

Recommendations of the International Conference “Freedom of Expression, Facing up to the Threat”

24-25 July 2017
Doha, Qatar

We, representatives of international, regional and national organisations of journalists, human rights and freedom of expression groups meeting at the International Conference in Doha, Qatar on 24-25 July 2017, organised by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar in co-operation with the International Federation of Journalists and the International Press Institute

Condemn unequivocally the threats by the governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Bahrain, demanding the closing down of Al Jazeera and other media outlets including Arabi21, Rassd, Al Araby Al-Jadeed and Middle East Eye.

and

Express our total solidarity with journalists and other media and ancillary workers at Al Jazeera and other targeted media.

This Conference recommends:

ON SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Conference recognises the numerous resolutions adopted in recent years by the UN General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council deploring the impact of attacks against journalists and other media workers on the public’s right to information and freedom of expression, and expressing concern at the chilling effect that such attacks, especially when perpetrated with impunity, have on the media as a whole.

Conference also expressly recognises that the work of media professionals often places them at specific risk of intimidation, harassment and violence (UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015), UN Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2 of 29 September 2016, and UN General Assembly Resolution 70/162 of 17 December 2015 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity). In addition, it has been widely recognised that ensuring accountability for all forms of violence against journalists and other media professionals is a key element in preventing future attacks.

Conference supports the developing of a new binding international instrument dedicated to the safety of journalists, including a specific enforcement mechanism, which would improve the international response to attacks against journalists and the culture of impunity. A Convention on the Safety of Media Workers, potentially negotiated within the UN General Assembly, would present the advantage of systematising the relevant obligations inferable from multiple legal texts and making them more accessible to decision-makers and law-enforcement authorities and bringing together the applicable human rights and humanitarian law norms, tailoring them to the situation of journalists.

Such a Convention includes, for example, the obligation to protect journalists against attacks on their life, arbitrary arrest, violence and intimidation campaigns, the obligation to protect against forced disappearances and kidnapping (by state agents or private actors), the obligation to carry out effective investigations into alleged interferences and to bring the perpetrators to justice; in the context of armed conflict, the obligation to treat media workers and facilities as civilians (and hence illegitimate targets) and to conduct military operations with due diligence in such a way as to avoid unnecessary risks to journalists reporting on the conflict

Conference finally believes that current legal provisions should be expanded beyond the obligation to protect journalists against attacks on their life, and include forced disappearances and kidnapping (by state or private actors), arbitrary arrest, intimidation, deportation/refusal of entry, confiscation/damage to property and new forms of violence experienced by journalists during the 2011 Arab Spring, and further develop Human Rights Council resolutions S-

2/1 and S-9/1 concerning the attacks on media installations and allowing access as well as safe media corridors in conflict zones.

Conference therefore **calls on** governments

1. To recognise all recommendations, covenants, declarations and resolutions promulgated or endorsed by international organisations such as the UN and its agencies such as UNESCO;
2. To implement forthwith the UN latest plan of action and enhance their working with organisations dedicated to the safety of journalists and media workers;
3. To acknowledge and accept their obligations to give journalists protection as civilians in situations of conflict;
4. To strengthen national mechanisms and laws including criminal laws and overhaul justice system to end impunity and to provide judicial and legislative assistance to prevent serious violations of international humanitarian laws including the targeting of journalists.

It also calls on **news organisations** to acknowledge their duty of care for all their journalists, in particular news gatherers, staff or freelance and their responsibility to provide hostile environment safety training and equipment whether at time of conflict or not.

ON MEDIA FREEDOMS

Believing that Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), defined as the freedom to “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Along with its corollaries of freedom of information and press freedom, freedom of expression is one of the cornerstones of democracy.

Believing also, as set out by UNESCO, that states have a duty to ensure that legislation designed to address national security and crime concerns does not override source protection laws other than in narrowly defined exceptional circumstances and that states legislate to protect the rights of sources.

Conference **calls on governments** to recognise the right of media organisations to report information freely and without interference from government and to allow citizens to access information on their own government and institutions in the cause of transparency and accountability.

It also **calls on governments** to limit their ability to curtail media access and set the limits of reporting and access to information and allow transparent and independent adjudication on decisions relating to publication.

Conference also acknowledges the vital role played by trade unions in supporting freedom of expression for journalists and defending the right of journalists to report on often contentious issues and hold power to account.

Recognising the danger in establishing legal limits on expression, and accepting the risks in allowing states the ability intervene on online information, conference calls on governments and media organisations to work to challenge hate speech, including misogyny, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and extremism, and to promote the idea that encouraging a plurality of ideas and ideologies is the solution to challenge bigotry and prejudice.

Conference also **calls on journalists** to respect codes of conduct that demand fairness, accuracy and the need to oppose the scapegoating of minorities and pandering to prejudice and ignorance.

ON INTERNATIONAL WORKERS RIGHTS

Conference recognises that the freedom of expression and in particular of the media is inextricably linked to the freedom of media workers to carry out their professional role without fear of intimidation or discrimination.

Acknowledging the central role of the International Labour Organisation in establishing and implementing global labour standards:

Conference recognises the vital principles enshrined in the eight fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation, including (i) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and (ii) Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98); the right to just and favorable conditions of work is contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Recognising the ability of trade unions to protect and defend the right to freedom of expression through codes of conduct, the setting of professional standards and collective endeavors Conference **calls on government** to honour the provisions of Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to act in compliance with the conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Participants agree to transmit these recommendations to regional and international institutions and to governments,

Participants recommend that all working papers and reports of workshops are considered as official documents and will be published in agreement with the authors.

Finally, participants express their appreciation and thanks to the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar for its efforts to organise the Doha conference and call upon it to continue its work with other concerned parties to implement the adopted recommendations.



Doha, 25 July 2017