



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 February 2014

English only

Human Rights Council

Twenty-fifth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.14-11464



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The necessity to move to a “zero tolerance” culture towards violence against media workers in order to insure their protection

The year 2013 has been the second deadly year for media workers in the last ten years because of the coverage of several armed conflicts. 129 journalists were killed in the line of duty in 28 countries. In 2012, 141 journalists were killed, a record figure due to the deadly Syrian conflict. The number of journalists killed in Syria this year has decreased however abductions of foreign journalists have increased: 15 so far are still in captivity in Syria or have disappeared.

Using the same yardstick, 107 journalists were killed in 2011, 110 in 2010 and 122 in 2009. A total of 609 journalists have been killed during the past 5 years; on average: 122 per year and 2,3 per week, one every three days.

Among the 129 journalists killed in 2013 around the world 90 (70%) were killed in conflict zones or in violent unrest. Three quarter of them were intentionally targeted, others were killed mostly accidentally in bomb attacks.

Overview

The journalists covering the Middle East were the hardest hit 44 (34%), followed by Asia 37 (29%), then Latin America 27 (21%), Africa follows with 18 (14%) ahead of Europe 3 (2%).

Syria ranks first as the deadliest country for media workers for the second year with 17 journalists killed. Iraq comes second with 16 killed, followed by Pakistan with 14, the Philippines 11 and India with nine killed.

According to the PEC observations, the situation has unfortunately deteriorated again in Iraq particularly in Mosul after an improvement last year: 16 journalists were killed in the country in 2013 against 3 in 2012.

Somalia comes in 6th place with 8 killed against 19 last year. Egypt follows with 7 killed, a marked deterioration following the 30 of June revolution that led to the ousting of former President Mohamed Morsi. Brazil ranks in 8th position with 6 journalists killed (against 11 in 2012), and Mexico 5 (against 11), Guatemala follows with 4 journalists killed.

Afghanistan, Columbia, Honduras, Libya and Russia witnessed the killing of 3 journalists in each country. Two journalists were killed in Haiti, Kenya, Mali, Paraguay. And one in each of the following countries: Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Nigeria, Peru, Uganda, Tanzania and Yemen.

Syrian Arab Republic: unprecedented kidnapping

In Syria, the number of journalists killed has diminished (-20) however the number of journalists kidnapped has risen dramatically. At the time of writing, at least 15 foreign journalists are in captivity: Didier François (France), Edouard Elias (France), Nicolas Hénin (France), Peter Torres (France), Basher Fahmi (Jordanian/Palestinian), James Foley (USA), Austin Tice (USA), Ishak Mostar (Mauritania), Samir Kassab (Lebanon), Bunyamin Aygun (Turkey), Marc Marginedas (Spain), Javier Espinosa Robles (Spain), Ricardo García Vilanova (Spain), Magnus Falkehed (Sweden), Niclas Hammarström (Sweden).

At least another 15 foreign journalists were freed or were successful in fleeing captivity, marking the total to a high of 30 kidnapped or disappeared in 2013.

Those kidnappings in Syria by armed groups are unprecedented; even in Iraq between 2003 and 2006 this high figure was not common which renders the coverage of the ongoing war in this country extremely dangerous for journalists. Those armed groups only seek financing of their armed struggle which places them on the level of criminal groups.

The PEC calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all journalists detained or abducted in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Pakistan: a high environment of impunity

During last several years, Pakistan has consecutively remained the third deadliest country for journalists on this globe. According to the list of the PEC, 11 journalists were murdered with impunity in 2011, it further roses to a dozen journalists' casualties in 2012 and in 2013 it further inched up to 14.

This appalling record is constantly drawing attention of world community and media defense groups including the PEC that are calling upon Pakistani government for greater journalist's protection, and investigation and prosecution of the murderers of more than 100 journalists.

Dozens of journalists have been intimidated, abducted, attacked and injured, but except a few, others 'kept mum' and did not report due to 'high environment of impunity' they are experiencing in other journalists' cases who are either been killed or seriously injured in line of duty.

Enormous threats are posed to the journalists' safety in Pakistan, especially in conflict zones. Scores of journalists have been killed in these regions including Baluchistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that is bordering Afghanistan.

Journalists who had been threatened with death have relocated themselves and their families to safe places or resorted to self-censorship. Many have been killed by militants, but sometime fingers are also raised at state agencies.

In March 2013, international media support groups, UN representatives, journalists trade unions, civil society and associations working on journalists' safety and media freedom gathered in Islamabad in a two-day international conference and launched the United Nations Action Plan against Impunity, in Pakistan. Another international conference was held in Pakistan and launched 'Pakistan Coalition of Media on Safety (PCOMS)' which is an alliance of media stakeholders seeking to promote a unified agenda of safety for journalists, media workers and media establishments in the country to take advantage of global UN plan against impunity in Pakistan.

Nawaz government's information and broadcasting minister assured during first meeting of the PCOMS steering committee in October 2013 that the government of Pakistan will extend support for the implementation of the UN Action Plan with the help of the PCOMS. The government will fully support the efforts of the UN and its partners in Pakistan for combating impunity against journalists for keeping them safe. The PEC will follow closely the concrete actions taken by the government in this regard.

Progress at the international level

Progress has occurred while mobilizing the international community, the Security Council has convened two meetings on the protection of journalists, the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution and the Human Rights Council decides to convene a Panel discussion on the same issue, while UNESCO continues the implementation of its Plan of action.

This awakening is a great success for organizations that defend journalists; now the question is what has to be done in order to effectively protect journalists in conflict zones.

Conclusion

With less than 5% of the cases of media workers' killing solved in the last 10 years, impunity remains the major cause of the high number of victims. The PEC is firmly convinced that the time has come to move from the impunity culture to a culture of "zero tolerance" towards violence against media workers.