conflict and non-conflict situations, strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide.

VII. Guide Questions

1. What is your delegation's position towards the situation?
2. What has your delegation done regarding the problem?
3. How can your delegation guarantee journalists' safety?
4. How is your delegation affected by the issue?
5. Does your delegation support freedom of speech and press?
6. What can your delegation do to promote free press?

VIII. Message from the Dais

Delegates, we are really looking forward to seeing the solutions and plans you come up with for the committee. Remember, this briefing is only an information guide, which is why we encourage you to research beyond the topics mentioned here. Position papers are due by **Monday, October 15, 2018 at 11:59 pm**. There will be a minimum of 1 page and a maximum of 2 pages. These must be written in Times New Roman, size 12 and have a line spacing of 1.5. Please add a works cited page (just with links). Position papers must be sent to the **committee email** below. If you have any doubts or concerns, feel free to contact us.

Thank you,

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