



**Statement by Frank La Rue
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE PROMOTION AND
PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF OPINION
AND EXPRESSION**

**Meeting of the Security Council in Arria format on:
« Protecting journalists »**

Friday 13 December 2013

New York



Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking France and Guatemala for promoting this important debate and for the opportunity of sharing my experience as UN special rapporteur.

In times of war or peace, when the public right to receive information and know the truth of events is threatened, all human rights can be undermined. Having a free press which operates in safety is a core requirement for democracy.

An attack against a journalist and social communicator is not only a violation of his or her rights, it is also a violation of the rights of society at large to seek and receive information and ideas of all kinds. Every time the press is silenced, critical information on human rights violations or threats against international peace and security can be suppressed.

Not surprisingly, the protection of journalists and social communicators appears as a central concern of all my activities as special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In reports addressed to the Human Rights Council in 2010 and 2012, I have discussed this issue in detail and prepared recommendations for increasing the security of journalists. My colleague, the special rapporteur on summary executions, Mr. Christof Heyns, also reported on this matter last year.

States also appear to share these concerns. In 2006, this Council condemned attacks against journalists (resolution 1738). The Human Rights Council did so (HRC/21/2) in 2012 as did the Third Committee of the General Assembly last month.

Despite these and other resolutions echoing well-known obligations to ensure the safety of journalists, they continue to face risks on a regular basis, particularly in situations of conflict.

A few days ago, two journalists were kidnapped in Syria. The Human Rights Council's independent commission of inquiry on the situation in that country reported that at least 84 journalists have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and August this year. Last month, two journalists were killed in Mali. In October, we received information on another killing in Somalia and two more in Iraq. These are just the most recent examples of a recurrent story.

During the last two years, in my regular work as UN special rapporteur, I transmitted confidential letters on attacks against 171 journalists to 40 different countries in all regions.

What can be done to change this pattern of violence and intimidation so often identified, particularly in situations of conflict?

Two words can summarize the essential root causes behind the existing violence and insecurity: silence and impunity.

Guaranteeing a safe environment for journalists is almost impossible if systematic attention to all incidents of intimidation and violence is lacking and if perpetrators are not identified and held accountable for their acts.

It is true that journalists, social communicators and media organizations should also take measures to improve their own protection and a lot is already being done in this regard, including through training and the adoption of internal codes of conduct. But the main responsibility is clearly of States.

It is rare for the perpetrators of violence against journalists to be brought to justice. Lack of political will to pursue investigations, inadequate legal frameworks, weak judicial systems, negligence, or corruption, are some of the main causes of such high levels of impunity.

Although some extreme cases of violence receive international attention, the great majority remains totally invisible. Often, before the killing of a journalist, threats and other forms of harassment occur, but there is rarely attention to these from national authorities or the international community. Special procedures of the Human Rights Council and other human rights protection mechanisms provide early warnings of these alarming situations. They can, and must, be more systematically used by international bodies, including this Council.

I appreciate the debate we are having today and take this opportunity to underline that it is important that the Security Council give systematic attention to the safety and protection of journalists. I would like to repeat here a recommendation made by the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson in July, that this Council consider the targeting of journalists and other threats to freedom of expression when addressing agenda items. It could also consider mandating peacekeeping missions to take specific action to ensure the protection of journalists as a group of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.

There are promising initiatives, such as the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of journalists or national plans launched to promote the protection of journalists. I am very glad to collaborate with these initiatives. But these platforms for action must be implemented fully. This requires systematic international attention to all threats and violence against journalists and the media.

Thank you.