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COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME • OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

Panel Discussion on Legal Threats to Safety of Journalists

2 November 2023, 10:00-12:00 CET

Palais de Nations, Room XIX, Geneva, and remote participation via Zoom

Registration: <https://indico.un.org/event/1007867/>

Interpretation available in all UN official languages

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Introduction

2 November was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/163 as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. It presents a significant occasion for the international community to come together and address the critical issue of protecting journalists and media workers worldwide. This landmark resolution denounces any acts of violence directed at media workers. Additionally, it calls upon Member States to proactively prevent violence against journalists and media professionals, to ensure accountability by pursuing legal actions against those responsible for crimes against journalists and media workers and to guarantee that victims have access to effective remedies. Moreover, the resolution encourages States to create a secure and supportive atmosphere that allows journalists to carry out their duties independently and freely.

To mark this day, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is organizing a panel discussion to present a comprehensive study on the impact of counter-terrorism and other criminal legislation - such as sedition, defamation, libel and cybersecurity - on freedom of expression, media freedom, and on the right to liberty and security of person. Those rights are enshrined in the Universal Human Rights Declaration, which marks its 75 anniversary this year, and it is in this context that the OHCHR seeks to shed more light on the recurrent use of various legal frameworks that unduly interfere with journalists work and at times subject them to arbitrary detention.

II. Event objectives

The event aims to achieve several key objectives. First, it seeks to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists and advocate for a safer environment for journalism. Second, it aims to present the findings of the OHCHR study on the negative impacts of counter-terrorism and other criminal laws on the work of journalists and media workers. Third, it endeavours to create a platform for journalists and media workers from diverse regions to come together, facilitating the exchange of experiences and insights. The event also serves as a platform for governments to share challenges they face in protecting and promoting media freedom and safety of journalists.

III. Methodology

In order to ensure the broadest participation of stakeholders, the panel discussion will be held in a hybrid format. Interpretation will be available in all UN official languages.



IV. Targeted audience

The panel discussion addresses a range of audience, including, journalists and media workers from diverse backgrounds and regions, representatives from international organizations, civil society, academia, and States' officials.

V. Key discussion points

The panel discussion comprises three parts: an opening session, a main session, and closing remarks. The main session features a moderator and panellists that will deliver statements highlighting different aspects of the OHCHR study. Following the main session, there will be an open floor for the audience questions and comments.

The main session will begin with an overview of the OHCHR Global Study, focusing on the impact of counter-terrorism and criminal laws, including defamation, libel, sedition, and cybersecurity laws, on media freedom and the right to liberty and security of journalists. The panel discussion will then expand its perspective to the global shrinking of civic space, affecting not only journalists and media workers but also various groups such as ethnic and religious minorities, political opposition, and civil society actors. Additionally, the panel will examine human rights restrictions in the online space, often justified by counter-terrorism and cybersecurity laws and map recent detention practices resulting from the implementation of these laws and the chilling effect on media freedom. Finally, seasoned journalists will offer some recommendations for creating a more secure work environment for journalists and media workers.

Throughout the main session, interventions will address, among others: 1. often used legal frameworks that hinder journalists' work; 2. restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, in the online and off-line spaces; 3. decriminalizing criticism of the State; 4. oversight and remedies; and 5. arbitrary and unlawful detention.

The panel discussion will also provide a platform for governments to comment on the OHCHR Study and share their experiences in handling various situations, specifically those related to terrorism and national security challenges, and how they integrate human rights considerations into these processes. Furthermore, the event will benefit from insights shared by a diverse group of journalists and media workers, including women journalists, as well as other civil society actors. The panel discussion will serve as a forum for listening to these diverse perspectives, with the aim of fostering collaborative efforts among governments, civil society, and media organizations to enhance the protection of journalists and uphold media freedom.

VI. Background documents

Reports

- OHCHR Study on the impact of counter-terrorism and other criminal laws on media freedom and safety of journalists, 2023
- Report of the Secretary-General; Terrorism and human rights - section B. Civic space and counter-terrorism ([A/78/269](#))
- Report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity ([A/78/270](#))
- Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Safety of journalists ([A/HRC/49/40](#))
- Internet shutdowns: trends, causes, legal implications and impacts on a range of human rights, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([A/HRC/50/55](#))
- [Global Study](#) on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Civil Society and Civic Space: Report by Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms



- Impact of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders, Report by Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms ([A/HRC/40/52](#))
- Sustainable development and freedom of expression: why voice matters; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression ([A/HRC/53/25](#))
- Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression ([A/HRC/50/29](#))

Briefers (available on OHCHR webpage)

- Summary of OHCHR study on the impact of counter-terrorism law and other criminal laws on media freedom and safety of journalists
- [Briefers on civic space and counter-terrorism](#)
- [Briefers on self-protection measures to respond to threats to journalists](#)
- [Briefers on How international human rights standards and mechanisms help protect journalists](#)
- [Briefers: Human rights and elections for journalists](#)
- [Briefers on Human Rights in the Context of Protests for Journalists](#)
- [Briefers: Global Drive for Media Freedom, Access to Information and the Safety of Journalists](#)