

Forum: Human Rights Commission 1

Issue: Protecting and Promoting Press Freedom

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Introduction

In this modern day and age, we as global citizens need to be aware of current events happening all throughout the world. Presently, the only way of possibly doing this is through following the media and the news. For this to be available to us we have the press. Journalists and reporters need their freedom of expression to deliver the current affairs of the world, without this freedom to create they essentially have no job. However with this freedom comes a price, they must work at risk of losing their life or facing imprisonment as a result of their work. As of 2018, the Council of Europe estimates at least 126 journalists in detention from Europe.

This issue is one that ripples into a bigger issue, the case of promoting freedom of speech. This year, the staff and faculty of Cumhuriyet newspaper in Turkey had protested against the decline in freedom in speech in Turkey. The decline was said to be the lowest in the past decade. This fact does not only apply to Turkey as the Global Press also seems to be reduced substantially than it has in decades past, claiming itself to be the worst in this century. This is measured through a metric in 172 countries between 2006 to 2016 where they factor 32 social and political indicators such as media bias, harassment to journalist and internet censorship

The fact that only 13% of the world's population are able to enjoy a free press, means that this is also an issue that is present in member states occupied by authoritarian regime such as North Korea and also democratic nations such as the United States of America. This shows that there are many reasons present as to why the freedom of the press is held back. Some nation such as Equatorial Guinea and Turkmenistan have done this to have their leaders keep power; whereas some nations chose to keep their traditional moral value in the perspective of their citizens such as Iran. For some such a Turkey and Venezuela it is a matter of protection from the possible rise of opposition. In addition to this, we see the level of risk that journalists take depending on the country they work in. Nations such as Turkey or Egypt have only put a cost on the freedom of the press, whereas in countries such as Syria and Mexico the press staff may even lose their lives.

Definition of Key Terms

Press

Any forms of media or writing, that is specifically printed for use, such as a Magazine or newspaper. Colloquially, the term also refers to the companies and employees whose work is related to the production of form of press, such as authors and reporters as well as photographers.

Human Rights

A list of rights that every human being has is entitled to from the moment they are born. Such examples of Human rights are the right to education and work, or even the right to freedom and liberty, Thanks to international law, member states are expected to ensure these rights to all their citizens, without discrimination based on factors such as sex, nationality, language, religion or language.

Freedom of Speech

The ensured right for any individual or group to express their opinion, viewpoint or idea without fear of repercussion or persecution from the government. Despite this, many countries have laws to restrict free speech by prohibiting hate, incitement or defamation. Amnesty international also defines freedom of speech as the right for citizens to search, receive and impart any type of media freely without the government's interference.

Detention

The withholding of an individual or person for suspicions related to perpetrating a crime/illegal activity. Usually executed by security personnel or police, detentions can happen either purposely or unintentionally, though should not involve any form of violence or coercion. Furthermore, detentions should only inflict on the person's liberty to walk or move freely, and they should not be used as a formal/official arrest or imprisonment.

Legislation

Any type of law, regulation or rule set in place by the government that will either shortly come into effect, or that has done so already. Depending by the country, some define legislation as a proposed law or bill that still needs approval before becoming a law in effect.

Commercial Pressure

In the context of journalism, Commercial pressure is an increasingly prominent demand for journalist to produce content more rapidly and with more focus on profitability. This has been due to decreasing sales of printed content, which has forced dependency on ad revenue from online articles and therefore a change in overall content and quality.

Fraud

An unlawful action or decision executed for the perpetrators gain or the loss of another entity. It can be found in about every sector of the economy, and it is internationally recognised as a deceptive action. Some examples include the fraud of taxes, properties and credit cards.

Background Information

Reasons that compromise the press' freedom

Manipulation of the press is a powerful political tool which governments utilise to sway both local and international opinion. The liberty of the press is crucial to allow the world to be kept updated with accurate and enlightening news. However, there are many reason as to why the government, political groups and even rising issues have discouraged the press from feeling secure and safe while doing their job.

Social Conflict

South Africa has granted unprecedented freedom for the press of their nation since October 19 1977. However, though the press may have this freedom, there is a question of how much will their opinion influence the people of South Africa. For example, Moegsien Williams believed that commercial press has dictated and dominated the nation of South Africa which has almost influenced a sense of political opposition to the African National Congress (ANS).

We see how this could be a concern to the government of South Africa. As a result it is easy to see that actions were taken to stop reduce the exposure of the government's flaws. For example, after the death of Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, journalist Donald Woods had fled to the United States of America after photographs were published in Wood's book exposing the South African government's cover-up of Biko's death.

From here we can see how the government has information that is preferred to be kept away from the public eye and the interference of the press could be detrimental to their public image. Many nations also have the same issue with the press gaining immense amounts of insight to the inner workings of a party or organization.

Organised Crime

According to Reporters without borders, organised crime is the single leading threat to media freedom. This is proven in the decade of 2000s at total of 141 journalists were killed as a result of their efforts to investigate the influence of criminal gangs and parallel economies.

An example of this would be the Italian mafia which has many criminal figures showing link to the death of Slovakian couple Jan Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova in February 2018. Kuciak was an investigator who specialised in searching for tax evasion. Kuciak was allegedly working on a story on Italian mafia involvement in fraud linked to EU subsidiaries in eastern Slovakia. Publication of a story could send plans made by the mafia hard to pursue and the need to destroy this hole in the plan is necessary. Therefore the actual publication of the work that the press is doing may risk their life as they risk the ethics of such underground criminal schemes

Syria is currently a dangerous area for journalism as it is currently under the civil war going on. Essentially, the media must ensure they report such advancements and disputes between the two parties in a neutral matter, however, this proves to be very difficult as many are capture, kidnapped and even killed as a result of their work. In 2017 itself, around 14 journalists were killed at the same time.

Legal Restrictions and government censorship

With the influence of social media there has been a rise in the world's population to share information and this should allow the press to have a platform in which their work can be liberated. However this is not the case technology has been matched with an equal amount of censorship under the influence of national security and reducing the risk of an international extremist uprising. Essentially this means that the audience that the press present their work to are shielded from many reportings as a result of protection from misinterpreted information or offensive speech (this can even include the showcasing of a person's speech).

We see how even nations which have practiced and promoted freedom of speech are now being led by an authoritative regime in which elected leaders are claim "fake news", which dismissed the voice of the press by essentially lowering the integrity of media organisations.

North Korea has made always been know to have control the media. Infact, all of its media is control, monitored and planned by the government. An interesting thing to note, is the difference in the televised reports presented by US news broadcasting systems and also the North Korean news presenter Ri Chun Hee, from broadcaster Korean Central Television, who is always know

for her charismatic demeanor while positively displaying North Korea. We understand that this shows the way the government propagates their nation and their policies issued.

In addition to this, Saudi Arabia has also been known for years to be very restrictive with the media. Most news and media sources are filtered or are influenced as a result of government monitoring. As a result, a bias viewpoint is presented to the people of Saudi Arabia which affects the integrity of the media as they are no longer a neutral party. The media policy ensure that new propagates the Saudi Arabian government's views and hence national unity. In addition to this, the recent murder of Jamal Khashoggi, previous Saudi Arabian reporter, speculated to be done to silence him based on his many views such a his views against the monarchy of Saudi Arabia when he advocated democracy in the Arab world.

Silencing due to authoritative power

The influence of a strong voice such as the press may be considered a threat to a nation led by an authoritative regime. As a result many governments of member states have set limits for the the press in reporting current affairs. An example of this is seen in Ecuador where as of 2018 there has been an ongoing battle of regulating the media.

This issue being one of great following especially when the government had shut down a television station for 3 days from December 22 called Teleamazonas. International media organizations such as the Washington based Human rights watch and the Committee to Protect Journalist suggesting that this was an issue that was simply the government's "attempt to intimidate the media into silence"

The Ecuador government had brought up claims of a violation against the government media regulations where they had allegedly broadcasted false information. This is prohibited as to reduce the risk of a social disturbance.

Treaties that affect Press Freedom

Currently there has been a lot of global effort to ensure the press and media are properly treated and have a sense of protection within their work field.

The main way security has been instilled is through passing treaties regarding the issue, that permit by international law the regulations that must be followed as a person working within the field and also the treatment they are to receive when they are invested in a project.

For example, the general statement that is brought up is article 19 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “all citizens shall have the right to freedom and expression. this general statement permits the use of publishing opinions which is crucial for journalists.

Furthermore, the International Press Institute (IPI) had partnered with the Al Jazeera Media Network and the International News Safety Institute and the African Media Initiative; have drafted a set of regulations that relate to press protection. this is particularly focused on those in dangerous environments. This ensures that there is proper protocol with in member states to ensure that is proper care for journalists working on projects in largely hostile environments such as terrorist zones. The only issues lie on when the actual declaration will be taken into place as it is yet to be passed. So many attempts have been made by organisations and NGOs to ensure that the press are getting their freedom, yet without the aid of member states the press are unable to see change in their field.

However, the International Program for the Development of Communication has made a productive move toward fighting to combat the issue. They had made decisions and discussed within UNESCO the safety of Journalists and the Issues of Impunity.

Major Countries and Organizations

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)

Freedom of expression and speech is regarded highly at UNESCO, as it is one of the 30 Basic Human Rights on the UNDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Recognizing that press freedom gains awareness through social media as well as gets advocated for through social media, UNESCO centers a portion of its work towards achieving full press freedom through a partnership with IFEX. This ‘clearing-house and alert network’ is a group of over 500 organizations all aimed to protect press rights in various regions, and since 1992 UNESCO has aided in achieving this initiative.

Along with field work, UNESCO works to promote awareness of the issue of press rights violation through an annual ‘World Press Freedom Day’. Since 1993, UNESCO dedicates every May 3rd to not only shed light on the issue, but also recognize the journalists who have risked their lives for their occupation. The UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize is awarded on this day to a distinguished journalist on who’s advocated and fought for press freedom.

Reporters Without Borders/ Reporters sans Frontières (RSF)

RSF is an international organization that has been specialized in working towards all aspects of press freedom since 1985. When combatting press violence, RSF focuses on specific factors such as

religious intolerance, abuse, independence through the media, and more. They've published multiple score reports to document progress over time and also display statistics and specific facts regarding this issue. Furthermore, RSF participates in global field work with members of national parliaments and governments to promote legislation of press protection under law. A further contribution of RSF to press freedom is the establishment of the World Press Freedom Index, which is a list of countries listed and ranked based on their press freedom record in the span of a year. All data is gathered through RSF field studies.

Human Rights Watch

Although it focuses on global human rights issues as a whole, Human Rights Watch regards Freedom of Speech as one of the 15 areas of focus that needs to be targeted. It recognizes that the ability to freely express one's ideas on a matter is just as crucial as life threatening human rights violations, but it's prominent that on an international scale it's not viewed as such. Human Rights Watch listed Press Freedom is one of the three classifications of Free Speech and openly advocates through daily media activity on the subject. Along with UNESCO, Human Rights Watch dedicates 'World Press Freedom Day' as an event to commemorate and discuss progression of journalists facing violations worldwide.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

CPJ is a nonprofit NGO that tackles journalists' rights with a very field-based perspective. Based in New York, CPJ has a strong focus in data and research collection of press violations to reach solutions that will prove effective. Their efforts extend specifically to journalists who have been imprisoned or killed as a result of their occupation, which is seen as a direct threat to their right to life. One project they've established, entitled #FreeThePress, recognizes individual journalists and the number of days of imprisonment and allows viewers to send them postcards to show support. CPJ aims to involve the public to stand in solidarity with the journalists whose lives have been affected by the violations. The data collected also includes the annual count of journalists who've been reported missing, imprisoned, or killed.

Finland

As of 2016, the Reporters Without Borders organization has ranked Finland at the top of the list of countries with the highest rates of press freedom. Finland's most recent ranking in 2017 descended to fourth, but nonetheless this nation executes some of the greatest freedom journalists receive worldwide. As a result of its high ranking, UNESCO held World Press Freedom Day 2016 in Helsinki, the capital city

of Finland. The Chairperson of Finland’s branch in RSF reported that “Our journalists can write freely without interference from media owners or the government. We also have very effective laws and institutions in place to help guarantee press freedom.” The implementation of legislation specified towards press freedom reflects the nation’s initiative for prioritizing press freedom. The nation’s government also works with local groups to further defend the right to free speech through organizations such as Finland’s Council for Mass Media (CMM) and the establishment of the world’s first Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The result of highly open journalist freedom of speech is displayed through the public’s trust in the information they receive: of all Finish adults in the population, over 93% read newspapers regularly.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 10, 1948	United Nations adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that freedom of speech is among the natural human rights. UNESCO begins advocating for press freedom of speech.
1981	Committee to Protect Journalists founded as one of the first non-governmental press violence aid organizations.
1985	Establishment of the Reporters Without Borders foundation, which continues to be one of the most successful NGOs
May 3, 1993	First UNESCO World Press Freedom Day
May 3, 1997	Annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize is awarded for the first time; named after Cuban journalist Guillermo Cano who was assassinated on December 17, 1986.
May 2, 2013	UN Secretary General holds debriefing regarding press freedom, addressing issues such as media laws as provisions influencing journalist expression.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Publishing and recognising censored material

For many years now, important associations have republished and awarded journalistic material that is censored in its native country, as a form of protest and fight against press restrictions. This is done primarily to make banned material available, but for the real purpose of bringing attention to censorship in the media. As an example, the USAs Association of American Publishers (AAP) has been publishing

controversial writings and journalistic work to the public, since the soviet era. Another initiative started by the APP is the recognition of authors who highlight sensitive topics in countries where they are otherwise prohibited. In 2015, the APP awarded Irina Bhalakonova, a Russian author has published a book with a heavy focus on the treatment of homosexuality in Russia. As part of her award, she was given a monetary compensation as well as notoriety for her work.

This method of dealing with this problematic has of course brought about some change, by bringing the world's attention to the mistreatment of journalists worldwide, but unfortunately it has not had any implicit effects. This is because this solutions main limitation is the lack of pressure that it puts on the perpetrators, as well as not granting access to the majority of the citizens where the work is banned, often where it is also most relevant.

Support and Lobbying for press freedom

A rather obvious, but sometimes effective method used to fight press restrictions is lobbying. In this fight, many world organizations have pressured governments to alter or ease regulation of press freedom, as well as guiding them through reform. Furthermore, large associations such as Reporters Without Borders have protected and supported independent media produces and NGOs that are involved in this topic. As an example, authors in exile due to persecution or fear have been supported financially and legally, in an effort to sustain their free journalistic work. These methods have had relative success in the fight for changing legislation and law in regards to press freedom and journalist, but has been seen by many as inefficient. This is because, lobbying groups can often use infinite amounts of funds and spend countless years for the alteration of just a small clause or section of a law, even without the certainty of success.

Possible Solutions

Use of technology against censorship

In terms of press censorship, we can see that social medias and websites have not been amongst the success stories of press freedom, but a new approach at combatting censorship may prove that notion incorrect. Students at Harvard university have created a new system for sharing media, by using the blockchain system. According to the founders it would be censorship and hack proof, meaning that governments or regimes would not be able to regulate its usage. This of course would be a strong advantage for its use and implementation, as large intrusive governments cannot restrict access to information; although concerns regarding the regulation of cyberbullying and online harassment may be points of discussion for this solutions success.

Furthermore, companies such as Microsoft are changing their policies on censorships, to help inform the public about press freedom. In the future, the company plans to include a written statement on

pages that are blocked, informing the user that the page is not 'unavailable' but has instead been censored. This solution of course has the advantage of informing citizens about the regulations imposed by authoritarian governments, although it has a large limitation in regards to any direct change it will actually bring about. Both of these examples are a clear indicators of the possibilities that technology brings to achieving freedom of the press, especially in terms of government regulated content.

Improved representation at the United Nations

A growing number of countries and world organizations have brought the world's attention regarding the representation of press freedom as a topic at the UN. This stems from 2 main issues, the lack of a concise mandate to solve freedom of the press, and the need for a special representative focused on the protection of journalist. Firstly, as of right now the only mandate that includes freedom of the press is stated in the Universal declaration of human rights, though unfortunately it has been critiqued for being vague and ineffective. Instead, many International organizations, as well as the French president have called for the creation of a more effective mandate, heavily focused on the safety of reporters. Secondly, the same entities are calling for the appointment of a special representative in regard to freedom of the press, so that dialogue regarding this problematic can be more direct and effective in changing the current situation. This solution is undoubtedly effective in raising awareness and starting public conversations on the topic of press freedom, but may have the limitation in bringing about real change in member states with uncooperative and stubborn authoritative regimes, where violations are most common.

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