

Human Rights Council

Safeguarding Press Freedom and Protecting Journalists in Conflict Zones



Message from the Dais:

Welcome to the Human Rights Council at this year's BEYMUN. We are honored to introduce ourselves as your dedicated Dais team: Serge Nohra and Moustapha El Haj as your Chairs, along with Myriam Bou Nader and Ahmad El Hamoui as your Co-Chairs. Together, we bring not only a shared passion for diplomacy and international cooperation but also a deep commitment to fostering meaningful discussions on human rights. Our collective experience spans several years of involvement in both national and international MUNs, and we are proud to have taken part in and organized numerous conferences where we developed and demonstrated strong leadership, negotiation, and public speaking skills.

With that in mind, we encourage each of you to approach this committee with the seriousness and preparation it deserves. As former delegates ourselves, we know that true success in MUN comes not only from speaking confidently but from researching thoroughly, collaborating respectfully, and thinking critically. We urge you to dive deep into your country's policies, understand the nuances of the topic, and come equipped with well-founded arguments and creative solutions. ***The more effort you put into preparation, the more rewarding this experience will be for you and your fellow delegates.*** This is your chance to shine, to lead, and to make your mark through diplomacy. As we prepare to engage with some of the most pressing human rights issues in the world today, we are confident that this conference will be an opportunity not only for productive dialogue but also for mutual learning, growth, and collaboration.

To our delegates, we want to say: we are incredibly excited to witness your ideas come to life through informed debate and teamwork. We are thrilled to be part of your MUN journey and are fully committed to supporting you every step of the way.

We can't wait to meet each and every one of you and embark on this unforgettable experience together!

Introduction to The Committee



Institutional Overview of the Human Rights Council

The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) is a key intergovernmental body within the United Nations system. It was created in 2006 by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect human rights around the world. The HRC's work is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which sets out fundamental rights and freedoms for all people (United Nations, n.d)¹. The Council acts as a forum where states can discuss human rights issues, raise concerns, and collaborate on solutions. It brings together UN member states, independent experts, civil society organizations, and other key voices to tackle global human rights challenges (UN General Assembly, 2006)².

One of the HRC's main responsibilities is to respond to human rights violations. It does this by reviewing situations around the world, recommending changes, and creating programs to support improvements. The Council can also establish special mechanisms—like special rapporteurs and working groups—to monitor and report on specific themes or countries (United Nations, 2024)³. These experts are independent and help provide accurate information and advice for better decision-making.



The HRC also oversees the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which reviews the human rights records of every UN member state. This process is cooperative and includes a review team (called a troika) made up of three UN member states. Through the UPR, countries are encouraged to reflect on their human rights progress, receive constructive feedback, and make commitments for improvement (United Nations, 2019)⁴. This helps build transparency and strengthens trust among nations.

In recent years, the HRC has played a role in addressing human rights concerns in many conflict-affected areas—regions facing instability due to internal violence, war, or fragile institutions. These include countries like Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In these cases, the Council has sent fact-finding missions, appointed special rapporteurs, and called on governments to respect international human rights laws. These actions show how the HRC not only discusses issues but also takes meaningful steps toward justice and accountability.

The Human Rights Council in Action: Responding to Global Crises

Established in 2006 as the principal UN body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights globally, the Human Rights Council (HRC) has since undertaken pivotal actions to address human rights violations, particularly in conflict-affected and politically unstable regions. From its early sessions, the Council demonstrated its capacity to respond to urgent crises through country-specific mandates and investigative mechanisms, such as **Commissions of Inquiry** and **Independent International Fact-Finding Missions**, which have played vital roles in documenting atrocities and advocating accountability.

A defining moment in the Council's history was its response to the **Syrian civil war**, where it authorized a series of investigative bodies to report on violations by both state and non-state actors. The resulting documentation became foundational for calls to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court. These mechanisms not only exposed war crimes and crimes against humanity but also highlighted the systemic suppression of the press and the persecution of journalists in conflict zones.



The HRC has also been instrumental in defending freedom of expression. In **2012**, it adopted **Resolution 21/12**, the first UN resolution focused solely on the safety of journalists. This was followed by **Resolution 33/2 (2016)**, which emphasized the obligation of states to

combat impunity and foster safe environments for media workers. These landmark actions signaled a growing global recognition of the press as a cornerstone of democratic societies and a vital actor in exposing human rights abuses. Another milestone was the Council's adoption of **Resolution 17/19 (2011)**, the first UN resolution affirming that human rights protections apply without discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. It marked a watershed moment in international human rights law and established the HRC as a progressive body capable of advancing rights in areas often overlooked by traditional institutions.

Furthermore, the HRC has responded to crises in regions like Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Ukraine by mandating high-level investigative missions and holding special sessions. In doing so, it has not only spotlighted systemic violations but also elevated the narratives of survivors, journalists, and civil society actors who risk their lives to report truthfully under repressive conditions. Through these actions, the Human Rights Council has solidified its role as a central forum for addressing both emerging and entrenched human rights challenges—especially those involving press freedom, freedom of expression, and protection for civil society in the most vulnerable contexts.

Human Rights and the Global Framework:

Human rights are a set of principles that guide how people should be treated with dignity and fairness. These rights are clearly defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948. The UDHR includes rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of belief, the right to education, and protection from torture or discrimination (United Nations, n.d)⁵. The HRC builds its work around these universal values, and its efforts are guided by the goal of making sure that everyone, no matter where they live, has their basic rights respected.

To better organize and understand its approach, the HRC works under eight core principles (United Nations, 2023)⁶:

1. **Universality** – Human rights apply to every person, everywhere.

2. **Impartiality and Objectivity** – Actions are based on fairness and not on political interests.
3. **Non-Selectivity** – The HRC engages all countries equally and encourages open dialogue.
4. **Non-Interference** – Respects national sovereignty while promoting global standards.
5. **Cooperation and Engagement** – Encourages collaboration between countries, experts, and civil society.
6. **Accountability and Transparency** – Holds countries accountable for their human rights commitments.
7. **Promotion and Protection** – Focuses on both spreading awareness and preventing abuses.
8. **Solidarity** – Stresses global unity in the fight for human rights.

These principles are not only foundational values—they are reflected in real-world situations across the globe:



In **South Sudan**, where civil conflict has led to widespread displacement and violence, the HRC's principle of **solidarity** was evident in its support for humanitarian organizations working on the ground. By encouraging regional cooperation and calling for international aid, the Council emphasized the need to stand with vulnerable populations. Additionally, **cooperation and engagement** was promoted through dialogue with neighboring states and peacekeeping forces to facilitate peace negotiations.

In **Myanmar**, the principle of **accountability and transparency** was exercised when the HRC appointed an independent fact-finding mission to investigate military actions against the Rohingya population. The findings helped raise global awareness and called on the international community to pressure Myanmar to adhere to human

rights norms. This also represented the principle of **promotion and protection**, as the Council sought to prevent further abuse and support the affected communities.

In **Yemen**, where conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis, the HRC applied **promotion and protection** by advocating for ceasefires, unrestricted humanitarian access, and investigations into civilian casualties. The principle of **universality** was particularly important here, highlighting that even in times of war, the rights of civilians must be respected.

The Significance of Multilateralism in the Human Rights Council

A defining characteristic of the Human Rights Council (HRC) is its commitment to multilateralism—the cooperative approach in which member states, alongside other relevant stakeholders, collaborate to safeguard and promote universal human rights. Unlike national institutions that primarily focus on domestic affairs, the HRC addresses human rights issues that transcend borders, such as refugee movements, international trade, environmental rights, and the protection of vulnerable populations in conflict zones (United Nations, 2006)⁹.

The reliance on multilateral dialogue is fundamental to the HRC's mandate, as it facilitates comprehensive and cooperative responses to complex, global challenges. Through mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the HRC enables states to engage in mutual review processes, where each nation is held accountable for its human rights practices while also contributing to the broader dialogue on international norms and standards. This process promotes shared responsibility and encourages the exchange of best practices among states (United Nations, 2019)¹⁰.



In an era marked by the rise of unilateral actions and protectionist policies, the HRC remains a crucial platform for fostering diplomatic engagement, collective responsibility, and the equitable advancement of human rights. The multilateral framework not only strengthens the efficacy of the Council's interventions but also ensures that the protection of human dignity is pursued in a manner that is both inclusive and globally informed (UN General Assembly, 2006)¹¹.

Rules of Procedure

This committee will operate on the basis of the regular BEYMUN rules of procedure. Delegates are required to use the following motions:

1. Setting the Agenda

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to set the agenda in favor of Topic A/B. "

Yet, this motion will not be used in the conference since there is 1 topic.

2. Speaker's List

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to open the Speaker's List with a speaker's time of [Y] seconds. "

3. Moderated Caucus

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to suspend the debate and move into a moderated caucus to discuss '[Subtopic Y]' for a total time of [Z] minutes, with a speaker's time of [W] seconds. "

4. Unmoderated Caucus

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to suspend the debate and move into an unmoderated caucus to [form blocs and alliances / discuss resolutions/work on the working paper or draft resolution / discuss the crisis] for a total time of [Y] minutes. "

5. Consultation of the Whole

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to suspend the debate and move into a consultation of the whole to discuss [the recommendations elaborated in the previous unmoderated caucus / the crisis] for a total time of [Y] minutes. "

6. Adjourn the Meeting

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to adjourn the meeting for [Y] minutes for the purpose of [a lunch break / a coffee break]. "

7. Solicit a Third Party

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to solicit [Third Party Y], as they possess relevant information or expertise regarding [Subtopic Z / the crisis]. "

8. Press Conference

"The delegate of [Country X] motions to suspend the debate and move into a press conference to discuss [a resolution related to Y / the crisis] for a total time of [Z] minutes. "

9. Extend the Time of the Unmoderated Caucus

“The delegate of [Country X] motions to extend the duration of the current unmoderated caucus by [Y] minutes. ”

10. Introduce the Draft Resolution

“The delegate of [Country X] motions to introduce the draft resolutions with a speaker’s time of [Y] seconds per author or co-sponsor. ”

11. Close Debate and Move into Voting Procedure

“The delegate of [Country X] motions to close the debate and move directly into voting procedure. ”

(Note: This motion requires a two-thirds majority to pass.

Written Motions:

1. Right of Reply: Delegates can request the right of reply to another delegate who has offended their country. There is no right of reply to a right of reply.
2. Appeal to the Chair's Decision: If the delegates feel that the chair has made an unfair decision, the delegates can send it as a note to the Chair.

Points:

- Point of Order: Used to correct a procedural or factual mistake. Interruptive, but do not overuse it.
- Point of Personal Privilege: Request to leave or adjust comfort (e. g. , temperature). Interruptive.
- Point of Inquiry: Ask about the rules or current stage. Interruptive.
- Point of Information: Ask a question when the floor is open. Not interruptive.
- Point to Instigate a Debate: Challenge another delegate’s resolution stance. Interruptive and subject to chair’s approval.

Mapping to the Sustainable Development Goals

The Human Rights Council (HRC) plays a vital role in supporting and advancing several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), which aim to improve quality of life, reduce inequality, and promote peace and prosperity worldwide. The HRC's work in promoting and protecting human rights directly contributes to achieving many of these goals in practical and meaningful ways:



- **SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions** – The HRC helps build fair and accountable systems by advocating for justice, transparency, and respect for the rule of law. For example, in countries experiencing prolonged conflict or political instability, such as Libya or Venezuela, the HRC has worked to expose abuses, support legal reforms, and call for fair trials and protections for vulnerable groups.
- **SDG 5: Gender Equality** – Gender equality is a central concern of the HRC's agenda. It addresses issues such as gender-based violence, unequal access to education and employment, and harmful cultural practices. In places like Afghanistan, where girls and women have faced serious restrictions, the HRC has repeatedly called for international attention and action to protect their rights and ensure equal opportunities.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** – The HRC focuses on protecting minority groups, migrants, refugees, and marginalized populations. It advocates for fair treatment regardless of

ethnicity, nationality, or social background. For instance, the HRC has worked on improving the rights of migrants and displaced communities in the Mediterranean and along the U.S.–Mexico border, reinforcing global commitments to equality and dignity.

- **SDG 1: No Poverty** – The HRC addresses poverty by emphasizing the link between human rights and economic well-being. By advocating for social protection, fair wages, and access to essential services, the HRC helps fight the structural causes of poverty. Its efforts in post-conflict regions, such as parts of the Sahel and Central America, have highlighted the need for rights-based approaches to economic recovery.
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** – The HRC promotes the right to health, especially in conflict zones and during humanitarian crises. It raises awareness about the impact of war on health systems, access to clean water, mental health, and healthcare services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the HRC stressed the importance of equitable vaccine distribution and access to health care, particularly in developing nations.

Overall, the HRC's commitment to human rights is deeply intertwined with the success of the SDGs. By addressing root causes of inequality and injustice, and by promoting human dignity in all aspects of life, the Council plays a crucial part in driving sustainable development forward in every region of the world (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2022)^{7,8}.

Human Rights List: Understanding Core Rights and Freedoms

Here is a brief list of the key human rights outlined in the UDHR, which form the foundation of the HRC's mission and areas of protection:

- Right to life, liberty, and personal security
- Freedom from torture and degrading treatment
- Right to equality before the law
- Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

- Right to work and to fair working conditions
- Right to education
- Freedom of expression
- Right to participate in government and free elections

These rights serve as the foundation of the HRC's work. In areas like war-torn communities or regions under authoritarian regimes, many of these rights are often violated. By identifying these violations, the HRC can apply international pressure and encourage positive reforms.

Introduction to The Topic

Amidst conflict-affected regions, the ability of the media to operate freely becomes a critical mechanism for exposing abuses, fostering accountability, and upholding transparency. Journalists and media workers are not merely narrators of unfolding events; they are often the only voices documenting violations, bearing witness where institutions fail. However, in these volatile settings, their role makes them targets for those who wish to suppress scrutiny. Threats against them are not abstract—these include physical violence, arbitrary detention, psychological harm, and targeted smear campaigns (OHCHR, 2025) ¹².

Recent trends show an alarming escalation. As of 2024, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted a sharp increase in aggressions toward journalists (OHCHR, 2025) ¹³. Complementing this, the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders recorded that nearly three-quarters of countries surveyed experience major obstacles to media freedom, with only a small minority deemed “good” or “satisfactory” environments (Reporters Without Borders, 2024) ¹⁴.



These dangers are more prominent in states grappling with socio-political instability, historical injustices, and ongoing conflict. Yet, the threats transcend geography. Even in the Global North, media practitioners sometimes face subtle repression under democratic veneers (Alterman, 2015) ¹⁵. In areas where civil unrest collides with propaganda, the distinction between journalism and activism becomes blurred. Both depend on uninhibited expression, though their purposes diverge: the journalist strives for impartiality, while the activist advocates for transformation (UNESCO, n.d.) ¹⁶. Historical parallels, such as the 1917 Russian Revolution, illustrate how dissenting narratives can evolve into movements.

In destabilized regions, however, journalists face additional barriers such as disinformation, censorship, and personal targeting. Legal and structural safeguards are indispensable to reduce the risks they face, alongside comprehensive prevention measures aimed at dismantling systemic suppression (OHCHR, 2025) ¹⁷.

Key Statistics and Impact of the Human Rights Council

Since its establishment in 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) has become a central platform for addressing global human rights issues. Its mechanisms, particularly the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures, have facilitated substantial international engagement, producing tangible outcomes in both state accountability and thematic human rights advancements.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR):

- As of 2024, the HRC has conducted four complete cycles of the UPR, covering all 193 UN Member States.
- The number of recommendations received by States under review has increased by 287% since the first cycle.

Resolutions Adopted:

- In 2024, the HRC adopted a significant number of resolutions addressing various human rights concerns.
- The Council adopts an average of 100 to 120 resolutions annually, reflecting the wide scope of its agenda—from country-specific situations to thematic issues such as gender equality, racial discrimination, and freedom of the press.

Special Procedures:

- As of November 2024, there are 46 thematic and 14 country mandates under the Special Procedures system.
- From 1992 to May 2024, mandate holders have completed 1,582 visits to 177 countries and territories, providing reports to the Human Rights Council.

These statistics underscore the HRC's institutional relevance in shaping global human rights discourse and generating international pressure, especially in situations where national mechanisms have failed to secure accountability or protect vulnerable populations.

Topic In Depth

Media Freedom and Independence in Conflict-Affected Regions

In volatile and war-torn environments, the space for independent reporting is often constricted by those seeking control over narratives. Freedom of the press, when intact, acts as a balancing force, enabling societies to remain informed, resist manipulation, and demand accountability from power structures. Where conflict disrupts institutions, the role of the press becomes doubly important: it documents atrocities, informs displaced populations, and offers a line of defense against widespread disinformation. Without such checks,

populations are left vulnerable to information asymmetry and manipulation.

Integral to this process is the concept of media independence—the ability of news outlets to function without coercion from political, corporate, or ideological forces. This autonomy enables journalists to uncover abuses and amplify suppressed voices. In conflict zones, however, control over information is often treated as a strategic asset. When external actors manipulate or starve independent outlets of resources, the resulting monopolization of information skews public perception and erodes trust in the media (European Commission, n.d.)

¹⁸.

Even where free expression is nominally upheld, wartime environments are rife with indirect restrictions.



Governments and armed groups alike may stifle dissent under the guise of national security, employ economic pressure, or obstruct access to critical zones. These tactics do not only compromise journalistic integrity but also endanger lives and hinder humanitarian reporting.

Therefore, preserving the role of the media in such contexts involves more than advocating for press freedom—it necessitates the active dismantling of both overt and covert mechanisms of suppression. A multifaceted strategy is essential: one that includes legislative protections, safeguards for physical safety, and sustained international pressure. Only through these efforts can independent journalism endure and fulfill its vital function in regions where silence can be fatal.

Impunity and Lack of Accountability for Crimes Against Journalists and Activists

In conflict zones, where information becomes a powerful tool, those who disseminate it—journalists and activists—often become deliberate targets. Their commitment to truth-telling amidst chaos places them at considerable risk, and yet justice for crimes committed against them remains elusive. Impunity continues to fuel these violations, sending a clear message that aggression against media workers carries no consequences. This systemic failure not only jeopardizes individual lives but also erodes the very foundation of press freedom in societies affected by conflict (CPJ, 2023) ¹⁹.

The Global Impunity Index (GII) by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reveals that in over 80% of journalist murder cases, perpetrators remain unpunished. This staggering figure highlights a structural flaw in ensuring legal recourse, particularly in states where conflict weakens judicial systems or where institutions are compromised by corruption or political interference. In such regions, accountability is not just absent—it is actively obstructed.

This challenge is not exclusive to fragile or authoritarian regimes. Even governments with democratic credentials have been implicated in enabling, or at least tolerating, violence against the press. In many conflict zones, those in power may directly incite or execute attacks, especially when journalists uncover sensitive truths—be it corruption, abuse of power, or human rights violations (OHCHR, 2025) ²⁰. Without robust protective mechanisms and international scrutiny, the free press becomes a casualty of unchecked violence.

Ensuring justice for these crimes must be a global priority. International legal frameworks, investigative bodies, and diplomatic pressure are essential in holding violators accountable and reinforcing that no society can be just without defending those who expose its injustices.

The Espionage Act

In times of conflict, the tension between national security and press freedom intensifies, often tipping in favor of suppression. The Espionage Act of 1917, originally enacted in the United States to safeguard military intelligence, has since become a benchmark for how states can exploit legal tools to stifle the press. Though intended to prevent harmful disclosures, it has been increasingly used to target whistleblowers and journalists, raising ethical concerns about transparency, public interest, and censorship (Alterman, 2015) ²¹.

This paradigm is mirrored in many conflict-affected regions, where governments invoke national security to justify harsh restrictions on the press. Laws inspired by or similar to the Espionage Act are often adopted to criminalize the publication of sensitive information, even when such revelations serve public accountability. In many cases, the mere act of reporting on military operations, corruption, or human rights abuses is reframed as a threat to national stability.

Such legislation enables authorities to sidestep public scrutiny by silencing dissent, effectively turning journalists into criminals for fulfilling their duty to inform. The consequences are severe—not just for individual reporters but for the collective right of societies to be informed. It establishes a dangerous precedent: that truth-telling during war is subversive, and secrecy outweighs justice.

Thus, challenging these repressive frameworks is essential to protect press freedom. Clear distinctions must be drawn between harmful espionage and necessary public-interest journalism. Advocating for reforms and promoting legal safeguards ensures that national security cannot be used as a pretext to dismantle democratic accountability, especially in conflict-ridden environments (UNESCO, n.d.) ²².

Journalists and Gender-Based Violence

Journalists operating in conflict zones face immense risks, but for women in the field, those dangers are compounded by gender-specific threats. Gender-based violence (GBV) emerges as an insidious form of suppression, targeting female journalists through harassment, intimidation, and sexual abuse. These tactics are not incidental—they are part of a broader system of control aimed at deterring women from participating in public discourse and reporting from the frontlines.

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), one in two women journalists have encountered GBV while working (IFJ, 2023) ²³. In conflict-affected areas, where legal protections are weakest and impunity is rampant, such violence often goes unreported and unpunished. Perpetrators—ranging from state actors and armed groups to fellow colleagues—operate within an environment that allows abuse to flourish unchecked. The effects are devastating. Many women are forced into self-censorship, career withdrawal, or even exile. In these circumstances, press freedom is diminished not only by political or military threats but also by the gendered silencing of voices. The intersection of journalism and gender in conflict zones reveals the urgent need for frameworks that address both professional and personal safety.

Despite these barriers, women journalists continue to expose injustice, challenge dominant narratives, and bring to light stories that might otherwise be ignored. Their resilience underscores the necessity of integrating gender equality into all efforts to protect press freedom. Recognizing GBV as a critical threat to journalistic integrity is not optional—it is foundational. Without dismantling the structures that enable gendered violence, the broader fight for free and independent media remains incomplete (UNESCO, n.d.) ²⁴.

Political Alignment and the Weaponization of Narratives

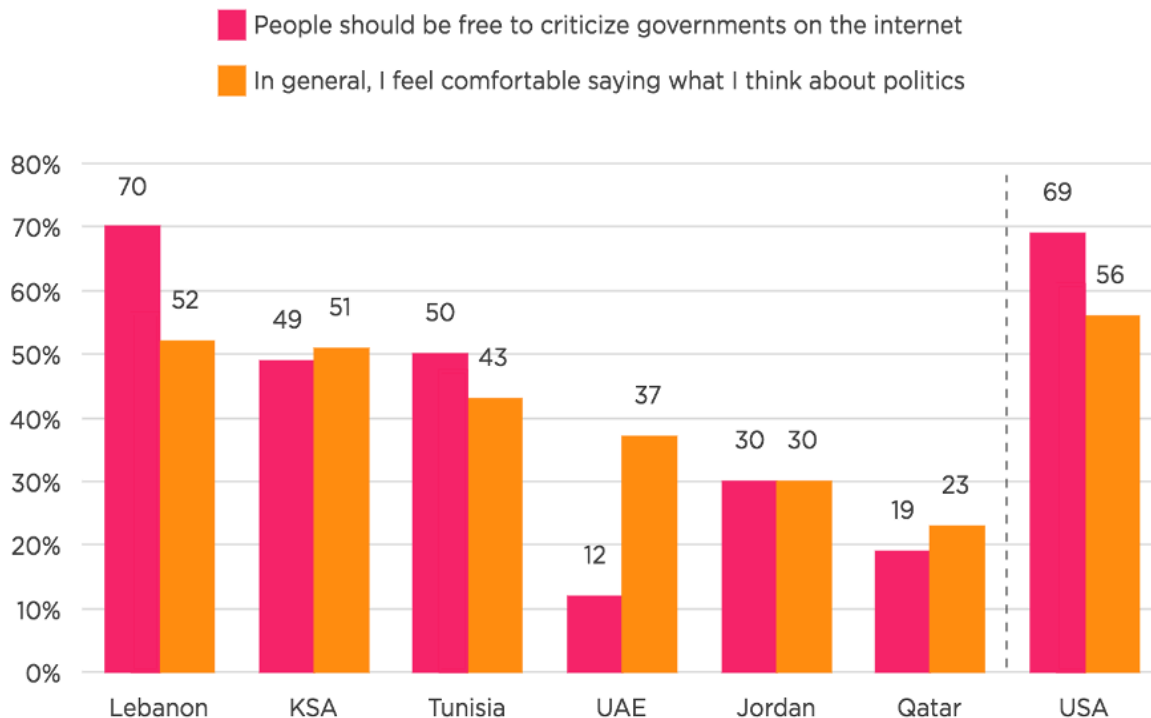
In politically unstable and high-tension regions, the manipulation of media by governing authorities and influential parties is a calculated strategy used to shape public perception, suppress dissenting voices, and justify contentious state actions. When media outlets fall under the influence of political interests, they often become tools for advancing dominant ideologies rather than platforms for objective reporting and critical inquiry (Alterman, 2015).

A central feature of this manipulation is **state-sponsored propaganda**, where media is deliberately used to promote the ruling government's narratives, especially during times of civil unrest or war. For instance, during the Syrian conflict, national broadcasting services routinely portrayed opposition groups as terrorists, reframing a domestic uprising into a matter of national defense (OHCHR, 2024). This rhetoric allowed the government to consolidate support while minimizing the visibility of human rights violations and civilian casualties.

A similar dynamic unfolded in **Turkey** after the failed coup attempt in 2016. The Turkish government took sweeping actions against independent media, arresting journalists and shuttering media houses under charges related to terrorism and national security. What remained was a largely state-aligned media landscape, which regularly echoed the administration's views and labeled critics as threats to public order (UNESCO, 2024).

In nations experiencing internal strife, **independent journalists and foreign correspondents** are frequently delegitimized through targeted disinformation campaigns, surveillance, or public

Free speech: % who agree with the following statements



Question replicated in USA in April 2017.
MENA base: Nationals only; 2017 n=4,411.

MEDIA USE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 2017
JORDAN | LEBANON | QATAR | SAUDI ARABIA | TUNISIA | UAE
MIDEASTMEDIA.ORG

accusations of disloyalty. In **Myanmar**, for example, state-controlled media played a central role in portraying the Rohingya minority as a violent threat, thereby constructing a justification for military-led displacement and atrocities under the pretext of national security (OHCHR, 2024).

Furthermore, governments often seek to monopolize **public broadcasting services** to drown out dissenting narratives. In **Russia**, state media channels such as RT and Sputnik serve as primary sources of information for many citizens and are widely recognized for disseminating narratives aligned with the Kremlin. During the 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent operations in Eastern Ukraine, these platforms consistently framed Russian actions as protective and necessary, while characterizing opposition and international criticism as hostile or deceptive (European Commission, 2024).

The politicization and instrumentalization of media in these settings severely undermine democratic principles, obstruct transparency, and erode public trust. By co-opting the press, governments not only restrict access to balanced information but also perpetuate division and misinformation. This threatens the journalistic mission of truth-telling

and erodes the public's ability to make informed decisions (OHCHR, 2024).

Additional Emerging Compound Challenges

Building on the foundational principles of press freedom and human rights, it is essential to explore **additional** multifaceted challenges that journalists face in conflict-affected and politically unstable regions. The following factors illustrate the evolving threats to independent journalism, shedding light on both structural and personal vulnerabilities that hinder the free flow of information:

- **Citizen Journalism and Suppression:** In regions where traditional media is suppressed, citizen journalists have emerged as vital sources of information. They usually do this at considerable risk, though, which may involve arrest, violence, and censorship, as governments try to control messages.
- **Cultural Trauma and Mass Disinformation:** The suppression of independent media constitutes cultural trauma, whereby groups are deprived of truthful narrations of their pasts. Disinformation then fills the gap, further destabilizing groups and frustrating attempts at reconciliation (OHCHR, 2025).
- **Exiled and Diaspora Journalism:** Journalists in exile continue to report on their home countries with many reporting for diaspora media. While they provide valuable insights, they have limitations like reduced access to information, risks to family members who remain behind, and financial constraints (UNESCO, n.d.).
- **National Security VS Censorship:** The balance between press freedom and national security is delicate. While there are legitimate security concerns that states have, in some cases, these are used as reasons to suppress opposition voices and censor information of public interest (UNESCO, n.d.).
- **Foreign Media and NGOs:** Journalists and foreign non-governmental organizations typically fall under restrictions during wartime, including bans on visas, surveillance, and accusations of espionage. These acts restrict the global community's ability to report and monitor human rights abuses (OHCHR, n.d.).
- **Psychological Impact on Journalists:** Journalists covering war zones often experience psychological trauma, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression. The constant risk of violence and threats can leave long-term mental health consequences, necessitating support systems for victims (IFJ, 2023).

- **Surveillance and Hacking:** Adversarial governments and actors have employed surveillance and hacking to endanger journalists, monitor their communications, and find out their sources. These pose actual risks to the safety and integrity of journalism (UNESCO, n.d.).

Case Studies

A) Mexico: Journalists Trapped in the Middle of Drug Cartel Violence

Mexico has long been one of the most dangerous environments in the world for journalists, primarily due to the intersection of organized crime and governmental inaction. The war on drugs, intensified by state militarization policies, has inadvertently fostered a climate where journalists are routinely targeted for reporting on crime and corruption. According to data from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), between 2000 and 2022, over 150 journalists have been murdered in Mexico, with the majority of cases going unsolved (RSF, 2023). Local journalists—those covering municipal politics, law enforcement, and cartel-related crimes—bear the brunt of this violence.

Cartels seek to control not only the drug trade but also public narratives. This results in a de facto system of “narco-censorship,” where intimidation, threats, and direct violence replace editorial independence. A 2019 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that over 90% of journalist killings in Mexico go unpunished, reflecting a broader pattern of impunity that emboldens perpetrators (CPJ, 2019). Furthermore, state actors are sometimes complicit or apathetic, as evidenced by the limited implementation of protective mechanisms. Although the Mexican government created a federal program for the protection of journalists in 2012, Human Rights Watch noted that the system suffers from underfunding and inadequate risk assessment protocols (Human Rights Watch, 2021).



B) Afghanistan: Journalists Fleeing Taliban Ruling

The fall of Kabul in August 2021 marked a devastating turning point for press freedom in Afghanistan. Under Taliban control, the media landscape has rapidly deteriorated. Journalists face systemic threats including arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearances. According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), over 300 media outlets shut down within the first year of Taliban rule due to safety concerns and financial collapse (IFJ, 2022). The regime has imposed draconian restrictions on content, banning foreign broadcasts and mandating censorship guidelines aligned with their ideological doctrines.

Women journalists, in particular, have suffered disproportionately. Many have been barred from working or subjected to gender-specific persecution. As a result, a significant number of Afghan media workers have sought asylum abroad. According to UNESCO, over 600 journalists fled the country following the Taliban's return to power (UNESCO, 2022). These exiled reporters often continue their work remotely through diaspora media, but they face challenges such as lack of resources, threats to family members left behind, and difficulties accessing verified information from within the country.



C) UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression

The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, established by the UN Human Rights Council, serves as a critical mechanism in upholding press freedom on a global scale. This mandate enables the investigation and reporting of violations, providing a platform for journalists to bring international attention to abuses. The role includes conducting country visits, issuing public reports, and communicating directly with states regarding alleged violations.



For instance, the 2019 thematic report by the Special Rapporteur emphasized the global deterioration of press freedom, citing digital surveillance, online harassment, and weaponized disinformation as growing threats (UNHRC, 2019). The Rapporteur's work has also been instrumental in highlighting lesser-known cases, offering a degree of protection through international visibility. In situations like those in Mexico or Afghanistan, the Rapporteur's urgent appeals to governments have occasionally led to investigations or protective measures—though systemic change remains elusive. Their reports are often used by NGOs and civil society organizations to lobby for international sanctions or diplomatic interventions (UNHRC, 2021).

International Actions

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

The **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** was established in 2012 by UNESCO and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board, responding to the alarming rise in violence against journalists and the widespread culture of impunity surrounding such attacks (UNESCO, 2024)²⁵. This initiative represents a coordinated inter-agency effort involving UN bodies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and member states, aiming to bolster the safety of media professionals and ensure justice through comprehensive mechanisms.

The plan includes the development of national safety strategies, the appointment of special prosecutors for crimes against journalists, and the collection of data on violence and legal proceedings. For example, Colombia adopted a national protection mechanism inspired by this initiative, offering bodyguards and secure transport to journalists under threat. Similarly, Mexico has implemented a federal protection program, though it continues to face criticism for inefficiencies and lack of prosecution in cases of journalist killings (OHCHR, n.d.)²⁶. The plan also utilizes safety indicators provided by the IPDC and advocates for training, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring of states' efforts in ensuring press freedom (UNESCO, 2024)²⁷.



b. The European Media Freedom Act (EU)

The **European Media Freedom Act**, introduced by the European Commission in September 2022, aims to preserve media pluralism and editorial independence across EU member states. It was developed in response to increased political interference in media operations, especially in countries like Hungary and Poland, where public broadcasters have been accused of acting as government mouthpieces (European Commission, 2025)²⁸.

Key provisions include safeguards against unjustified surveillance of journalists, transparent allocation of state advertising, protection of editorial decisions from political or commercial influence, and

mandatory conflict-of-interest disclosures. A central aspect of the Act is the formation of the **European Board for Media Services**, comprising representatives from national regulatory authorities to oversee consistent application of media laws across the EU. While still subject to approval and amendments by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, the act has garnered support as a potential framework to combat democratic backsliding and protect press freedom at the supranational level (European Commission, 2025)²⁹.



c. UN Human Rights Council Resolutions on the Safety of Journalists

The **UN Human Rights Council (HRC)** has adopted several resolutions aimed at enhancing the safety of journalists globally, most notably the resolutions endorsed in 2012, 2014, and 2021. These documents emphasize the need for member states to ensure accountability, strengthen judicial processes, and provide targeted protection to journalists working in conflict or politically sensitive environments (OHCHR, 2023)³⁰.

The 2021 resolution particularly highlighted the Windhoek+30 Declaration, reaffirming commitments to press freedom in the digital era (UNESCO, n.d.)³¹. It called upon states to prevent violence against journalists and guarantee their rights through national legal frameworks. For instance, Sweden and Norway have adopted preventive legal instruments to criminalize threats against journalists, while Tunisia, though praised for its early post-revolution progress, has

struggled with subsequent regression in protecting press freedoms (OHCHR, 2019)³².

These resolutions are reinforced by the HRC's special rapporteurs and mechanisms to monitor implementation, though challenges remain in contexts such as Myanmar, Russia, and Syria, where state actors are often complicit in repressing media freedoms (Alterman).



d. Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 on Human Rights on the Internet

Adopted on **13 July 2021**, **UNHRC Resolution 47/16** asserts that human rights must be protected online as robustly as they are offline, particularly with regard to freedom of expression (OHCHR, 2023)³³. The resolution condemns unjustified Internet shutdowns, online censorship, and digital surveillance — practices increasingly deployed in regions such as Iran and Myanmar during political crises to silence dissent and obstruct journalistic reporting.

The resolution stresses the importance of universal, affordable digital access and literacy, especially for marginalized groups affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also advocates for gender-responsive digital inclusion strategies, highlighting the disproportionate targeting of female journalists through online harassment and doxing campaigns.

To support safer digital spaces, the resolution calls for multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector to create legal protections for net neutrality and data privacy. Countries such as Estonia and Canada have emerged as

leaders in digital rights legislation, offering models for balancing security and expression in the digital age (OHCHR, 2023)³⁴.



Questions to consider

- How does your country view press freedom during times of war or crisis, and what limits—if any—are placed on it in those situations?
- What laws or policies does your country have to keep journalists safe when they're reporting from dangerous or conflict-affected areas?
- How has your country treated journalists in past conflicts, and how has it responded to international concerns or reports about press freedom violations?
- Is your country part of any international agreements that protect journalists and support freedom of expression, like the Geneva Conventions or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights?
- What systems or organizations does your country rely on to keep track of threats or violence against journalists, and how does it

respond when those rights are violated?

- How does your government try to stop the spread of misinformation during conflict without harming the work of honest and independent journalists?

Recommendations



Legal Protections

- Delegates should advocate for the the codification of comprehensive legal protections for journalists and activists within national frameworks, ensuring that acts of violence, harassment, and censorship are recognized as criminal offenses under domestic law, in alignment with international standards (UNESCO, 2024)³⁵.
- Delegates should promote the establishment or reinforcement of independent judicial oversight bodies, such as national press councils or ombudsmen, tasked with ensuring the impartial investigation and prosecution of crimes against media personnel, similar to the models used in Finland and South Africa.
- Delegates should encourage their respective states to ratify and domesticate international legal instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to better align national media legislation with internationally recognized human rights norms.

Structural and Diplomatic Mechanisms

- Delegates should recommend the creation of regional cooperation platforms — modeled on the Organization of American States (OAS), African Union (AU), and ASEAN — to provide cross-border monitoring, emergency response coordination, and safe haven arrangements for threatened journalists and activists.
- Delegates should advocate for the institutional strengthening of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), granting them the authority and resources to monitor, document, and respond to press freedom violations, and to report directly to UN mechanisms such as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression (OHCHR, n.d.)³⁶.
- Delegates should support the use of diplomatic tools, including targeted sanctions and bilateral pressure, to hold accountable those state actors who perpetrate or facilitate systematic violations against media practitioners (Alterman).

Technological and Digital Safety Measures

- Delegates should propose the implementation of standardized digital safety training programs for journalists and media professionals, particularly in regions prone to surveillance and cyberattacks, in collaboration with international digital rights organizations.
- Delegates should support the development of encrypted, anonymous digital reporting platforms that enable journalists to safely report threats and violations to international monitoring bodies, modeled after existing initiatives by Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists.
- Delegates should encourage the adoption of robust national data protection and cybersecurity laws to prevent illegal tracking, digital harassment, and the deployment of surveillance software against journalists, especially in contexts of political repression.

Short-Term and Community-Based Initiatives

- Delegates should recommend the launch of national media literacy campaigns — particularly targeting youth and rural communities — to foster critical thinking, increase public trust in credible journalism, and reduce susceptibility to disinformation, following successful models implemented in Finland and Estonia.
- Delegates should propose the establishment of emergency response systems, including protection funds and temporary relocation schemes, in collaboration with NGOs and intergovernmental agencies, to provide immediate support to journalists under imminent threat, as practiced in Sweden and Canada.
- Delegates should advocate for the inclusion of mental health services as an integral part of journalist protection programs, ensuring access to psychological counseling and trauma support for those operating in conflict zones or under sustained threat.

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