



United Nations Correspondents Association

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Mr Secretary General,
Mr President of the General Assembly
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen

Since the start of the war in Ukraine dozens of journalists, TV operators and photographers have been killed, injured, threatened, robbed, or kidnapped, and the list grows as the conflict continues. Lives lost and sacrificed for the truth, with this being just the most recent example of what has been an ongoing threat against members of the media.

According to the latest UN data, fifty-five journalists and media professionals were killed last year, with nearly 9 in 10 killings since 2006 still unresolved. Although the number of victims stands at its lowest for a decade, UNESCO underlined the many dangers that reporters face in trying to cover stories and expose wrongdoing. And revealed how impunity is “alarmingly widespread”.

During times of crisis, such as the war in Ukraine or the Covid-19 outbreak, it is even more important that the public have access to reliable and timely information, and that journalists have a key role to play in defending the rights to freedom of expression.

As the Secretary General reminds us, “Press freedom is vital for peace, justice and human rights”, and he urges “countries to investigate and prosecute crimes against them with the full force of the law”.

We stand in solidarity with those members of the media who find themselves in difficult situations throughout the world.

And those free among us have the duty to hold up the flame of truth in honor of all those who are regularly threatened, killed, intimidated, harassed, arbitrarily arrested, or injured.

Over the past decades the news media landscape has changed profoundly.

Internet on one hand helps diffusion, but on the other hand it encourages the creation of niche areas that not only disinform but reinforce prejudices.

There has been a critical increase in the reach of journalism and social media through digital sources, but at the same time fake news is accelerating, and lessens public trust in our work.

Not to mention the manipulation of social media and its use as a weapon of mass disruption of which, ultimately, authentic, and transparent information becomes the victim itself.

Also, facing the dissemination of FAKE NEWS is an imperative for journalism. And it is a gateway to prove the importance of new and traditional media, and its ability to provide verifiable information for public interest.

At a time when disinformation and mistrust of the news media is growing, a free press is essential.

The World Press Freedom Day acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom and to the international community to help those people who are denied the right of access to information.

Authoritarian regimes continue to tighten their grip on media organizations, but journalists in democratic and free nations are also under threat.

I echo past appeals by the Secretary General in calling for governments to protect journalists and to strengthen press freedom.

But once again I ask the United Nations to take a step forward in addressing the protection of members of the press all over the world by appointing a Special Representative for the Protection of Journalists, a key figure that can no longer be ignored within the debate on freedom and accuracy of information.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Valeria Robecco', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Valeria Robecco

President, United Nations Correspondents Association