

Opening Remarks

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me at the outset, to express my sincere appreciation for your attendance to this Panel Discussion. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Deputy Director General of UNESCO and to the representatives of Argentina, Austria, France, Costa Rica and Tunisia for honoring this event with their presence.

Yesterday, November 2nd, we celebrated the first International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The International Day has been proclaimed, following Resolution 68/163 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity adopted by last year's General Assembly.

The Resolution laid down the international framework for the protection of journalists, urging Member States to implement concrete measures in order to address the present culture of impunity. Following this Resolution, the Secretary General submitted to the current session of the General Assembly a comprehensive report on the progress of its implementation.

Unfortunately, as the Report of the Secretary General concludes, there is an upward trend in the number of journalists killed in recent years and an increased targeting of journalists and media workers to silence them.

In this context, the fight against impunity has gained self-evident importance. There is worldwide awareness of the hazards associated with professional journalism on the one hand and ever-growing assaults against journalists and media workers on the other. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 90% of journalists' murders, there has been impunity of any perpetrator.

This trend constitutes, undoubtedly, the biggest obstacle to the safety of journalists and highlights the fact that a climate of impunity creates further violence.

On the other hand, it is a positive development that awareness on the issue is high in the international agenda.

Over the last few years, the United Nations, especially UNESCO, have been active on the issue. High-level meetings have been bringing together all relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, independents experts and media groups. The meetings culminated in the adoption of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, already implemented in pilot countries.

Many governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as civil society actors have also undertaken important initiatives in this regard. Regional organizations have contributed to standard-setting and awareness-raising through adoption and resolution regarding the safety of journalists.

Last April, the Council of Europe issued a declaration on the Protection of Journalism. The EU adopted Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline in May, while it is currently funding a number of pilot projects in the area of violations of media freedom and pluralism.

Many States have undertaken important initiatives to reinforce the legal framework for the protection of freedom of expression, press freedom and the right to information, while upgrading their efforts to ensure the investigation and prosecution of threats and attacks against journalists and media workers.

However, we have still a long way ahead of us in order to secure a safe and enabling working environment for all journalists. Journalists who work in conflict areas put their lives on a daily basis at risk, in an effort to do their duty and disseminate information around the globe. Their safety is not guaranteed. On the contrary, their working conditions are unbearable as they have to deal with the threat of being murdered, kept hostage, harassed, intimidated or tortured.

The threat is grave and for this reason this event is very timely, given that it is a great opportunity to discuss new ways to improve the protection of journalists and fight impunity.

The issue of their safety has become further alarming especially in some spots in the world, where we have all recently

witnessed the perpetration of crimes of mass atrocities by non-state actors against journalists. In fact, all these heinous crimes should function as a catalyst in order to strengthen the international community's resolve to do whatever is necessary to bring the perpetrators to justice.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The essence of this anniversary is to remind us our duty to tackle impunity and to concentrate our efforts on securing a safe environment which will guarantee freedom of speech and expression, as well as access to information for all.

All acts of violence demonstrate in the most explicit way efforts to silence independent voices and opinions. These blatant violations pose a threat not only to the right of freedom of expression, but also to the very existence of democracy, threatening thus the foundations of our societies.

Thank you very much.