**Questionnaire for the report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity**

**Organization: PEN International**

**Website: pen-international.org**

**Contact: Sarah Clarke, International Policy and Advocacy Manager (sarah.clarke@pen-international.org)**

1. **Please identify the gender specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalists in your country or abroad. Please elaborate on how those obstacles and violations manifest themselves in practice and how they differ from the obstacles and human rights violations faced by their male counterparts.**

PEN International’s 2016 internal gender review noted 4 barriers identified for PEN women members in all regions. Extracts include barriers identified by women writers in PEN and other sources of information of gendered freedom of expression.

“Gender inequality becomes a freedom of speech issue when women are prevented from empowered communication because they are women.” The following section explores each of these in turn:

1. The impact of violence against women and girls on free expression

See PEN International’s oral statement to 57th Commission on the Status of Women on Violence against Women: <http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/UN-CSW-PEN-Statement.pdf> and blog post about the CSW: http://www.pen-international.org/04/2013/15649/

* Violence against women means that those women do not have the opportunity to tell their stories nor address the broader economic, social and political circumstances they face.
* PEN Honduras says that while outspoken people of all genders are threatened and attacked, **“in the case of women, it is our sexuality which is attacked, and our families. The threats we receive are sexual.”** PH told us that increasing amounts of **threats of sexual violence forced her to go into exile** and then, when she returned, **to move house many times when opponents tracked her down and attacked her car and her house**. She told us, **“There are female human rights defenders, who may not be writers, but are raising their voices and expressing themselves in protest, who have been raped. In the case of human rights defenders in indigenous zones, it is even worse: these women are horribly persecuted. It is systematic. They are followed, they are threatened with rape, they are told that if they stay they will be killed.”**
* **A Chinese journalist in exile in Canada,** says she receives a **dozen emails a day threatening sexual violence against her**, and that the Chinese government punished her for leading a delegation to Tibet by **reporting that the men in the delegation were having affairs with her.** Sheng considers her situation unique because she is the most active person from her community abroad. “Most women back off, withdraw,” she says.
* PEN **Uganda** spoke of her country as one where female genital mutilation is practiced, where domestic violence is widespread, and where women **writers are subject to harassment, especially if they are politically outspoken.**
* PEN South Africa calls this type of violence **“somatic censorship.” Whether by murder, “corrective rape,” threats to family, or some other means, attacks on women’s bodies are intended to silence their voices—and they often do**.

2) Techniques used to harass, silence, and censor women in the digital sphere;

* Speaking about writing on the Internet, PEN Uganda pointed out that “**women who are vocal are called crazy**.”
* “**Doctored photos have been posted online, and phony advertisements for escort services, using my face and personal details, have been widely distributed,” Independent Chinese PEN** told us. There is also a practice of exposing the names, addresses, and families of women who are active on social media, a practice known as “doxing”.
* PEN Honduras went into some detail: “There are women who write, but their writing remains unpublished. I tell them to go online, start a blog. But there is repression when women write. **When I upload things to Facebook there are reactions, there are campaigns to discredit me.** For instance, there was a campaign that said I was being financed by the drug cartels. Once, there was someone who I accepted as a friend on Facebook who then started a **smear campaign** against me, saying I wasn’t honest.”
* **The Guardian** published research based on a review of the more than one million online comments that it had blocked.[[1]](#footnote-1) **“Articles written by women got more blocked (i.e. abusive or disruptive) comments across almost all sections.** But the more male-dominated the section, the more blocked comments the women who wrote there got (look at Sport and Technology). Fashion, where most articles were written by women, was one of the few sections where male authors consistently received more blocked comments.”

1. The restriction of women and girls’ access to education and the consequences to participation in civic life;

PEN International’s oral statement to 58th Commission on the Status of Women on Violence against Women on participation and education: <http://www.pen-international.org/pen-international-oral-statement-at-the-58th-un-csw-session/>

* Access to education is uneven between genders. Girls in many parts of the world are either unable to attend school or, as PEN Uganda told us, are the first to **sacrifice education for work and marriage** if called upon to do so.
* PEN Myanmar pointed out that “access to education is uneven among different demographics and geographies: access for women in rural areas is difficult.” Further, “The outlook on education is not good. **The perception is that women don't need education.”** This stems from the social norm of women’s domesticity: if a woman’s purpose is to become a wife and mother then she doesn’t need education. PEN Myanmar a say there’s a “need to be clear that the answer is WOMEN's rights, not WIFE's rights.”
* PEN Guinée told us**, “Education of girls in rural zones remains a serious problem**. Even in areas where many girls are registered, it is still a problem to keep them in school.
* There are serious consequences to this lack of education. PEN Honduras told us about the situation in Honduras: **“If you don’t have access to education, you are more vulnerable, you have less opportunity**. Even those who do have university degrees are paid extremely badly here in Honduras, so you can imagine what it is like for a woman with no education, it is scary. They end up working in the factories, they are subjected to violence there—the conditions are terrible; or they end up in domestic service, where often they are sexually abused—12 hour days, 7 days a week; or informal jobs in markets for instance, where the salaries are incredibly discriminatory to women.”

4) Challenges that women writers face in the professional and commercial spheres.”

* The widespread **pigeonholing of women within certain roles** means that their work is often ignored.
* Several of our respondents point out that perfectly legitimate work done by women who are experts in their fields is **disregarded by men** who cannot accept that a woman has anything worthwhile to say about anything serious.
* Dr. Ma Thida, a surgeon, writer, and activist from Myanmar, recalled that when she started writing, at age 16 or 17, “people reading my work thought it must have been by a man in his 40s: it expressed the author's own opinion, the writing was strong. **When they noticed the author was a woman, they mocked me**.”
* Dr. Ma goes on to say, “Once women writers are compared to men writers, their lack of knowledge of the world becomes apparent. We need to encourage women to be interested world and local affairs, not just superficial news.” **Lack of education and the internalized presumption of domesticity** conspire to keep many women from applying their intellect to serious matters.
* This has the effect, in certain situations, of **restricting women’s writing to more trivial matters**—gossip, fashion, domestic tasks—while serious matters of politics and economics are the exclusive purview of men.
* PEN Delhi tells us that it **“never occurred” to publishers that women could or did write**—thinking that women had nothing to say, and therefore not publishing their writing. **If women's writing was published, it was not translated or included in anthologies at home or abroad**.
* Discriminatory practices common to many industries apply to women writers as well. These include dismissal for taking a stand or showing leadership. PEN Uganda **told us about a woman who was fired for speaking about politics;** PEN Honduras went into some depth, saying, “**if we do get jobs in the media, we are suffer discrimination. From our bosses, our colleagues**. **Our bosses send us on the most dangerous assignments so that we leave, or they try to discredit the work we do by claiming that we don’t have a brain to think with. Colleagues try to tell you how to write your story. This also happens in the organizations (NGOs): if you don’t stand up for yourself, forget about it!”**
* Women also face hurdles in rising within organizations to management positions; the **International Women's Media Foundation** reported in their 2011 survey of 443 print and broadcast news companies that women held **only 38.7% of senior management positions including managing editor and bureau chief, and only 28.7% of middle management positions such as editor.** The situation is much improved when women do occupy those positions of power; women writers have noticed that they get to write more interesting articles and get better placement within publications.

PEN International staff – internal consultation:

**PROTECTION**  – Psycho-social support will be integrated in PEN/ ICORN protection programmes. Particular focus on the difficulties and expense of managing family reunions. Men generally get threats that are personal whilst women have a different perspective.

**PROTECTION** – Similar situation in Iraq. Outcome of the issues faced by women writers: public shame (link to the cultural values section in the manifesto.)

**ASIA AND AMERICA**– Example of projects in Honduras + India report (specifically digital attacks.)

<http://www.pen-international.org/themes/honduras-journalism-in-the-shadow-of-impunity/>

<http://www.pen-international.org/the-india-report-imposing-silence/>

1. **Please indicate whether you monitor and collect information and disaggregated data (e.g. by sex, gender identity, ethnicity, age, online/offline, focus areas of work) specifically on the gender-specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalists.**

Case list Some examples: the Mirabal sisters, Anna Politkovskaya, Berta Cáceres, Khadija Ismailova s

ICORN Report

The notable rise in applications from women writers at risk noted in the previous report continues. The level of risk faced by women writers seeking protection tends to be acute, and gender has been identified as a key factor in prioritizing urgent cases.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | January-June 2016 | | July-December 2016 | |
| **Region** | Cases of women received | Cases of women returned | Cases of women received | Cases of women returned |
| Africa | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Americas | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Asia | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Europe | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| MENA | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 12 | 5 | 5 | 11 |

**PROTECTION** – In North Africa there are less women journalists. There is also an increasing number of ICORN writers, tending to tell each other that the system is working (see Ethiopia.) Moreover, some female writers do not consider moving as an option. They mainly want to stay in their countries without looking for a replacement. Especially in Arabic countries.

**PROTECTION** (– Rise in numbers of women writers seeking protection the ICORN report, there is a rise in the number of journalists that are women to professionally put themselves forward. Almost all of them are young and IT writers (access to internet, social media and blogging community increasing access for women.)

**PROTECTION** – Most women have young children and usually the whole family tries to move to the country of protection. Middle Eastern countries requiring this but sometimes they need their husband’s confirmation to leave the country. Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender writers face much more severe protection concerns, most often from close family members and their immediate communities.

**AFRICA**– Culturally there are some countries where it’s much more difficult to leave the family for women.

1. **What programmes and initiatives have your organisation adopted to address the issue of safety of women journalists, including the underlying causes of the obstacles and human rights violations, and harmful gender stereotypes, experienced by women journalists? How do these measures differ from those adopted to address the issue of safety of journalists more generally, or the safety of male journalists? Please, elaborate on the impact of any measures adopted.**

**PEN International will be voting on a Women’s Manifesto on securing equal freedom of expression for women writers at our Congress in Ukraine in 2017.**

**Past programmes and initiatives:**

“The Women Writers’ Committee was set up in 1991 to promote certain issues faced by women writers around the world – challenges at family and national levels such as unequal education, unequal access to resources and actual prohibition from writing.

The committee reaches out to both aspiring and practising women writers through PEN Centres and other organisations and networks, and works with the Writers in Prison Committee on behalf of incarcerated or endangered women writers.

Representatives from the committee attend meetings of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The committee has held conferences in countries such as Nepal, Kyrgyzstan and Senegal, and has published special newsletters. It uses Facebook to connect the work of women writers to the world.”

A detailed essay on gender-specific forms of censorship identified by the group can be found here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/meredith-tax/gender-based-censorship>

“PEN’s Writers in Prison Committee is actively monitoring cases where women writers have been raped, beaten, harassed, had teeth broken during questioning, and their family members, even their unborn children, threatened because of their work. Although the context in which this abuse is perpetrated varies hugely, it is clear that in all of these situations women writers have been directly targeted for their role in advancing freedom of expression.” (PEN International’s Oral Statement at the 57th CSW Session)

“Capacity building strategies to support and protect writers at risk at a local level through our network of PEN centres has led to a number of successful initiatives in the period in question. Bangladeshi poet and blogger Choity Ahmed contacted PEN for assistance in July 2016, and in October 2016 Swedish PEN invited her to Sweden for a period of rest and respite, and to give her an opportunity to resume her literary work. With the help of a temporary relocation grant from the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka, a small grant from the PEN Emergency Fund and a relocation grant from the EU Temporary Relocation Platform, Choity Ahmed and her two daughters arrived in Sweden in January 2017.” (ICORN Report)

Civil society programmes, for instance Nicaragua focusing on online security and workshops organised in Kenya.

To address bias in publishing in India – PEN Dehli member’s response:

Butala responded by creating a publishing house in 1984, publishing books by women, about women. At the time, “there was a lack of materials for women to understand women, including economic relations and violence.” In her publishing work, she translates women’s writing into and out of English, and works with women from disadvantaged backgrounds (disadvantaged by poverty, caste, rural location and especially by occupation such as sex worker or domestic labourer). She says that writing about women is seen as political. “You do get criticism, but also warmth, interest, curiosity.”

PEN Guinée told us**, “Education of girls in rural zones remains a serious problem**. Even in areas where many girls are registered, it is still a problem to keep them in school. The Centre Guinéen has always demanded equity as a condition of participation of schools in our partnership.”

**PROTECTION** (CATHY) – No need of gender lens for protection. Need of awareness (ex. Visa problems) for certain issues but generally no need for that element. There are some NGOs that work with a particular group in a particular country. See RSF in Afghanistan. It’s relevant in very specific settings. Women usually targeted because they are advocating for women’s rights (ex. Iran.) Many HRDs targeted in Iran because of these issues. Lots of them are now in Scandinavia (especially Sweden.) A gender lens is useful when looking at their family and at the society were they are living in.

**PROTECTION** (PATRICIA) – Cases of women journalists were going to be a priority. Relocation of families costs 4 times more than a single person. Sometimes the fact that these writers are women triggers the discrimination.

1. **Are the measures – if any – referred to in response to Question 3 above part of a “gender-sensitive” approach (see GA Resolution 70/162 page 3)? If so, what does this approach consist of?**

**Resolution 70/162 page 3**: “*Acknowledging also* the particular vulnerability of journalists to becoming targets of unlawful or arbitrary surveillance or interception of communications in violation of their rights to privacy and to freedom of expression.”

1. **In the country/countries in which your organisation works, are there any specific laws and/or policies or initiatives (e.g. training, raising awareness) to address harmful gender stereotypes, intersecting forms of discrimination and other human rights violations experienced by women journalists in the course of carrying out their work (e.g. workplace, in the field, online)? What is the impact of these laws, policies or initiatives?**

**Russia, Turkey, nearly all of the MENA region were identified as particularly problematic legal frameworks for women writers.**

1. **In the country/countries in which your organisation works, are there any specific laws and/or policies or initiatives to address violations of international humanitarian law committed against women journalists?**

“PEN Mali will be running human rights education programmes with the aim of building social cohesion in a post-conflict environment through empowering the new generation to build networks and effect change. The project will focus on empowering women, young leaders and writers, and will be working in 17 schools across the country to build human rights, citizenship, democracy and dialogue into the curriculum and into society at large.”

**MENA** (NAELL) – Lebanon has a draft Bill for the protection of women.

1. **What mechanisms and/or networks do you have in place to share information and increase the protection of women journalists, particularly in situations of conflict or political instability?**

“Creative Writing – Paving the way for social change. Through this project PEN Bosnia will use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people (17-24) from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH); the project aims to address existing divides between different communities in post-war BIH. PEN Bosnia will organise a series of literary workshops for young writers that will focus on literature, language and human rights.”

**PROTECTION**– It could be useful to know what are the particular needs of women journalists and HRDs. However, this is not useful unless it’s resourced.

1. **What gender-specific barriers have women journalists who are victims of human rights violations faced in obtaining an effective remedy?**

Example of Khadija Ismayilova (she was filmed in her own apartment.)

**PROTECTION**– Liu Xia in China under house arrest but there is no legal remedy to that. Extra legal process in place but no mechanism in place to challenge that legally. Problem with extra judicial punishment. Need to focus on partners of writers and journalists as well.

**PROTECTION** – In Iraq there is a tendency to avoid the problems because they know that there is no protection provided for them. Self-censorship and censorship on behalf of the employer.

**MENA** – Sexual violence: women feel as if they can’t speak about it.

See Egypt as another example. Look at what women have experienced in terms of lack of protection for harassment from authorities. Moreover, the remedy should not only be legal, but also medical, psychological etc.

**ASIA**– Group of women journalists in India publishing on “The Ladies’ Finger” where they were specifically targeted because they were writing on gender issues.

1. **Please indicate if your organisation has developed specific initiatives for the safety of women journalists in light of SDGs, in particular Goal 5 and Goal 16.**

**SDG 5**: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

**SDG 16**: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

RESOLUTION ON THE ABDUCTION OF SCHOOL-AGED GIRLS (Resolution adopted at 82nd PEN International Congress in Ourense, Spain, in 2016):

“Violence against women and girls has long threatened freedom of expression, and the wider global context of gender inequality continues to be a very serious threat to the participation of women and girls in literature, and to the education and literacy of girls. In particular, the abduction of school-aged girls is an ongoing global issue and – as well as being an act of gender-based violence in and of itself – typically marks the end of an individual’s education: prohibiting her participation in, contribution to, and access to global literature both as a reader and a writer.

Recent examples of this include:

* The Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping by Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2014;
* Ongoing mass abductions of Yezidi girls by the group calling itself Islamic State in Iraq;
* The continued disappearances of indigenous girls in Canada and the west of the United States;
* Abductions of school-aged girls in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, who since 2012 have been more specifically targeted on their journeys to and from school.”

“The climate of fear created by this situation poses a further threat to other female students for whom the risk of abduction may be a prohibiting factor in their own choice or opportunity to attend school.”

“The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 82nd World Congress in Ourense, Galicia (Spain), 26th September to 2nd October 2016, calls on all governments:

* To gather statistics on the abductions of girls and to evaluate the impact such abductions have on the education of girls;
* To generate more advanced global consciousness and understanding of this issue through research.

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International also calls on UN Women:

* To act as a global leader in this research and to prioritise combatting the abduction of girls in their activities.”

“Guinean PEN was established in by the Women Writers Association of Guinea, which makes it one of the few Centres that has a majority of women writers as members. The Centre runs its own museum and cultural centre and raises the majority of its funds through income-generating activities including performances and cultural activities. The focus for much of the Centre’s work is to use literature and cultural events to raise awareness of social issues, and to introduce communities who do not normally have access, to the world of literature. This includes projects promoting reading in rural agricultural communities and using literature to support the rights of women and girls.”

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)