

Forum: UNESCO

Issue: The question of protecting Freedom of expression with respect to journalism

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“Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated”

(UN General Assembly Resolution 59, 1946)

Introduction

First of all we have to keep in mind the clear meaning of freedom.

Freedom is the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without restrictions particularly from a despotic government.

Freedom of expression is at the same time a freedom, a right, and a cornerstone of democracy.

It is important directly, given its close relationship with human dignity. The inherent desire of persons to communicate freely can be seen in the actions of the youngest members of society – newborn babies – as well as in almost every social activity that is undertaken by human beings.

But people can be free only if they are aware of the facts happening around the world. So it is fundamental that journalists are free to report the facts, denounce abuses, and alert the public.

There are countries where the torturers stopped torturing when the media revealed the violence, and corrupt politicians abandoned shady practices when investigative journalists published compromising information.

How can we help stopping these practices against human freedom?

Key terms

IFJ (The International Federation of Journalists): it is the largest union of journalists in the world.

This organization aims to protect and strengthen the rights and freedoms of journalists. It works also for solidarity, social justice, labor rights, democracy, human rights, and fighting poverty, corruption and globalization.

First founded in Paris in 1926, the federation was relaunched twice in 1946 and in 1952. Today, IFJ has around 600,000 members representing more than 100 countries;

IFEX (The International Freedom of Expression Exchange): it is a global network of over 100 independent non-governmental organisations working at the local, national, regional and international level to defend and promote freedom of expression as a fundamental human right;

RWB (Reporters Without Borders) or **RSF** (Reporters Sans Frontières): it is an international non-profit, non-governmental organization that promotes and defends freedom of information and freedom of the press. This organization, with a head office in Paris, France, has consultant status at the United Nations;

The Press Freedom Index: it is an annual ranking of countries compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders based upon the organisation's own assessment of the countries' press freedom records in the previous year;

Background information

Mass communications history is fairly short, although the various forms of mass media that have developed over the years have made a tremendous impression on the technological, political, economic, social and cultural trends of every nation. Mass communications, defined as communication reaching large numbers of people, primarily developed in just the last 500 years. While books are the oldest medium, credit for the oldest mass media goes to the newspapers. They were the first to reach a mass audience, ultimately serving all classes and becoming a medium of democracy.

News-sheets and reports published by various governments are among the first known examples of publications giving rise to the modern newspaper. As early as 100 B.C., the Roman government published a news-sheet known as the "Acta Diurna", or "Daily Actions". Beginning in the seventh century, the Tang dynasty of China block-printed a "Palace Report".

Newspaper development was generally slow because of strict controls of the governments. For example in 16th century in England Henry VIII feared the power of the press, and by 1534 he instituted measures to control printing, including licensing. For more than 100 years, unauthorized publications and words criticizing the Crown resulted in imprisonment and even death. The licensing requirement was not lifted until 1694. Nonetheless, in some countries such as Germany, authority was weaker and newspapers were able to develop more quickly.

In America, newspaper development was quite slow. Little demand existed because newspapers from England were readily available, the population was small and largely illiterate, and transportation was difficult. Barter in lieu of cash also made advertising difficult. Moreover, colonists, still under British rule, lacked full citizenship and did not enjoy press freedom. The first newspaper in America, published in 1690, only lasted one issue. "Publik Occurences, Both Foreign and Domestick" was printed by Benjamin Harris who lacked the requisite license from the British Crown. It was not until 14 years later in 1704, with authority from the Massachusetts governor, that a handwritten sheet called the "Boston News-Letter" was published. It lasted until 1776.

Relevant U.N. events

- The United Nations General Assembly declared May 3rd to be **World Press Freedom Day** or just **World Press Day** to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press and remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and marking the anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, a statement of free press principles put together by African newspaper journalists in Windhoek in 1991. UNESCO also marks World Press Freedom Day each year by bringing together media professionals, press freedom organisations and UN agencies to assess the state of press freedom worldwide and discuss solutions for addressing challenges. Each conference is centered on a theme related to press freedom, including good governance, media coverage of terrorism, impunity and the role of media in post-conflict countries.
- The UNESCO project "Training Security Forces on Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists" aims at building the capacity of security forces to uphold citizens' rights to freedom of expression and information by improving journalist safety. Its goal is to establish more professional relationships between security forces and journalists conducive to a better

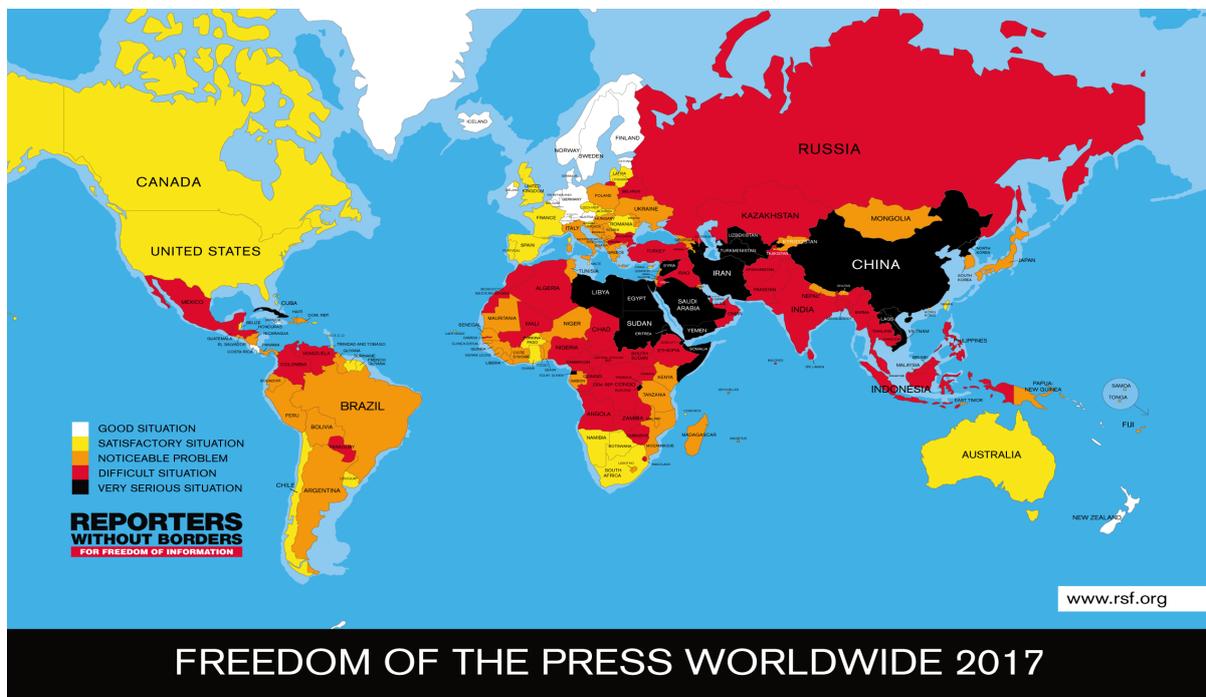
environment for freedom of expression for all citizens. The project has been already implemented in Tunisia since 2013.

On November 4th 2014, during the celebration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, UNESCO's project Office in Tunisia launched a manual on freedom of expression and public order, which has been prepared within the framework of the project, to train security forces on freedom of expression, freedom of the press and the protection of journalists.

States involved in the issue

The 2017 World Press Freedom Index compiled by the Paris based World Media Watchdog, "Reporters Without Borders" (RSF) reflects a world in which attacks on the media have become commonplace and strongmen are on the rise.

RSF's latest World Press Freedom Index highlights the danger of a tipping point in the state of media freedom, especially in leading democratic countries. Democracies began falling in the Index in preceding years and now, more than ever, nothing seems to be checking that fall.



In the emerging new world of media control, even the top-ranked Nordic countries are slipping down the Index. After six years at the top, Finland (down 2 at 3rd) has surrendered its No. 1 position due to political pressure and conflicts of interest. The top spot has been taken by Norway (up 2 at 1st), which is not a European Union member. This is a blow for the European model. Sweden has risen six places to take 2nd position. Journalists continue to be threatened in Sweden but the authorities sent a positive signal in the past year by convicting several of those responsible. The cooperation between the police and certain media outlets and journalists' unions was also seen as a step forward in combating the threats.

At the other end of the Index, Eritrea (179th) has surrendered last place to North Korea for the first time since 2007, after allowing closely-monitored foreign media crews into the country. North Korea (180th) continues to keep its population in ignorance and terror – even listening to a foreign radio broadcast can lead to a spell in a concentration camp.

The Middle East and North Africa region, which has ongoing wars in Yemen (down 4 at 166th) as well as Syria, continues to be the world's most difficult and dangerous region for journalists. The Asia-Pacific region is the third worst violator overall but holds many of the worst kinds of records. Two of its countries, China (176th) and Vietnam (175th), are the world's biggest prisons for journalists and bloggers.

The European Union and Balkans region continue to be the one where the media are freest, although its regional indicator (of the overall level of constraints and violations) registered the biggest increase in the past year: +3.8%.

Possible solutions

The topic in discussion is very important because freedom is a right of each human being and it should be limitless. We are talking of one of its aspects, the freedom of expression with respect of journalism; so we have to find some solutions that can work well from different points of view: human and also hetical.

We have to find solutions in order to guarantee the freedom of press in the States where there is a dictatorship that does not allow journalists to do their job freely, but also in the countries where the freedom of expression and the respect of journalism is supposed to be present, even recognized by law, but the governments, and in particular some politicians, hinder this right using their authority. We have always to keep in mind that The UN Human Rights Committee, which is a group of experts with responsibility for monitoring and promoting implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), has stated:

“The right to freedom of expression is of paramount importance in any democratic society.”

Good work delegates

Useful links

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002313/231305e.pdf>

<http://www.lincoln.edu/criminaljustice/hr/Speech.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_Freedom_Index

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Federation_of_Journalists

<https://rsf.org/en/2017-world-press-freedom-index-tipping-p>

<https://rm.coe.int/16802ed00c>

<http://www.newsmediauk.org/Current-Topics/Press-Freedom>

<https://rm.coe.int/16806433ae>

<https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/38504/en/un-hrc:-resolution-on-safety-of-journalists-breaks-new-ground>

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2016/sep/30/media-freedom-groups-welcome-resolution-to-protect-journalists>

http://www.reclaimthedia.org/communications_rights/ict_solutions_to_foster_freedom_of_expression.html

<http://www.humanrights.is/en/human-rights-education-project/human-rights-concepts-ideas-and-fora/substantive-human-rights/the-right-to-freedom-of-expression-and-religion>