#### Background material to the UN Secretary-General’s Report on Safety of Journalists and Impunity

# Fojo Media Institute’s Special Report focusing on Threats and On-line Hate against Women Journalists and Gender Equality

### Summary

This report summarizes experiences from actors within the Swedish media sector specifically related to on-line hate and threats against women journalists in Sweden. It also provides summaries of Fojo Media Institute’s activities related to on-line hate and threats against women journalists as well as gender equality in Sweden, globally, Somalia, Russia and Belarus, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and the MENA-region.

### Sweden

#### Analysis of on-line hate and threats directed towards women journalists

Threats, harassments and hate-crimes against journalists and media workers in Sweden have increased during the last years. Women working in media are particularly exposed to threats of sexual violence and intimidation. Although the results of this trend indicate a clear risk for women’s voices in media to be silenced due to these threats, a positive trend is that many women journalists have chosen to speak up about the threats and on-line hate they have been exposed to. Their disclosure has resulted in an increased awareness of the need for action as well as a vital public discussion on the topic.

The levels of violence, threats of violence and intimidations directed towards journalists have increasing in Sweden as well as many other countries. Different surveys indicate that between 30 - 40 percent of Swedish journalists have received direct threats, journalists within daily press more often than for instance journalists from web media. Approximately two thirds have been subject to intimidations of different kinds.

In comparison, only 5 percent of the general population report having been subjected to threats and harassments (according to statistics from Brå, national authority  
<https://www.bra.se/bra/brott-och-statistik/hot-och-trakasserier.html> ) Women are more subject to harassment than men: 5,7 percent in comparison with 3,7 percent.

In some surveys, female journalists stand out as being more often victimized than their male counterparts. In other surveys there are no difference in the intensity between threats against male and female journalists. However, all results point to the fact that the nature of the threats and intimidations differ between the genders: female journalists receive sexualized threats, harassment and intimidations much more frequently than their male colleagues. The threats are also cruder(Anette Novak, Fojo Deputy Chair, former Media Commissioner to the Swedish Government).  According to the Cision National Journalist Survey 2015, a quarter of all Swedish women journalists were subjected to sexist on-line hate.

A report made by Utgivarna regarding hate and threat towards Swedish media outlets summarizes the results of a survey conducted by TNS Sifo and Utgivarna in 2016. The results display that 75 percent of the media outlets have experienced an increase in threats during the last five years, and that 42 out of 92 media outlets had been threatened during the last 12 months.

Furthermore, the survey indicate that the threats carried out through e-mail have increased in relation to threats carried out face-to-face or through telephone calls in comparison to results from 2015 year’s survey. The most severe threats came predominantly from unidentified private individuals and right-wing extremist groups. According to the survey, the most common reasons for severe threats were anger and disappointment related to a certain publication, often with the specific purpose to scare the media worker into silence and passivity (Utgivarna, 2016).

Another survey, conducted by the Swedish Union of Journalists (Journalistförbundet), reveals that harassment, threat and other forms of pressurizing impact Swedish journalists in their reporting as well as in their decision to report or not to report on particular topics. 30 percent of the journalists that participated in the survey answered that threat, harassments or other ways of pressure had an impact on their reporting. As many as 25 percent answered that they had chosen not to report about a particular topic due to the threats (Journalistförbundet, 2014).

Based on a study of hate and threat towards Swedish journalists, the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom) argue for the results to show a clear misogynist discourse when it comes to sexist comments directed towards journalists. One third of the study’s women journalists had received sexist comments and 15 percent had been threatened with rape, mutilated genitals and other forms of sexual violence. For men, the same numbers represented only 3 respectively 5 percent of the male journalists (Löfgren Nilson, 2015).

The results from a research conducted by the Swedish Public Service Radio (Sveriges Radio, SR) and Tidningsutgivarna (TU) based on 619 interviews with media workers within SR and TU show that every third journalist had been threatened during the last 12 months (Nydahl, 2016). Cilla Benkö, Executive Director of SR, says in relation to the conducted research that it is today easier than ever to scare and harass journalists to silence, as threats and harassment can be done through an e-mail, a telephone call or a massive hate attack through social media. Benkö also stresses the fact that women journalists often receive threats related to sexual violence, which in contrast affect very few male journalists. At the same time, the research shows that men are behind the absolute majority of threats towards both men and women (Benkö, 2016).

Jeanette Gustafsdotter, Executive Director of TU, adds the number of media workers who are considering quitting their jobs due to threats is considerable higher among women compared to men. Gustafsdotter stresses the risk that women journalists are scared off their democratic mission to pursue their careers as journalists (Gustafsdotter, 2016).

Dr Maria Edström, senior lecturer at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Gothenburg describes the problem of threats and sexualized hate speech towards women journalists in Sweden as at least twofold. The first issue relates to the self-censoring mechanism of threats and hate speech; namely the way in which the purpose of the threats is to silence the voice of women journalists, as well as to scare off other women and keep them from entering the field of journalism. As a result, women journalists avoid writing reports on particular topics which may attract threats and hate-attacks.

The second issue relates to the way in which sexualized hate speech made by (predominantly male) internet trolls are often protected by the Swedish hate crime legislation, which currently lacks a gender component. The lack of gender-inclusiveness in the legislation, as well as absence of knowledge by criminal authorities in how to deal with hate-crimes, facilitates for trolls to deny their actions or to claim them to be ‘jokes’ that never were meant to be realised.

As a result, the actions of the trolls are seldom held to account. In addition, Edström argues that although there are some laws that might apply to these issues – such as unlawful threats and libel – these laws are seldom used. Hence, sexualized hate speech can currently be used as an effective tool for silencing women and aggravate gender equality.

However, although threats and sexualized hate speech may limit women journalists, Edström also lifts forward a positive trend in Sweden; namely the fact that many Swedish women journalist have chosen to speak openly about the threats. As a result, connections between antifeminism and other undemocratic ideas have been revealed in the process (Edström, 2016).

#### Activities to counter on-line hate and threats

The Swedish government has acted on the situation and invited in April 2016 media representatives to a roundtable on threats against female journalists.

A special seminar on the threats and hate speech against journalists was carried out in January 2017, hosted by the Swedish Press Ombudsman and the Press Council. The seminar was attended by several high-profile publishers as well as professor Marilyn Clark who has carried out an investigation on the topic on behalf of the Council of Europe and the Swedish National Police Commissioner.

The Swedish Government has also initiated an action plan with the purpose of protecting and safe-guard the democratic discussion against hatred and threats. The result of this work will be presented during 2017. It will contain direct actions aimed at specifically targeted subjects who play a central role in the national public discourse, as well as broad, proactive actions to decrease the vulnerability in the public sphere. Since the Swedish government has declared itself a feminist government, the action plan will most certainly contain activities specifically addressing the vulnerability of women journalists.

The Swedish Government recently received the final report of a national Media Inquiry, prompting them to investigate possible legislative measures, namely to investigate the possibility to consider “threats against journalists” as a more serious crime than common threats. The proposal is based on the fact that several surveys have shown that threatened journalists are silenced – and that these types of crimes therefore should be considered a crime against democracy itself.

Indicting and condemning the perpetrators is also mentioned in the Media Inquiry as important from a signal point of view. The inquiry urges the Swedish State Attorneys to prioritize investigating these crimes – in order to bring the criminals to justice.

On a branch level, the Swedish Journalism Union has developed “Guidelines to Manage Threats against Journalists”, a roadmap used by many newsrooms. This material, however, does not address the specific challenges faced by women journalists.

On a media branch level, major newsroom are collaborating with security companies and offer internal safety training for editorial and other staff. Fojo Media Institute and other actors also offer safety trainings.

# Fojo Media Institute’s activities related to safety, on-line hate and threats against women journalists

### Globally

#### International Seminar on Hate and Threats against Women Journalists

Fojo Media Institute, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Institute and the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO organized an international seminar on the topic ‘Defying Hate and Threats against Women Journalists’ at the Swedish Government Office. The seminar was held on December 2, 2016, the 250th Anniversary of the Swedish Freedom of Expression Act, the first of its kind in the world.

During this seminar, roundtable discussions were organized on safety of women journalists. Issues emphasized during the seminar and of which were jointly agreed upon by the seminar participants included:

* the problem surrounding **the difference in the content of threats** directed towards women journalists compared to those directed towards male journalists. Female as well as male participants of the seminar emphasized the way in which threats against women journalists are more directed towards initiating public humiliation and sexual harassment compared to threats received by male journalists, which tends to be milder and less personal in their nature. This fact illuminates an apparent inequity underlying the way in which men and women journalists face unequal opportunities in their work; women journalists are limited and constrained by threats and attacks which convey a different kind of hatred compared to those directed towards male journalists.
* the double-edged nature of **social media** in being both a hinder and an asset for strengthening the protection of journalists. The seminar participants emphasized the fact that there are loopholes in social media which allow threats and harassments to be spread freely without the perpetrators being brought to justice. In this manner, social media currently reflects a grey area in which personal attacks can wreak havoc and in which there is a lack of an efficient protection system aimed towards combatting threats against journalists. At the same time, social media platforms allow for collaboration, networking, and can in many ways function as forums for the support and help for journalists who have been exposed to threat or harassments.
* the issue surrounding authoritarian states **control and censorship** of the media and their targeted work against independent journalists (e.g. Philippines, Mexico, Russia and China). Journalists being followed, imprisoned and threatened to death is a serious threat to democracy. The importance of other states and international organisations in taking a stance against such undemocratic acts was underlined by the seminar participants as effective means for securing the safety of journalists working under the scrutiny of such states.

Lastly, the participants of the seminar expressed important needs that are crucial in order to be able to tackle the above-mentioned issues, namely;

* the need for **legal protection** against threats and harassments in order to safeguard the work of (particularly women) journalists and tackle the issue of impunity. Laws and regulations need to be adjusted to facilitate the work and protection of journalists.
* the need for **structural** **support** for journalists exposed to risks and threats in their work in order to enable them to withstand external pressures without having to risk their careers
* the need to **inform and educate** civil society in source criticism and how to tackle the issue of disinformation (i.e. fake news)

For more information on the seminar, see <http://fojo.se/journosafe>

#### “2 December Declaration”

Jointly with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Fojo Media Institute elaborated the 2 December Declaration in defence of women journalists being subjected to on-line hate and threats. The Declaration was signed by a great number of newspapers - among others the New York Times - and media practitioners all over the world. For more information, please see <http://2december.wan-ifra.org/> and Annex 1.

#### Activities proposed

Fojo Media Institute has proposed that the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs finance a pilot for a Swedish based International Centre to Manage On-line Hate and Threats against Women journalists. For a brief Concept Note on the proposed Centre, please see Annex 2.

### Somalia

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, and is a country with a prevailing culture of impunity. Al-Shabab continues to pose a threat to women journalists in Somalia, and non-Al-Shabab conservative elements across Somalia have been known to threaten women journalists specifically. Somali women journalists are also exposed to sexual harassment and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Despite the security threat, one of the most important challenges for Somali women journalists is not their physical safety, but the cultural barrier. Somali society largely does not support the idea of media being an appropriate profession for women. It is seen as inappropriate for women to appear on television and radio as well as interacting with men other than their husbands and immediate family members. There is a clear double standard in the way in which Somali families do not support their wives and daughters in becoming journalists, while at the same time there is a societal preference for women as presenters of radio and television programmes.

In news reporting, women voices are rarely heard in Somali media. If portrayed, it is usually in a stereotypical way; as victims and not as actors. Subjects of relevance for women are rarely covered in Somali media. These cultural norms are preventing Somali women from contributing to media and hinder them from making their voices heard, which poses a fundamental problem for Somali society at large.

The ‘Strengthening Somali media: Promoting peace, reconciliation, accountability and citizen participation in democratic processes’ programme implemented by Fojo Media Institute and International Media Support (IMS) takes a broad approach to gender, with specific gender-focused activities and gender as a cross-cutting theme, which ensures that all activities taking place are designed with a gender perspective (PCG, Fojo & IMS, 2015).

The programme has three gender specific intervention areas (Fojo & IMS, 2016):

1. Safety and working conditions of female media workers
2. Career development of female media workers
3. A gender perspective on media content

**Intervention area 1: Safety and working conditions of female media workers**

A number of activities are taking place under the programme to address the safety of women media workers. The activities include inter alia;

* Safety training for women journalists, as well as training in court ethics and court-room behaviour for both male and female journalists to address the problem of journalists breaking the rules when going to court to defend themselves or attend trials of their colleagues, thus being held in contempt of the court.
* The establishment of a legal aid department employing two lawyers full-time to defend journalists and provide legal counselling for free.
* The creation of a hotline for journalists which journalists can call if they face danger or are in distress.
* The initiation of the Somali Media Safety Committee, in which the Somali Women Journalists (SWJ) association is a key member, ensuring that safety and security issues affecting women are taken into account as part of the committee’s work in developing a national safety system. SWJ is a key participant in the advocacy capacity building activities and thereby strengthening their skills in advocating for improved working conditions, including on safety, for women.

**Intervention 2: Career development of female media workers**

The Women in News (WIN) programme works with media houses and their female employees to overcome the gender gap in management and senior management positions. The programme equips women media professionals with the strategies, skills and support networks they need to take on a greater leadership role within their organisations.

**Intervention area 3: A gender perspective on media content**

Fojo and IMS have developed and implemented a highly successful gender-mainstreaming strategy with Radio Ergo, resulting in the proportion of female voices in the radio programming rising with 10 percent in solely one month.

### Myanmar

Fojo/IMS’s report on gender in the Myanmar media landscape reveals that women journalists are facing two main obstacles that are hindering them in their daily work. The first one relates to a lack of opportunity for women to advance their careers. The second obstacle relates to the absence of institutional mechanisms that support women working within the media industry. (Fojo Media Institute, 2016a).

Although the majority of women journalists included in the study had received training from international NGOs – with equal opportunities for men and women to participate – the training equations were missing the aspects of safety and gender; two critically important areas of training for a transformative society like Myanmar. The report illuminates the way in which women media professionals are particularly exposed to security threats, which hinders them from working on equal footing with men. Due to on-going conflicts in many areas of Myanmar, the issue of security for women media workers has become a key factor behind the relatively low number of women journalists in the states and divisions. The political instability has made parents oppose their daughters entering the media industry, and unsafe roads are making it difficult for women journalists to travel on their assignment. Consequently, the media coverage of conflict related stories tend to be predominantly assigned to male reporters. As a result, the marginalization of women is often reflected in the absence of women’s perspectives on political and societal issues; a fact which ultimately constitutes a risk of biased and unbalanced news representation in Myanmar media (Fojo Media Institute, 2016a).

Fojo’s recommendations for gender equality in the Myanmar media landscape include active promotion of gender equality to, and influence over, the media through;

* The development of a public service media law which includes principles of diversity and pluralism
* The implementation of firm gender equality and sexual harassment policies within media houses
* The incorporation of gender and diversity in journalism curricula of universities and other media related academic curricula
* The promotion and development of media networks and associations that work towards strengthening women’s right in the media field
* The provision of training in gender awareness and sensitivity for both men and women in media houses

Moreover, Fojo and IMS have supported the creation of the Myanmar Press Council (MNMC) under which umbrella two safety training workshops have been conducted so far: one in Yangon in December 2016 and one in Taunggyi in January 2017.

### Russia and Belarus

Research conducted by Fojo and its partners in Russia and Belarus reveals how gender bias is built into the power structures of media organizations. While women make up more than half of the Russian media executives on a local level, in regional media they only make up 36 and in federal media only 10 percent. Hence, the closer to power the fewer the women. Similar results have been found in the media context of Belarus, where women make up 70 percent of the journalist corps while the remaining 30 percent male professionals virtually all hold some kind of supervisory position. The findings point towards prejudices against women and their abilities that are ingrained in society as the core of the gender power imbalance. The research consisted of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and an on-line questionnaire covering more than 400 respondents (Fojo Media Institute, 2016b).

In addition to the above mentioned research, Fojo has conducted a draft report on the Russian media environment which highlights gender aspects of media workers employment and career. The purpose of this report is inter alia to identify gender aspects of salary levels and career prospects in the Russian media industry, as well as to analyse the impact of gender on the choice of topic and content of media publications. Moreover, the report includes an analysis of gender stereotypes among those employed in the Russian media as well as the distribution of men and women within different professions and positions. The draft is available in Russian and will be translated into English within short.

### Rwanda

In Rwanda, media is considered as one of the areas where gender equality has had limited success. Men continue to dominate top positions and hard news reporting jobs. Gender-based corruption, such as sexual harassment, is widespread in the recruitment process as well as in the working conditions for female media practitioners. In general,the risk of threats is met with self-censorship in the editorial offices.

Fojo is engaged in improving the education at the School of Journalism at the University of Rwanda and has established a volunteer program with journalists from Sweden. Through this program, Fojo is strengthening female journalism students in particular through:

* Using a gender perspective throughout the training
* A strong gender perspective in the Baseline Study for the project to identify specific threats, obstacles and problems for women journalists/journalism students
* A curriculum review of the three-year training with a specific module about gender issues
* Short courses for professional journalists to raise awareness about gender issues
* Female volunteers and lecturers acting as role models

## Zimbabwe

**The media industry in Zimbabwe is hampered by repressive media laws, self-censorship, low revenue and lack of qualified journalists.** There are however signs of reforms and several opportunities for change.

Having been engaged in media support in Zimbabwe since 2008, Fojo manages the Sida funded Swedish Media Development Programme in Zimbabwe since 2012. The programme aims to contribute to increased freedom of expression and a professional and independent media sector, serving democracy, human rights and development in Zimbabwe (Fojo Media Institute, 2016c).

In 2015, Fojo’s partner Gender and Media Connect (GMC) partnered with the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) on a nationwide programme training on sexual harassment issues in newsrooms throughout Zimbabwe. From this work, GMC and ZUJ produced the booklet called ‘Power, Patriarchy and Gender Discrimination in Zimbabwean Newsrooms’. On November 18, 2016 the Zimbabwean radio station Star FM carried out a training session on sexual harassment for their staff under the lead of GMC (Mujati, 2016).

On December 2, 2016, GMC in partnership with Fojo and the Embassy of Sweden held the candid talk ‘Women at the frontline of Zimbabwe Journalism - Challenges of staying the course’ (see Annex 3). The event was attended by representatives from media houses, CSOs, freelance journalists, journalism and media students and lecturers as well as donor communities. Key issues that were brought up during the candid talk’s panel discussions were related to sexual harassments, remuneration disparities and other bottleneck issues that hinder female professional progression.

### The MENA-region

On the 1-3 November 2016, Fojo and the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt, held a seminar for women journalists from the Middle East and North Africa on how to counter threats, on-line harassment and other kinds of intimidations of journalists. In connection to this seminar, the participating journalists adopted a Declaration in which they urge governments, media organization and civil society to intensify their efforts in dealing with threats and on-line hate against journalists, with a particular focus on women journalists, the Alexandria Declaration (see Annex 4).

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## Annexures

1. Edström, M. (2016) ‘The trolls disappear in the light’
2. The 2 December Declaration
3. Concept Note on a proposed Swedish based International Centre to Manage On-line Hate and Threats against Women Journalists
4. ‘Women at the frontline of Zimbabwe Journalism - Challenges of staying the course’
5. The Alexandria Declaration