





**Forum:** United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

**Issue:** Protecting whistleblowers and journalists in authoritarian states

**Student Officer:** Nikoletta Roussaki

**Position:** Deputy President

---

Dear Delegates,

My name is Nikoletta Roussaki, I'm 15 years old and I am a first year International Baccalaureate student at Pierce - The American College of Greece. It is with great honour that I'm serving as the Deputy-President in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in this year's LOGOSMUN Conference. This conference marks my second time chairing and seventh conference overall, and I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to be a Student Officer.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this year's conference and applaud your decision to participate. I hope by the end of this conference, along with having engaged in fruitful debate, you will have understood that MUN is more than just an event, but is a tool, an exercise of diplomacy, global awareness and negotiation. That, along with the friendships made along the way, the opportunities to learn and collaborate with people from various backgrounds, are the reasons that have made MUN so valuable to me. I hope by the end you'll share this sentiment as well.

In this study guide you will find information which will provide you with an insight and an in depth, thorough understanding of the third topic of this committee. However, I highly recommend conducting your own research in order to be in the position to engage fully and appropriately in the debate. In addition to that, being familiar with your country's policy is of equal importance.

I'm committed to dedicating my time and energy to this conference and I am eager at the prospect of assisting you all in such a meaningful event. If you have any questions concerning this topic or about the conference itself, feel free to contact me via email at [nikolettaroussaki@gmail.com](mailto:nikolettaroussaki@gmail.com). I look forward to meeting you all in November!

Kind regards,

Nikoletta Roussaki

## Introduction



What happens to humanity when truth itself is treated like a crime? In authoritarian states, where it is already dangerous to speak your mind, journalists and whistleblowers are at high risk for reporting and making what is happening public. Every 4 days, a journalist is killed somewhere in the world for doing their job, and around 80% of journalist killings go unpunished. This is a topic of great importance, since whistleblowers and journalists are the backbone of accountability and freedom of information. When authoritarian regimes repress and punish them, it weakens global democracy and helps aid in the complete opposite; tyrannic and dictatorial rule.

Journalists play a big role in ensuring that corruption, abuses, and human rights violations come to light. First made proclaimed by the 1948 UDHR Article 19 which elevated and made known the importance of freedom of expression, and followed by the rise of investigative journalism in the 20th century, these both raised accountability and access to information globally. However, when the digital era started its uprising, journalism and whistleblowers were faced with a domain new and unknown. Now the repression came in the form of censorship, spyware, cyberattacks, and surveillance. An important milestone is the post 9/11 era, where governments justified surveillance under the guise of national security, which created an unsafe environment for both journalists and whistleblowers.

This topic is directly tied to the United Nations. UN bodies such as UNESCO, and the HRC actively promote the freedom of press and protection of Journalists. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, shows the attempts the UN has made in order to tackle this issue, but either way impunity remains high. Along with impunity, the challenges which are called to face are the lack of legal protections, the steady and rapid rise of digital repression, and the limited options for asylum and relocation available to journalists and whistleblowers.

The stakes are high for this subject, because if whistleblowers and journalists cannot operate safely and correctly, authoritarianism will thrive unchecked. That is why it is important for those who play a massive role in global security and democracy, for those who tell the truth even when misinformation and disinformation dominates, to work without risk of being captured, tortured and even murdered. The credibility of the present and the future relies on protecting them.

## **Definition of key terms**

### Whistleblower



“A whistleblower is a person who reveals confidential information about a crime or misdeed (e.g. human rights violations, corruption, misuse of data). Whistleblowers often seek to introduce more transparency to the dealings of politics, state authorities or corporations.”<sup>1</sup>

### Journalist

“A person who writes news stories or articles for a newspaper or magazine or broadcasts them on radio or television”<sup>2</sup>

### Authoritarianism

“In politics and government, the blind submission to authority and the repression of individual freedom of thought and action. Authoritarian regimes are systems of government that have no established mechanism for the transfer of executive power and do not afford their citizens civil liberties or political rights”<sup>3</sup>

### Freedom of Expression

“It is the right to speak, to be heard, and to participate in political, artistic, and social life. It also includes the 'right to know': the right to seek, receive, and share information through any media.”<sup>4</sup> This right is put in jeopardy during times of digital repression and internet blackouts since they aim to control what people say or can access online, therefore limiting it.

### Freedom of the Press

“The right of newspapers, magazines, etc., to report news without being controlled by the government”<sup>5</sup>

### Censorship

---

<sup>1</sup> “ECCHR: Whistleblower.” Ecchr.eu, 2018, [www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/whistleblower/](http://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/whistleblower/).

<sup>2</sup> “Journalist.” Dictionary.cambridge.org, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/journalist](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/journalist).

<sup>3</sup> Lindstaedt, Natasha. “Authoritarianism.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 28 Mar. 2024, [www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism).

<sup>4</sup> “What Is Freedom of Expression?” Article 19, <https://www.article19.org/what-is-freedom-of-expression/>.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam Webster. “Definition of FREEDOM of the PRESS.” Merriam-Webster.com, 2019, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom%20of%20the%20press](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom%20of%20the%20press).



“A system in which an authority limits the ideas that people are allowed to express and prevents books, films, works of art, documents, or other kinds of communication from being seen or made available to the public, because they include or support certain ideas.”<sup>6</sup>

### Surveillance

“The act of watching a person or a place, esp. a person believed to be involved with criminal activity or a place where criminals gather”<sup>7</sup>

### Political Asylum

“The protection given by a government to foreign people who have left their own country because they disagree with their own government”<sup>8</sup>

### Reprisals

“Activity against another person, especially as a punishment by military forces or a political group”<sup>9</sup>

### Impunity

“Freedom from punishment or from the unpleasant results of something that has been done”<sup>10</sup>

### Propaganda

“Information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions”<sup>11</sup>

## **Timeline of events**

| Date | Description of event |
|------|----------------------|
|------|----------------------|

<sup>6</sup> “Censorship | English Meaning.” *Cambridge Dictionary*,  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/censorship>

<sup>7</sup> “SURVEILLANCE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Cambridge.org, 2019,  
[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance).

<sup>8</sup> “Political Asylum.” @CambridgeWords, 20 Aug. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/political-asylum](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/political-asylum).

<sup>9</sup> “Reprisal.” @CambridgeWords, 20 Aug. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reprisal](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reprisal).

<sup>10</sup> “IMPUNITY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Dictionary.cambridge.org,  
[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/impunity](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/impunity).

<sup>11</sup> “PROPAGANDA | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Cambridge.org,  
[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda).



|                |                                                                                            |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1689           | English Bill of Human Rights was enacted into law                                          |
| 1948           | Universal Declaration of Human Rights                                                      |
| 1966           | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted                       |
| 1972-1974      | The Watergate scandal                                                                      |
| 1976           | ICCPR becomes legally binding                                                              |
| 1993           | UN establishes the post of 'Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression'       |
| 2002           | Daniel Pearl, Wall Street Journal Reporter is murdered in Pakistan                         |
| 2004           | Adoption of the UN Convention Against Corruption                                           |
| July 2010      | WikiLeaks Afghanistan War Logs are published                                               |
| 2011           | Many governments stop journalists from covering protests (Arab Spring)                     |
| 2012           | UNESCO launches 'UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity' |
| June 2013      | Edward Snowden reveals NSA mass surveillance                                               |
| 2 October 2018 | Jamal Khashoggi, journalist, murdered in Saudi consulate in Turkey                         |
| 2019           | Julian Assange (Australian editor, publisher, activist) arrested in London                 |
| 2020           | Belarus Protests                                                                           |
| 21 May 2021    | Belarus forces Ryanair plane to land to arrest journalist Roman Protasevich                |
| July 2021      | Pegasus Project reveals global spyware abuse against journalists and whistleblowers        |
| 2022           | Russia invades Ukraine: journalists are arrested or killed                                 |
| 2023           | Increasing digital repression used in authoritarian states                                 |



2024

UNHRC debates strengthening protections for whistleblowers and journalists

## Background information

### Historical Background

The origins of free expression trace back to ancient Athens, where parrhesia was a democratic principle, followed by the English Bill of Rights (1689) in which freedom of speech was legally protected by the Parliament. In regards to more recent developments which helped elevate free expression to being seen as a basic human right, worth mentioning is also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (1966, put in motion 1976). These schemes established the first global legal framework meant to protect journalists, even if many authoritarian states never endorsed ICCPR. Both will be elaborated on further in the guide.

The 20th century consists of a very important time for human rights and journalism. After the expansion of broadcasting and press post WWII, journalism became a tool central to government accountability. The media acts as a “watchdog”, investigating and exposing corruption and providing citizens with information to hold officials responsible. That way, it gives marginalized people a voice, and pushes governments to address public concerns and respond to citizen needs. Famous cases of this include the Watergate scandal (1972-1974) in which “Post” journalists Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward investigated and uncovered a web of connections, illegal activities and subterfuge by the then president of the US Richard M. Nixon, and in the end resulted in his resignation. Another example is the leaking of 11.5 million documents which revealed how the wealthy, politicians and other high profile individuals used tax havens to avoid taxes and hide assets. Unlike the Watergate scandal, this was a global effort of over 350 reporters from more than 80 countries, coordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

However, as journalism gained more power in exposing corrupted authority figures or bodies, authoritarian states responded by augmenting repression. Before internet tools and digital surveillance, tools of such regimes consisted of banning newspapers, shutting down printing and seizing TV and radio stations. Modern control consists of digital surveillance, spyware, online censorship and disinformation. Great examples of modern tactics are China's Great Firewall (2000s-today), and Pegasus spyware (exposed 2021). Repression with these as cornerstones, shows that the “battlefield” has changed to something quieter, harder to trace, and always changing and evolving, deeming it hard to control and be protected against.

The most recent event that shaped the future of this topic, is 9/11, where the twin towers complex was destroyed in a terrorist attack on September 11 2001. The era that followed, led states to expand both counterterrorism and surveillance powers. Specifically the U.S. Patriot Act (2001) in which it was allowed to sacrifice press freedom in the name of national security



was a consequence of the post 9/11 era, and is gradually being used as an excuse for other repressions against the press and freedoms. As will be mentioned in depth below, whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed how extensive these programs were.

### Why journalists and whistleblowers face persecution

There are three main reasons as to why journalists and whistleblowers face persecution. Journalists research, report and publish news about current events and whistleblowers report wrongdoing of any sort, like illegal activity and corruption. What they do, poses a threat to authoritarian regimes, and therefore endangers them and leaves them vulnerable to maltreatment.

First of all, they expose corruption, abuse of power and human rights violations, which puts mostly governments at risk. Since governments, especially ones in authoritarian regimes, often try to cover up actions that may be punishable or criticised, they resort to silencing those who make the reports and inform the public. Information is power in such states, and those who hold it are in danger, because authorities will go to great lengths to make sure they are the ones who control the flow of information and who has access to it.

Additionally, they threaten government legitimacy especially in authoritarian states as whistleblowers often reveal “sensitive” state information. Such sensitive information may include facts on the corruption of a government, surveillance, human rights violations, which all aid to undermine state credibility. In authoritarian regimes, such legitimacy comes down to controlling the narrative and therefore the flow of information. Exposure, what journalists strive to do, is a direct and big threat to the power they hold.

A well known example is the Edward Snowden revelations which undermined the U.S. government's statements involving the security of post 9/11. He exposed the US and other allied mass surveillance programs that followed the attack in 2013. He shone light on a big coverup by the government, and showed how national security was used as an excuse to monitor citizens and flagged individuals. That led to him being charged under the Espionage Act, and forced into exile in Russia. His case shows the true cost of whistleblowing, even in democratic states.

Lastly, journalists are often accused of being “foreign agents” or “threats” to security and sovereignty. For example, in Russia dozens of journalists and outlets were branded as “foreign spies”, “terrorist sympathizers”, or “agents of the West”<sup>12</sup>. The framing of journalism as something wrong and criminal, results in the public being swayed further into believing what their government is supporting; the prosecution of whistleblowers and journalists as enemies of the state and its sovereignty.

---

<sup>12</sup> Nast, Condé. “How Putin Criminalized Journalism in Russia.” The New Yorker, 7 Apr. 2023, [www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-putin-criminalized-journalism-in-russia](https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-putin-criminalized-journalism-in-russia).



## Methods and tools of repression

### Censorship

Censorship at its core is the deliberate suppression or even removal of speech, information and media by authorities, mainly during protests or political events. It mainly affects journalists, protesters, activists, but also the general public. There are over 1000 cases of social media censorship by governments in 2023, and at least 49 countries have used content removal or social media throttling.

### Surveillance

Surveillance has very little information on how it's used and carried out, primarily because it's the collection and monitoring of citizens' data and communications without their consent, and is therefore illegal. Either it be targeted or mass, governments do not disclose any information surrounding it, and when questioned, it's put under the justification of national security. However it impacts civilians at a large scale, and then human rights defenders and activists, journalists and people who speak aloud about their dissatisfaction at political parties. More than 70 countries have been linked to mass surveillance operations, and billions of communications are intercepted annually, specifically in countries with advanced surveillance systems. This abuse, first made known during the 2021 Pegasus revelations, showed the systemic and global targeting of reporters, and recently Amnesty International has confirmed there has been new targeting of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) journalists.<sup>13</sup>

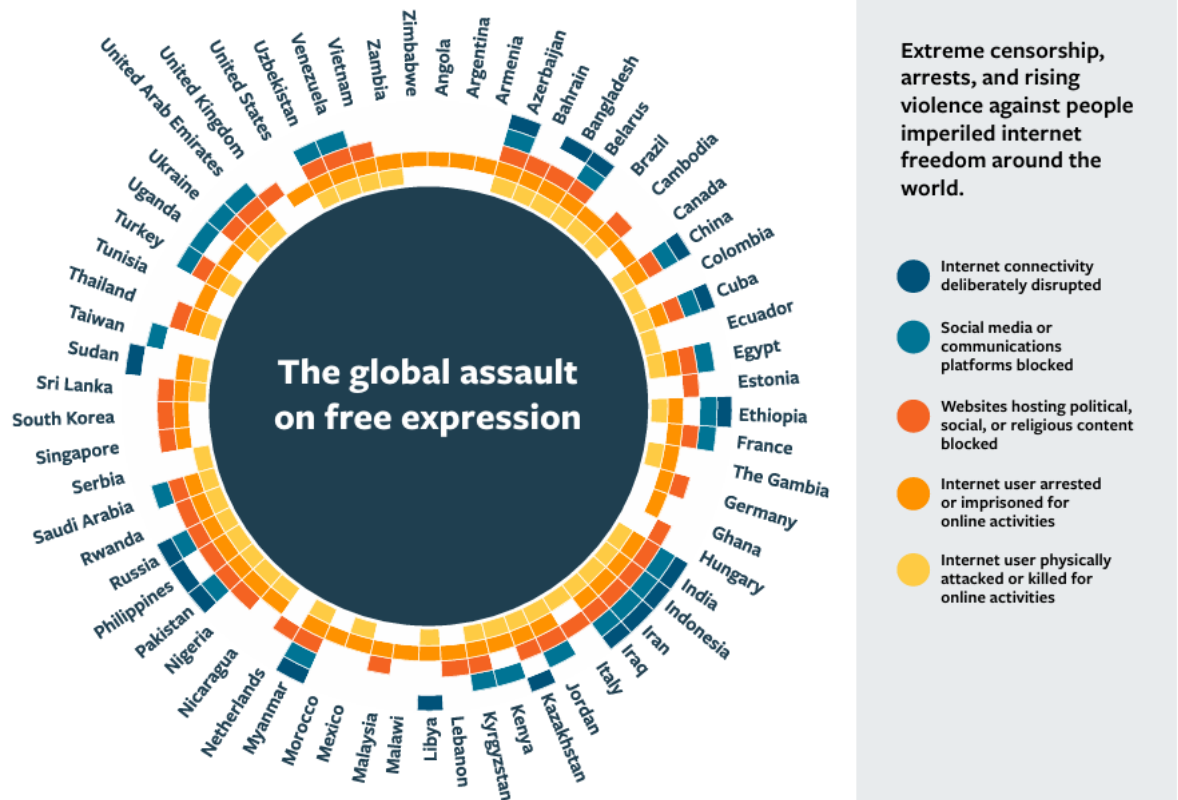
### Misuse of Laws

Many governments create or find loopholes in policies and laws, which enable them to misuse laws to their advantage, and inevitably journalists and whistleblowers disadvantage. Such examples are criminal and administrative laws, espionage, fake news, defamation and “foreign agent” statutes. Freedom House as seen in the image below, documents the sharp increase and use of this method against online expression specifically.

---

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International. “Massive Data Leak Reveals Israeli NSO Spyware Used to Target Activists, Journalists, and Political Leaders.” Amnesty International, 18 July 2021, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/the-pegasus-project/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/the-pegasus-project/)

Figure 1: Graph showing the different types of digital rights violations made in



countries.<sup>14</sup>

### Violence and Intimidation

It is not uncommon for harassment, arrests, beating, forced disappearances (kidnapping) and killing to be used to silence the press. 2024 was the deadliest year the Committee to Protect Journalists has recorded, since at least 124 journalists and media workers were killed,<sup>15</sup> serving as a devastating reminder of the lengths authorities will go in order to remain in power and control.

### Exile

Many journalists flee their countries in order to continue reporting, but face many hardships along the way. Visa difficulties, legal insecurity and harassment which may continue

<sup>14</sup> The Struggle for Trust Online FREEDOM on the NET 2024 Highlights from Freedom House's Annual Report on Internet Freedom TABLE of CONTENTS. [FREEDOM-ON-THE-NET-2024-DIGITAL-BOOKLET.pdf](https://freedom-on-the-net-2024-digital-booklet.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> "Reports Archive." Committee to Protect Journalists, 18 Jan. 2024, [cpj.org/reports/](https://cpj.org/reports/).



abroad too leaves them vulnerable. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports how exiled journalists face unsafe passages and transnational repression, giving emphasis on the Russian reporters in Europe (2023)<sup>16</sup>

### Impact

Violations of the rights of journalists and whistleblowers result in weakening the democratic community and the power of law. Despite the media being underestimated, it holds significant power when being a safeguard to ensure corruption and abuse don't go unchecked. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2024 Index shows a sudden drop in countries with “healthy” press freedom, from 36% to 21% in the span of 2023 to 2024<sup>17</sup>.

Also, another form of censorship, is the one caused by journalists themselves, known as a “chilling effect”. With surveillance, legal risk, and uprising violence against journalists, fear leads them to withhold information and sensitive reporting, which is a pattern repeatedly appearing in global internet freedom assessments of freedom house and others like the World Wide Web Foundation and Reporters without Borders.

At the same time, misinformation and propaganda rule public opinion and narratives. National media outlets greatly influence the information which is accessible in public media, while independent media is suppressed and controlled. This specifically greatly reduces global transparency which helps build trust and foster accountability. Especially during crises

### Challenges

The challenges when facing this topic are split into three sectors; the fact that journalist killings go unpunished 80% of times, digital repression being on the rise and posing as a big threat on its own, and that there are limited political asylum options.

According to UNESCO and CPS, roughly 4 out of 6 journalist murders remain unsolved. This fact gives further power to governments and militias and emboldens them so they continue targeting whistleblowers and reporters since they know accountability is unlikely. Weak judicial independence in authoritarian states also plays a big role, since it makes prosecutions almost impossible. At the same time, digital advancements make repression easier. Digital surveillance, spyware, internet shutdowns, and even online harassment all add to the issue. Repression is made cheaper, harder to trace back, and more global when it comes to who has access to it. Lastly, journalists and whistleblowers often try to flee repression. Many times

---

<sup>16</sup> “Forced to Flee: Exiled Journalists Face Unsafe Passage and Transnational Repression - Committee to Protect Journalists.” Committee to Protect Journalists, 20 June 2024, [cpj.org/reports/2024/06/forced-to-flee-exiled-journalists-face-unsafe-passage-and-transnational-repression/](https://cpj.org/reports/2024/06/forced-to-flee-exiled-journalists-face-unsafe-passage-and-transnational-repression/).

<sup>17</sup> Reporters Without Borders. “2024 World Press Freedom Index – Journalism under Political Pressure | RSF.” Rsf.org, 2024, [rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure](https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure).



though, it isn't possible due to bureaucratic delays, strict and restricting asylum policies, or rejection. Only few countries have relocation programs for journalists, and even rarer for at risk ones. Without “safe havens” for journalists and whistleblowers, they often remain trapped in dangerous environments or end up in exile.

## Stakeholders

### Afghanistan

Journalists faced severe repression ever since the Taliban took over in 2021. The Taliban forced dozens of media outlets to close, and even banned female journalists from appearing on TV. Ever since the takeover, Afghanistan has served as one of the biggest examples of states not just refusing to protect journalists and whistleblowers, but adding to the problem. There have been reports of arbitrary detention, torture, and killings of reporters, and therefore is considered one of the world's most dangerous country for journalists. The most current example of a journalist being killed under the Taliban, was Danish Siddiqui, whose parents are still seeking legal action against the Taliban ambush which resulted in his death.

### China

The most well known censorship program in motion to this day was created in Beijing in the late 1990s, the Great Firewall. China is a major stakeholder in such a topic due to this fact, since it has one of the most restrictive media environments in the world. Examples of the repression caused by the Great Firewall are the blocked websites and platforms (Google, Facebook and Twitter) and the fact they also monitor online activities. The Chinese government has taken over 300,000<sup>18</sup> censorship measures, and while the Great Firewall has been effective in controlling the flow of information, it has also led to great criticism and concern regarding human rights and freedom of expression. Whistleblowers have also faced harassment when exposing COVID-19 mismanagement (e.g. Li Wenliang 2020) and uses mass surveillance and cyber laws to monitor, arrest, and limit journalists and activists alike.

### Russia

Having passed a “foreign agent law” in 2012, to label media as foreign funded spies, Russia mainly uses disinformation and propaganda to limit and put at risk journalists and whistleblowers. State repression had a clear spike after the Ukraine invasion in 2022, as many journalists were imprisoned or forced into exile. Along with that, many high profile journalist killings (e.g. Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian investigative journalist who reported on Chechnya and Kremlin abuses, who was shot dead in Moscow with suspected state involvement but none convicted) remain unsolved, revealing impunity.

---

<sup>18</sup> "China's Great Firewall Is Blocking Around 311K Domains, 41K by Accident." The Record, 14 July 2025, <https://therecord.media/chinas-great-firewall-is-blocking-around-311k-domains-41k-by-accident>.



## Iran

Iran has systematically imprisoned journalists, and censors the media. During 2022-2023 protests, many reporters were arrested for covering the events and demonstrations, and were and still are often accused by authorities and the government to be collaborating with hostile states. Internet shutdowns, much like India, are used to block reporting and coordinating protests and human rights violations.

## Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is infamously responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi inside the Istanbul consulate. Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist, was a US based journalist and active critic of Saudi Arabia's government. He covered many stories, like the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the rise of al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, and other Saudi news. When he arrived in the Saudi consulate to pick up a document on his marriage earlier in the year, he was murdered by agents under orders of the Saudi Arabian government. At first Saudi Arabia attempted to deny it, but further research by the UN proved that it was a wrongful killing from his country. Even the domestic press is very controlled, and they have little tolerance for dissent. This is proven since it's known that whistleblowers and dissidents risk being jailed, torture, or exile. Not only do their policies pose a threat towards such people, but their technology does too. Pegasus, an advanced spyware program, is used to surveil journalists nationally and abroad alike.

## Belarus

Belarus is an authoritarian state, and its government has silenced critics and journalists mainly during the 2020-2021 protests. They arrested journalist Roman Protasevich by forcing a passenger plane to land, an act of international repression. Many outlets are frequently shut down and journalists are detained and beaten. Belarus also works closely with Russia when concerning disinformation and propaganda.

## United States

The United States is currently one of if not the biggest public supporter of global press freedom, and that is mainly shown through funding and their diplomacy. However, their record is mixed. There has been prosecution of whistleblowers and journalists under the Espionage Act (e.g. Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning.) The freedoms of such people, and mainly the freedom of the press is protected nationally under the First Amendment which states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."<sup>19</sup> Even with the constitution, concerns are still at large due to surveillance, security laws and the inconsistency shown in their actions.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lok, Justin. "First Amendment and State Laws." Free Speech, 22 Aug. 2024, [freespeech.ucdavis.edu/learn/first-amendment-and-laws](https://freespeech.ucdavis.edu/learn/first-amendment-and-laws).



### United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Committee (UNESCO)

UNESCO, as will be mentioned in the previous attempts, is responsible for the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists. As a committee, it promotes “the safety of journalists and combatting impunity for those who attack them are central actions within UNESCO's support for press freedom and freedom of expression”<sup>20</sup>, and along with the action plan mentioned above, it has relevant international commitments. They also “monitor and report on the killings, as reflected in the Observatory of Killed Journalists and by periodically requesting Member States to provide information on the status of judicial inquiries into these cases.”<sup>21</sup>

### Reporters without Borders (RSF)

“Reporters Without Borders is an international non-governmental organization that aims at defending journalists and media assistants imprisoned or persecuted for doing their job and exposes the mistreatment and torture of them in many countries. It fights against censorship and laws that undermine press freedom, gives financial aid to journalists or media outlets in difficulty, as well to the families of imprisoned journalists, and works to improve the safety of journalists, especially those reporting in war zones.”<sup>22</sup> It also publishes the World Press Freedom Index annually, where countries are ranked on press freedom, provides emergency support and campaigns for imprisoned reports, and criticises authoritarian states such as China, Russia and Iran greatly.

### Amnesty International

“Amnesty International is an international organisation that campaigns to protect human rights of individuals and groups across the world. Amnesty undertakes research, information and education campaigns to draw attention to human rights issues and violations”<sup>23</sup> Like RSF, it reports and monitors human rights violations against journalists and whistleblowers, but has also investigated the Pegasus scandal in 2021, which was targeting journalists worldwide and put in motion campaigns for release of imprisoned reporters in countries like Iran, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, etc.

---

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO. “Safety of Journalists | UNESCO.” Www.unesco.org, [www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists](http://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists).

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO. “Safety of Journalists | UNESCO.” Www.unesco.org, [www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists](http://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists).

<sup>22</sup> “Reporters without Borders.” Refworld, [www.refworld.org/document-sources/reporters-without-borders](http://www.refworld.org/document-sources/reporters-without-borders).

<sup>23</sup> “Amnesty International.” Human Rights Channel, [human-rights-channel.coe.int/amnesty-international-en.html](http://human-rights-channel.coe.int/amnesty-international-en.html).



## **Relevant UN resolutions, treaties, and events (Previous attempts)**

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Article 19 of the UDHR, guarantees “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”<sup>24</sup> It may be non binding, but it still creates the foundation of international human rights law, and was the first global recognition that free expression should be a universal right.

### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The ICCPR is a legally binding treaty for the states that endorse it. Even though it has been under the works since 1966, in 1976 it was put into motion. Article 19.2 specifically states that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”<sup>25</sup> It provides the legal framework necessary for protecting whistleblowers and journalists all around the globe, since it protects the freedom of expression and information.

### United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 68/163

This was the first UNGA resolution focused specifically on the safety of journalists and impunity. It calls on member states to prevent violence against journalists, investigate attacks, and prosecute those who violate human rights and endanger journalists, activists and whistleblowers. It also announced November 2nd as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, commemorating the death of two french journalists in Mali 2013.

### United Nations (UN) PPlan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

An action plan put into motion by UNESCO, it is the first UN strategy to create a free and safe environment for whistleblowers and journalists, in all situations, either facing conflict or not. It is particularly important, since unlike the attempts mentioned before, it actually focuses on the prevention, protection and prosecution of those at fault, all at once. It encourages states to adopt safety mechanisms and strengthen judicial systems.

### Regional Treaties and Frameworks

---

<sup>24</sup> United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” United Nations, 1948, [www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights).

<sup>25</sup> United Nations. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” OHCHR, United Nations, 1966, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights).



Such examples may be the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR 1950), Article 10, the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR 1969), Article 14, or the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), Article 9. All these treaties have in common the fact that they show protection and prosecution is not only up to universal bodies, but can also be localized, and be just as efficient.

### United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Resolutions

The UNHRC has repeatedly passed resolutions concerning this matter over the years (e.g. A/HRC/27/5, 2014 or A/HRC/RES/33/2, 2016). It has called on states to prevent violence, stop misusing laws, and make sure there is accountability for the crimes media workers face. Also, this body has addressed more recent challenges such as digital surveillance and even the online harassment which may happen to journalists. Most resolutions are non-binding, but remain politically significant, since they set global standards and examples for countries.

## **Possible solutions**

### Creating Stricter Legal Protections

In order to solve the topic at hand, one of the most important things to do is to create stricter and therefore binding legal protections. Such protections should consist of law such as the EU Whistleblower directive, but with penalties for offenders. At a UN level it should be encouraged to create treaties that promote criminalising attacks on journalists and punishing perpetrators even if they're state officials.

Punishments should include but not be limited to sanctions being paid by the state to the UN if they're the ones responsible, power being temporarily taken from bodies in charge of journalist and whistleblower freedoms and put into the hands of reliable UN committees.

Along with such policies though, it is important for frameworks specifying on promoting transparency to be put in motion. That way, not only is it easier to level down and eventually find the ones responsible for and hold them accountable, but it also deters the misuse of authority.

Lastly, with the uprise in technology which is being observed in the last 30 years, a prudential action is establishing digital safeguards. The UN specifically should encourage export controls on spyware such as Pegasus, and consequently prevent authoritarian misuse and overuse. Training programs addressing journalists could prove to be beneficial since knowing the risks and what to look out for already gives them a big advantage in facing the risks.

Implementation for all of the above may be through signed treaties and agreements, which all require reporting journalist killing and prosecutions to a UN oversight body. Non compliance could trigger reports which report names, sanctions or International Criminal Court referrals.



### Strengthening international mechanisms

In order to ensure that this issue is solved successfully, international collaboration also plays a significant role. From expanding UNESCO Journalist Safety Indicators into a binding monitoring system, to ensuring states that refuse to investigate or prosecute killings face the UN Security Council or are referred to the ICC, global frameworks, treaties, and agreements are notable in efforts made to resolve whistleblower and journalist freedom violations. An example of this is the Belarus sanctions after Protasevich's arrest. This proves that it's possible, even if not put into motion often. This solution aims to change that, and help ensure further accountability and union between member states.

### Creating asylums and relocation programs

A major problem when dealing with protecting whistleblowers and journalists, is the fact that no safe haven exists for them. Many are either temporary or not stable. Therefore, creating such asylums and programs will guarantee that their safety and well being is non negotiable. A fast-tracked asylum for at-risk journalists, and for ones in critical situations should be established under the UNHRC. At the same time, such foundations can be funded by donors, and a UN relocation fund from member states. Programs may include the return to a safe life if they wish, or providing a way to safely travel and get to a destination of their choice. Any states which do not abide shall face diplomatic pressure, and eventually the loss of power in the UN or privileges they may have there.

### **Further reading**

To better understand the topic at hand it is advised to go through these links which will provide you with better comprehension of the resolution passed by the General Assembly; the role of a Special Rapporteur; and an article on Project Pegasus, which is linked to one of the threats whistleblowers and journalists face.

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | OHCHR](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression | OHCHR](#)
- [About the Pegasus Project - Forbidden Stories](#)



## Bibliography

- Amnesty International. “Massive Data Leak Reveals Israeli NSO Spyware Used to Target Activists, Journalists, and Political Leaders.” *Amnesty International*, 18 July 2021, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/the-pegasus-project/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/the-pegasus-project/).
- Cambridge Dictionary. “CENSORSHIP | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 23 Oct. 2019, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/censorship](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/censorship).
- . “Political Asylum.” @*CambridgeWords*, 20 Aug. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/political-asylum](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/political-asylum). Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
- . “PROPAGANDA | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda).
- . “Reprisal.” @*CambridgeWords*, 20 Aug. 2025, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reprisal](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reprisal). Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
- . “SURVEILLANCE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 2019, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance).
- “ECCHR: Whistleblower.” *Ecchr.eu*, 2018, [www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/whistleblower/](http://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/whistleblower/). Accessed 26 Aug. 2025.
- “Forced to Flee: Exiled Journalists Face Unsafe Passage and Transnational Repression - Committee to Protect Journalists.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 20 June 2024, [cpj.org/reports/2024/06/forced-to-flee-exiled-journalists-face-unsafe-passage-and-transnational-repression/](https://cpj.org/reports/2024/06/forced-to-flee-exiled-journalists-face-unsafe-passage-and-transnational-repression/).
- “IMPUNITY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/impunity](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/impunity).



“Journalist.” *Dictionary.cambridge.org*,

[dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/journalist](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/journalist).

Lindstaedt, Natasha. “Authoritarianism.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 28 Mar. 2024,

[www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism).

Lok, Justin. “First Amendment and State Laws.” *Free Speech*, 22 Aug. 2024,

[freespeech.ucdavis.edu/learn/first-amendment-and-laws](https://freespeech.ucdavis.edu/learn/first-amendment-and-laws).

Merriam Webster. “Definition of FREEDOM of the PRESS.” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2019,

[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom%20of%20the%20press](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom%20of%20the%20press).

“Reporters without Borders.” *Refworld*, [www.refworld.org/document-sources/reporters-](https://www.refworld.org/document-sources/reporters-without-borders)

[without-borders](https://www.refworld.org/document-sources/reporters-without-borders).

“Reports Archive.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 18 Jan. 2024, [cpj.org/reports/](https://cpj.org/reports/).

*The Struggle for Trust Online FREEDOM on the NET 2024 Highlights from Freedom*

*House’s Annual Report on Internet Freedom TABLE of CONTENTS*.

UNESCO. “Safety of Journalists | UNESCO.” *Www.unesco.org*, [www.unesco.org/en/safety-](https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists)

[journalists](https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists).

United Nations. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” *OHCHR*, United

Nations, 1966, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights)

[covenant-civil-and-political-rights](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights).

---. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, 1948, [www.un.org/en/about-](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights)

[us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights).

“What Is Freedom of Expression?” *ARTICLE 19*, [www.article19.org/what-is-freedom-of-](https://www.article19.org/what-is-freedom-of-expression/)

[expression/](https://www.article19.org/what-is-freedom-of-expression/).



BBC. “Jamal Khashoggi: All You Need to Know about Saudi Journalist’s Death.” *BBC News*, 24 Feb. 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399).

Kenton, Will. “What Are the Panama Papers?” *Investopedia*, 12 June 2022, [www.investopedia.com/terms/p/panama-papers.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/panama-papers.asp).

Nast, Condé. “How Putin Criminalized Journalism in Russia.” *The New Yorker*, 7 Apr. 2023, [www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-putin-criminalized-journalism-in-russia](http://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-putin-criminalized-journalism-in-russia).

“PBS Newshour Extra.” *Www.journalisminaction.org*, [www.journalisminaction.org/case/watergate](http://www.journalisminaction.org/case/watergate).

Reporters Without Borders. “2024 World Press Freedom Index – Journalism under Political Pressure | RSF.” *Rsf.org*, 2024, [rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure](https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure).

