Beat: News

Threats to media workers' freedom 'growing by the day'

UN Chief Warns

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"Journalists and media workers are facing "increasing politicization" of their work and threats to their freedom to simply do their jobs, that are "growing by the day", said the UN chief, marking World Press Freedom Day on Tuesday."

"The day shines a spotlight on the essential work they do, bringing those in power to account, with transparency, "often at great person risk", said Secretary-General António Guterres, in a video message.

Frontlines of crises.
"Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many media workers have been on the frontlines, providing accurate, science-based reporting to inform decision-makers and save lives", he said.

"At the same time, journalists who cover climate, biodiversity and pollution have succeeded in bringing global attention to this triple planetary crisis."

But the threats to their freedom to go about their reporting and story-telling fairly and accurately, are multiplying daily.

"From global health to the climate crisis, corruption, and human rights abuses, they face increased politicization of their work and attempts to silence them from many sides.

"Digital technology has democratized access to information. But it has also created serious challenges."

Feeding on outrage, lies
The UN chief noted that many social media platforms make their money not through increasing access to fact-based reporting, but on boosting engagement, "which often means provoking outrage, and spreading lies."

"Media workers in war zones are threatened not only by bombs and bullets, but by the weapons of falsification and disinformation that accompany modern warfare. They may be attacked as the enemy, accused of espionage, detained, or killed, simply for doing their jobs."

Mr. Guterres said that digital technology, was also making censorship easier for authoritarian governments and others, seeking to suppress the truth, with many journalists and editors facing the prospect of their work being taken offline on a daily basis.

Women at 'particular risk'.
Digital technology is also creating new "channels for oppression and abuse", with women journalists "at particular risk" of online harassment and violence.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, has found that nearly three-quarters of women respondents, had experienced online violence. Hacking and illegal surveillance also prevent journalists from doing their jobs.

"The methods and tools change, but the goal of discrediting the media and covering up the truth remains the same as ever", said the UN chief, leading to citizens who live in societies without free media, being "manipulated in horrifying ways."

No democracy
"Without freedom of the press, there are no real democratic societies. Without freedom of the press, there is no freedom", he said.

Ten years ago, the UN established a Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, to protect media workers and end impunity for crimes committed against them, and the UN is continuing to fight to protect their rights.

This year's World Press Freedom Day Global Conference, began on Monday, and will run until 5 May in Punta Del Este, Uruguay, built around the theme Journalism under Digital Siege.

Participants will discuss the impact of the digital era on freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, access to information and privacy. World Press Freedom Day events will reunite relevant stakeholders such as policymakers, journalists, media representatives, activists, cybersecurity managers and legal experts to explore these issues and develop concrete solutions to address the threats posed to press freedom and privacy in the digital age."

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