

SHISMUN '26

11th Edition

BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

AGENDA

*Addressing the Systematic Erosion of Press Freedom Worldwide, with
Special Emphasis on Ending Arbitrary Arrests of Journalists and
Creating Safe, Harassment-Free Environments for Media Professionals
under Repressive Regimes*



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear Delegates,

It is our privilege to welcome you to the United Nations Human Rights Council at the 11th edition of SHISMUN. This year, the Council turns its attention to a crisis that sits at the very foundation of every other human right we discuss in this building: the systematic erosion of press freedom worldwide, with special emphasis on ending arbitrary arrests of journalists and creating safe, harassment-free environments for media professionals under repressive regimes.

We chose this agenda because it refuses to stay in the background. A free press is not a luxury reserved for stable democracies; it is the mechanism through which every other right becomes visible, verifiable, and enforceable. When a journalist is jailed for a headline, when a reporter is followed home by state security, when an editor is bankrupted through a defamation suit designed only to exhaust them, the casualty is never just one individual career. It is the public's ability to know what its own government is doing in its name.

Over the course of your research and debate, you will find that this is not a simple story of dictators versus reporters. Democracies wiretap journalists in the name of national security. Organised crime networks assassinate reporters with more regularity than most armed conflicts do. Governments increasingly do not need to jail anyone at all; a well-timed lawsuit, a throttled internet connection, or a starved advertising market accomplishes the same silencing far more quietly. You will be asked to hold all of these realities in your head at once, and to propose solutions that work not only for the loudest cases that make international headlines, but for the thousands of local reporters whose names never leave their own districts.

We expect delegates to arrive with more than headlines. Read your country's domestic press laws. Understand how your state has voted on past Human Rights Council resolutions concerning the safety of journalists. Know whether your country is itself named in the reports you will be citing against others, because in this committee, hypocrisy is noticed quickly and rewarded rarely. Diplomacy in the UNHRC is not about assigning blame theatrically; it is about finding the narrow, difficult, and often unglamorous space where sovereignty, security, and the individual's right to speak and to know can coexist.

We are looking forward to a committee defined by rigorous research, sharp but respectful negotiation, and resolutions that could plausibly survive contact with the real world. This background guide is your starting point, not your ceiling. Push past it.

Warm regards,

Vaibhav Tokas
Chairperson, UNHRC

Yashika
Vice Chairperson, UNHRC

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MUN

Question 1: What is the United Nations?

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 to maintain international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights by 51 countries. United Nations have 6 principal organs.

The UN has 4 main purposes

- To keep peace throughout the world;
- To develop friendly relations among nations;
- To help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, to conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy, and to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms;
- To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals

Question 2: What is the Model United Nations?

Model United Nations is a simulation of the actual United nation which is done to enhance knowledge about pressing international issues. It is called Model United nation not mock United nation because it does not work as an exact replica of the United Nations, it is just an attempt to understand the working of the United Nations by practicing some of its working mechanisms. Every person who participates is given a country to represent and are called Delegates of their respective committees. There are some rules that we follow in MUNS to facilitate the debate called rules of procedure. The procedure that is closest to what is followed in the actual UN.

Question 3: What is considered to be valid evidence in the Model United Nations?

Evidence or proof that is acceptable from sources

News Sources:

- REUTERS- Any Reuters article which clearly makes mention of the factor is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.

<http://www.reuters.com/>

- State-operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in the support of or against the state that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any Country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country in the council.

Some examples are.

RIA Novosti (Russia) <http://en.rian.ru/>

IRNA (Iran) <http://www.irna.ir/ENIndex.htm>

BBC (United Kingdom) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

Xinhua News Agency and CCTV (P.R. China) <http://cctvnews.cntv.cn/>

- Government Reports: These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

- Government Websites like the State Department of the United States of America (<http://www.state.gov/index.htm>) or the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (<http://www.eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm>)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of various nations like India (<http://www.mea.gov.in/>). People's Republic of China (<http://www.fimprc.gov.cn/eng/>), France (<http://www.diplomatic.gouv.fr/en/>). Russian Federation (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/main_eng)
- Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports <http://www.un.org/en/members/> (Click on any country to get the website of the Office of its Permanent Representative) d. Multilateral Organisations like the NATO (<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/index.htm>).
- ASEAN (<http://www.ascansee.org/>), OPEC (http://www.opec.org/opee_web/en/), etc.
- UN Reports: All UN Reports are considered credible information or evidence for the Executive Board of the Security Council.
- UN Bodies: Like the SC (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>), GA (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/>), HRC (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/HRCIndex.aspx>) etc.
- UN Affiliated bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (<http://www.iaea.org/>), World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/>), International Monetary Fund (<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>), International Committee of the Red Cross (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.jsp>), etc. C. Treaty Based Bodies like the Antarctic Treaty System (<http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm>), the International Criminal Court (<http://www.icccpi.int/Menus/CC>)

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For RULES OF PROCEDURE:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18kgA2JohSFiEV_Ny6LVdmslOATSWKQg6/view?usp=sharing

UNHRC MANDATE

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an inter-governmental body within the UN system, established by General Assembly resolution 60/251 on 15 March 2006, replacing the former Commission on Human Rights. It is composed of 47 member states, elected by the General Assembly for staggered three-year terms on the basis of equitable geographic distribution, and is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe, addressing situations of human rights violations, and making recommendations on them.

The Council is supported administratively by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which was itself created by General Assembly resolution 48/141 in 1993 and is mandated to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realisation, by all people, of all rights established under the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and subsequent international human rights treaties.

The Human Rights Council is mandated to:

- Promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner.
- Address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon; it may also address urgent human rights situations.
- Promote the effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system.
- Promote human rights education and learning, as well as advisory services, technical assistance, and capacity-building, in consultation with and with the consent of the member states concerned.
- Serve as a forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights.
- Make recommendations to the General Assembly for the further development of international law in the field of human rights.
- Promote the full implementation of human rights obligations undertaken by states, and follow up on the goals and commitments related to the promotion and protection of human rights emanating from UN conferences and summits.
- Undertake a Universal Periodic Review (UPR), based on objective and reliable information, of the fulfilment by each state of its human rights obligations in a manner that ensures universality of coverage and equal treatment of all states.
- Contribute to the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies.
- Work in close cooperation with governments, regional organisations, national human rights institutions, and civil society in the field of human rights.

In addition to these core functions, the Council appoints Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Working Groups under its Special Procedures mechanism to investigate and report on specific thematic issues

or country situations. Of direct relevance to this agenda is the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, a mandate first created by the former Commission on Human Rights in 1993 and carried forward by the Council, which examines, monitors, advises, and publicly reports on freedom of expression violations worldwide, including those affecting journalists and media workers.

The Council convenes three regular sessions each year in Geneva and may also hold special sessions to address urgent human rights situations at the request of one-third of its membership. Its resolutions are not legally binding in the manner of Security Council resolutions, but they carry substantial normative and political weight, shape the international human rights agenda, and frequently form the basis for subsequent binding instruments and customary international law.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

Press freedom is often described as the oxygen of democracy, but that metaphor understates how mechanical its function actually is. A free press is the primary infrastructure through which citizens learn what their governments do with public money, public power, and public trust. When that infrastructure is damaged, every other right guaranteed on paper becomes harder to claim in practice, because the population loses the means of finding out whether those rights are being honoured at all.

The year 2026 finds this infrastructure in its worst condition since Reporters Without Borders began systematically tracking it a quarter-century ago. According to the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index, the global state of press freedom has fallen to a 25-year low, continuing a decline that, for the first time in the Index's history, was already classified as a "difficult situation" globally in 2025. More than half of the world's population, some 4.25 billion people, now live in countries where the state of press freedom is rated "very serious." Fewer than eight per cent of people worldwide live somewhere the situation is rated "good" or "satisfactory."

The Committee to Protect Journalists' 2025 Prison Census, released on 21 January 2026, recorded 330 journalists behind bars for their work as of 1 December 2025 — the third-highest figure since CPJ began keeping records in 1992, and the fifth consecutive year in which the global total has exceeded 300. China remained the world's single worst jailer of journalists for the third year running, holding 50 journalists, followed by Myanmar with 30 and Israel with 29, all of the latter Palestinian journalists held without trial. Nearly half of all imprisoned journalists worldwide are being held without any formal sentence, and more than a quarter of those unsentenced detainees have already spent five years or longer behind bars without due process — a direct violation of the right to a fair trial without undue delay under international law. Nearly one in five imprisoned journalists reported having been tortured or beaten while in custody.

Detention, however, is only the most visible tool in a much larger repertoire. According to UNESCO's Observatory of Killed Journalists, more than 1,800 journalists have been killed worldwide between 2006 and 2025 for doing their jobs, and close to nine in every ten of those killings remain judicially unresolved. Impunity of this scale does not merely fail individual victims; it actively signals to the next would-be killer that the cost of silencing a reporter permanently is close to zero. Latin America and the Caribbean continue to record the highest number of journalist murders of any region, frequently linked to organised crime and drug trafficking networks rather than to state actors directly, which raises distinct challenges for a Council whose traditional focus has been state accountability.

This agenda asks the Council to look past the most extreme cases — the killings and the high-profile imprisonments that make international headlines — and to examine the fuller ecosystem of repression that has evolved specifically to operate beneath that threshold of visibility. Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), commercial spyware deployed against reporters' phones, the selective allocation of state advertising to reward friendly outlets and starve critical ones, foreign agent and NGO laws that criminalise independent journalism by redefining it as espionage, and internet shutdowns timed to coincide with protests or elections have all become preferred instruments precisely because they are harder to condemn cleanly and harder to litigate internationally. Delegates are expected to grapple with this full spectrum, not merely its most dramatic edge.

Why This Matters to the Human Rights Council Specifically

The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and given binding legal force through Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which 173 states have ratified. Freedom of the press is widely understood, including by the UN Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 34, as an essential specific application of this broader right. The Human Rights Council has adopted a dedicated resolution on the safety of journalists roughly every two to three years since 2012, most recently on 7 July 2025 through resolution A/HRC/RES/59/15, adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by more than 70 states, which for the first time incorporated explicit new language on SLAPPs, digital surveillance, and the particular risks faced by journalists in armed conflict and occupied territory. That the resolution passed by consensus, even as the underlying data shows the situation worsening year after year, illustrates the central tension delegates must navigate throughout this committee: near-universal rhetorical agreement that press freedom matters, alongside persistent and in some cases accelerating practical erosion of it.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

Press Freedom

The right of journalists, media outlets, and ordinary citizens acting in a journalistic capacity to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, through any media, without undue interference from the state or private actors, and without fear of retaliation for the content of that reporting.

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

Under international human rights law, an arrest or detention is considered arbitrary when it lacks a legal basis, is carried out in a manner inconsistent with domestic or international procedural guarantees, or is used to punish an individual for the legitimate exercise of a protected right such as freedom of expression. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention investigates individual complaints of this kind, including a substantial and growing caseload involving journalists detained under vaguely worded laws on "extremism," "fake news," "spreading false information," or "endangering national security."

SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation)

A civil lawsuit, typically for defamation or a similar tort, filed not with a realistic expectation of winning on the merits but in order to exhaust the financial and psychological resources of a journalist or outlet, deter further reporting, and chill other journalists from covering the same subject. SLAPPs are increasingly filed by powerful individuals, corporations, and, in some jurisdictions, state-linked actors, often in favourable jurisdictions chosen specifically for their plaintiff-friendly defamation laws — a practice known as "libel tourism."

Foreign Agent and Extremism Laws

Legislation, modelled in several cases on Russia's 2012 "foreign agents" law, that requires media outlets or individual journalists receiving any foreign funding, however incidental, to register under a stigmatising legal label, submit to onerous reporting requirements, and face criminal liability for non-compliance. Similar "anti-extremism" and "anti-fake-news" statutes have been used across multiple regions to criminalise reporting that criticises the government, often with deliberately vague definitions that grant prosecutors broad discretion.

Commercial Spyware and Digital Surveillance

The use of intrusive surveillance software, such as NSO Group's Pegasus or similar tools sold by private cyber-intelligence firms, to covertly access a journalist's phone, messages, location data, and sources. Because such tools are marketed to governments as counter-terrorism instruments, but have repeatedly been documented in use against journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition figures, they represent one of the fastest-growing and least-regulated threats to source confidentiality and journalist safety.

Internet Shutdowns and Network Throttling

The intentional disruption of internet or mobile network access, ordered by a state authority, often timed to coincide with elections, protests, exam periods, or politically sensitive anniversaries, with the explicit or implicit aim of preventing the dissemination of information and images that might embarrass or challenge the authorities in power.

Non-Refoulement of Journalists in Exile

The principle, drawn from international refugee law, that a journalist who has fled persecution for their reporting should not be returned to a country where their life or freedom would be at risk. A growing number of journalists now operate in exile, reporting on their home countries from abroad, which raises distinct questions of transnational repression, including harassment of family members who remain behind and, in documented cases, cross-border surveillance or attempted extradition of exiled reporters.

Impunity

The failure of a state to investigate, prosecute, and punish those responsible for crimes against journalists, whether committed by state agents, organised criminal groups, or private individuals. UNESCO's Director-General reports on this issue biennially; the persistent finding across successive reports is that roughly nine in every ten killings of journalists worldwide are never judicially resolved.

THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

Article 19 of the UDHR provides that "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." Though not itself a binding treaty, the UDHR is the moral and normative foundation from which all subsequent instruments on this subject descend, and many of its provisions, including this one, are now widely regarded as reflecting customary international law.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

Article 19 of the ICCPR gives binding legal force to the right to freedom of expression, permitting only narrowly defined restrictions that are (a) provided by law, (b) necessary, and (c) for the purpose of respecting the rights of others, or protecting national security, public order, public health, or morals. The UN Human Rights Committee, in General Comment No. 34 (2011), has repeatedly stressed that these restrictions must never be used as a pretext to suppress legitimate criticism of governments or public officials, and that the free press plays a "central role in ensuring that the public has access to information and ideas."

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012)

Developed by UNESCO and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in 2012, this remains the primary UN-wide coordination framework on journalist safety. It establishes an inter-agency mechanism to strengthen coherence across UN bodies, encourages states to develop protective legislation, supports the creation of national mechanisms for the safety of journalists, and mandates the UN Network of Focal Points on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, co-chaired by OHCHR and UNESCO, to coordinate the UN system's response to attacks on media workers.

Human Rights Council Resolutions on the Safety of Journalists

Since 2012, the Council has adopted a resolution on this specific theme approximately every two to three years, each iteration progressively expanding the standards addressed. The most recent, A/HRC/RES/59/15, adopted by consensus on 7 July 2025 under the leadership of Austria together with a core group including Brazil, France, Greece, Morocco, Qatar, and Tunisia, and co-sponsored by more than 70 states, added new operative language explicitly addressing SLAPPs, digital surveillance of journalists, the safety of journalists in situations of armed conflict and occupation, and gender-specific attacks on women journalists, including AI-facilitated gender-based harassment.

Sustainable Development Goal 16.10

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly links press freedom to development outcomes through Target 16.10, which commits states to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements." This linkage has allowed press freedom advocates to situate journalist safety not purely as a civil-and-political-rights issue but as a precondition for the broader development agenda, widening the coalition of states willing to engage on the topic.

Regional Instruments

Beyond the universal framework, regional human rights systems provide additional, sometimes more specific, protections: Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights (interpreted extensively by the Inter-American Court and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression), and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Delegates representing states within these systems should be prepared to reference the relevant regional jurisprudence, since it frequently sets a higher or more specific bar than the global instruments alone.

MECHANISMS OF REPRESSION: HOW PRESS FREEDOM IS ERODED IN PRACTICE

1. Arbitrary Arrest and Pre-Trial Detention

The bluntest and most visible tool remains direct detention, typically justified under sweeping national security, anti-terrorism, or "false information" statutes that are drafted broadly enough to capture almost any critical reporting. CPJ's 2025 census found that nearly half of the 330 journalists jailed worldwide were being held without any formal sentence at all, and over a quarter of that group had already been detained for five years or more without trial, a direct contravention of the fair trial guarantees in Article 14 of the ICCPR. Pre-trial detention functions as a punishment in itself: it removes a journalist from their work indefinitely, without a state ever having to prove its case in open court.

2. Violence, Killings, and Impunity

Physical violence, ranging from assault at protests to targeted assassination, remains the most severe end of the spectrum. UNESCO's Observatory of Killed Journalists records over 1,800 killings between 2006 and 2025, with roughly nine in ten cases never resulting in a judicial resolution. In conflict zones, journalists face additional risk from being directly targeted rather than merely caught in crossfire; human rights organisations have documented an unprecedented number of journalist deaths in the Gaza conflict since October 2023, alongside allegations that some killings constituted deliberate targeting rather than incidental harm. In non-conflict settings, Latin America continues to record the highest concentration of journalist murders globally, frequently linked to reporting on organised crime, corruption, and drug trafficking, where the perpetrators are private criminal networks rather than the state itself — a distinction that complicates traditional Council mechanisms built around state accountability.

3. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

Civil defamation and related suits, filed with the primary intent of financially and psychologically exhausting a journalist rather than genuinely vindicating a legal claim, have become one of the fastest-growing threats to independent media, particularly in jurisdictions with strong rule-of-law institutions where direct state censorship would be harder to justify. The 2025 Human Rights Council resolution on the safety of journalists was the first to explicitly name SLAPPs as a distinct category of threat requiring dedicated legislative and judicial safeguards, including anti-SLAPP statutes that allow early dismissal of manifestly abusive suits.

4. Digital Surveillance and Commercial Spyware

Investigations by international consortia of journalists and digital rights organisations have repeatedly documented the use of commercial spyware, most notably NSO Group's Pegasus and comparable tools sold by other private firms, against journalists, editors, and their sources across multiple continents. Because such surveillance compromises source confidentiality — arguably the single most important protection a journalist can offer a whistleblower or witness — its use has a chilling effect that extends far beyond the individuals directly targeted, discouraging sources more broadly from coming forward at all.

5. Foreign Agent, Extremism, and "Fake News" Legislation

A growing number of states have adopted legislation modelled, whether explicitly or in substance, on Russia's 2012 "foreign agents" law, which requires any individual or organisation receiving foreign funding or support to register under a stigmatising legal category, comply with onerous reporting obligations, and face criminal penalties for lapses. Parallel "anti-extremism" and "combating false information" statutes, often adopted or expanded during public health emergencies, elections, or periods of unrest, have handed prosecutors broad and frequently unreviewable discretion to criminalise ordinary critical reporting.

6. Economic Strangulation

Financial pressure is among the least visible but most effective tools available to hostile governments and powerful private actors. States can direct public advertising spending toward loyal outlets and away from critical ones; regulators can selectively enforce tax, licensing, or media-ownership rules against disfavoured outlets while ignoring identical violations by favoured ones; and concentrated media ownership, increasingly in the hands of individuals or conglomerates with close ties to political power, can quietly reshape editorial lines without a single explicit act of censorship. RSF's 2025 and 2026 Indices identify this economic dimension as a newly critical and previously underestimated threat, noting that editorial interference linked to ownership or funding pressure was reported by respondents in the majority of the 180 countries and territories surveyed.

7. Internet Shutdowns and Network Throttling

Deliberate, government-ordered disruptions of internet or mobile connectivity, frequently timed to coincide with elections, protests, or politically sensitive anniversaries, prevent both the gathering and the dissemination of independent reporting at precisely the moments when public accountability matters most. These shutdowns disproportionately affect the ability of local and freelance journalists, who often rely on mobile data rather than newsroom infrastructure, to do their jobs at all.

8. Transnational Repression of Journalists in Exile

As domestic space for independent journalism has narrowed in a growing number of countries, an increasing share of critical reporting on those countries is now produced by journalists who have fled abroad. This has given rise to transnational repression: harassment of family members who remain in the country of origin, cross-border digital surveillance, attempted extraditions on politically motivated charges, and, in a small number of extreme and well-documented cases, attacks on exiled journalists in their host countries.

9. Gendered Attacks on Women Journalists

Women journalists face a distinct and compounding layer of risk, including coordinated online harassment campaigns, sexualised threats, and doxxing, frequently amplified through networks of inauthentic or bot-driven accounts. The 2025 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists was dedicated specifically to raising awareness of AI-facilitated gender-based violence against women journalists, reflecting growing recognition within the UN system that generative AI tools have measurably lowered the cost and increased the scale of such harassment campaigns.

CASE STUDIES IN STATE AND NON-STATE PRESS REPRESSION

China: Detention as Standard Practice

China has been the world's single worst jailer of journalists for three consecutive years according to CPJ's prison census, holding 50 journalists as of December 2025, roughly fifteen per cent of the global total. Chinese authorities routinely rely on charges such as "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," a deliberately elastic offence frequently used against journalists, bloggers, and citizen reporters covering topics the state considers sensitive, including Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and public health. Detained journalists, including prominent citizen reporters previously imprisoned for their coverage of COVID-19, have in some documented cases been re-arrested and re-sentenced shortly after completing an earlier term, illustrating how detention functions less as a single punitive act than as an ongoing, renewable instrument of control. China also maintains one of the world's most extensive systems of internet censorship and surveillance, restricting the operating environment for both domestic and foreign correspondents.

Myanmar: Press Freedom After the 2021 Coup

Myanmar's press freedom environment collapsed following the military's February 2021 seizure of power, which set the country's media landscape back by well over a decade almost overnight. With 30 journalists imprisoned as of the 2025 CPJ census, Myanmar remains the second-worst jailer of journalists globally. Independent outlets have been forced to operate from exile, journalists inside the country report under threat of arrest for even routine coverage of the civil conflict between the junta and resistance forces, and press credentials have been used as a tool of selective access, favouring outlets sympathetic to the military administration.

Israel–Palestine: Journalist Safety in Armed Conflict and Occupation

The conflict in Gaza has produced what press freedom organisations describe as an unprecedented death toll among journalists in a single conflict, with RSF documenting close to 200 journalists and media workers killed since October 2023. CPJ's 2025 prison census additionally found that Israel had moved up to become the third-worst jailer of journalists globally, holding 29 Palestinian journalists, all without any disclosed legal basis for their detention, even amid a subsequent ceasefire and prisoner exchanges. RSF's 2025 Index ranked Palestine 163rd of 180 territories, describing it as one of the most dangerous places in the world for reporters, citing not only the killings but the sustained exclusion of independent foreign media from Gaza and the destruction of newsroom infrastructure. Israel itself fell eleven places to 112th in the 2025 Index amid what RSF described as rising domestic pressure on critical media. This case illustrates the acute difficulty of applying UN human rights mechanisms to journalist safety during active armed conflict and prolonged occupation, where humanitarian law, the laws of armed conflict, and international human rights law all apply simultaneously and sometimes in tension.

Russia and Belarus: Legislated Silence

Russia's "foreign agents" law, first enacted in 2012 and repeatedly expanded since, has become the template copied, in whole or in substantial part, by several other governments seeking a legally elaborate rather than overtly brutal mechanism for constraining independent media. Independent Russian outlets that have not

shut down entirely now largely operate from exile, and Belarus has pursued a parallel and in some respects harsher path since the disputed 2020 election, jailing journalists en masse and forcing the country's most prominent independent outlets to relocate abroad. Both states rank among CPJ's leading jailers of journalists and near the bottom of the RSF Index.

Turkey: Judicial Weaponisation

Independent estimates place the number of journalists and media workers imprisoned in Turkey at roughly 17 as of 2025, with many detained, prosecuted, or convicted in connection with coverage of protests, governance failures, or politically sensitive court cases. Turkey's approach illustrates the use of an ostensibly independent judiciary as an instrument of press control: prosecutions proceed through formally regular legal channels, which complicates international advocacy, even as rights groups argue the underlying charges are politically motivated.

India: A Complex and Contested Picture

India rose eight places in the 2025 RSF Index, from 159th to 151st, a modest improvement that RSF nonetheless situates within a broader pattern of concern over concentrated media ownership by groups with close ties to political power, alongside continuing scrutiny of press regulation and the use of sedition-adjacent and anti-terrorism statutes against journalists covering conflict zones, protests, and corruption. India's case is frequently cited in committee as an example of the limits of formal democratic protections when combined with informal economic and ownership pressures on editorial independence.

Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru: Journalism Against Organised Crime

In Latin America, the principal threat to journalists is frequently non-state rather than state actors. Mexico has for years ranked among the deadliest countries in the world for journalists outside active war zones, driven overwhelmingly by cartel violence against reporters covering corruption, trafficking, and local politics. The 2026 RSF Index recorded a 31-place fall for Ecuador, to 125th, following the murders of journalists Darwin Baque and Patricio Aguilar in 2025, while Peru fell 14 places to 144th after the murder of four journalists the same year. These cases underscore a structural gap in the international framework: UN human rights mechanisms were designed primarily to hold states accountable for their own conduct, and are considerably less equipped to compel states to protect journalists from well-resourced criminal organisations operating with local impunity.

Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela: The Collapse of Independent Media

The 2026 RSF Index describes Nicaragua's media landscape as lying "in ruins," characterised by systematic repression and the sustained forced closure or exile of independent outlets since the 2018 crackdown. Cuba is described as undergoing a profound crisis forcing its few remaining independent journalists underground, while press freedom guarantees in Venezuela remain deeply uncertain despite the release of some detained journalists during 2025, illustrating that episodic releases do not by themselves indicate structural improvement.

Afghanistan: Press Freedom Under the Taliban

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghanistan's media sector has been decimated, with hundreds of outlets closed, a ban on female journalists appearing on camera at several broadcasters, and systematic harassment and arbitrary detention of remaining reporters, particularly those covering women's rights, humanitarian conditions, or security incidents. Successive Human Rights Council resolutions since 2021 have called for the restoration of press freedom protections as part of the broader human rights response to Taliban rule.

A Note on Positive Developments

The picture is not uniformly bleak, and delegates should be prepared to cite examples of improvement as well as decline. The 2026 RSF Index recorded the largest single-year improvement of any country or territory in post-Assad Syria, which climbed 36 places following the fall of the Assad government, alongside gains for Poland and Gabon, both of which moved from a "problematic" to a "satisfactory" classification. These cases demonstrate that press freedom conditions are not fixed, and that political transitions, legal reform, and sustained international attention can produce measurable improvement within a relatively short period.

CROSS-CUTTING HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS IN IMPLEMENTATION

The Due Process Gap

International law guarantees the right to a fair trial without undue delay under Article 14 of the ICCPR, yet CPJ's 2025 data shows that nearly half of all imprisoned journalists worldwide are held without any sentence at all, and more than a quarter of that group has been held for five years or longer. This is not an incidental failure of individual justice systems; in many of the states concerned, prolonged pre-trial detention functions as the punishment itself, allowing the state to remove a journalist from circulation indefinitely without ever having to prove a case in open court or expose itself to the scrutiny that a public trial would invite.

The Blurring Line Between State and Private Repression

A meaningful share of the most severe threats facing journalists today, from organised-crime killings in Latin America to coordinated online harassment campaigns, originate with non-state actors rather than governments directly. This complicates the traditional human rights framework, which is built primarily around state duty-bearers and state obligations, and requires the Council to consider a wider concept of due diligence: a state's obligation not only to refrain from persecuting journalists itself, but to actively investigate, prosecute, and prevent attacks carried out by private actors within its jurisdiction.

Impunity as a Structural Incentive

With close to nine in every ten killings of journalists worldwide going judicially unresolved since UNESCO began tracking the figure, impunity functions less as a gap in enforcement and more as an implicit, self-reinforcing policy. Each unresolved killing lowers the effective cost of the next one, both for state actors seeking to silence critical coverage and for criminal networks seeking to protect illicit operations from scrutiny.

Regulatory Capture and Selective Enforcement

Media licensing, taxation, and ownership regulations are frequently facially neutral but selectively enforced, applied rigorously against outlets critical of the government while identical violations by loyal outlets go unpunished. This selective enforcement is particularly difficult for international mechanisms to address, since the underlying law is often unobjectionable on its face; the violation lies entirely in the discriminatory pattern of its application, which requires sustained monitoring over time rather than a single documentable act.

The Digital Dimension: Surveillance, AI, and Platform Power

The proliferation of commercial spyware and, increasingly, generative AI tools capable of producing convincing disinformation or automating harassment campaigns at scale, has outpaced the international legal and regulatory frameworks designed to address them. The 2025 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists explicitly recognised this gap by focusing on AI-facilitated gender-based violence against women journalists, and the July 2025 Human Rights Council resolution similarly broke new ground by naming digital surveillance as a distinct threat category requiring dedicated safeguards, including judicial authorisation requirements and export controls on surveillance technology sold to governments with poor human rights records.

Journalist Safety in Armed Conflict and Occupied Territory

International humanitarian law affords journalists the same protections as civilians during armed conflict, and war correspondents accredited to armed forces additional specific protections under the Geneva Conventions. In practice, the scale of journalist deaths documented in recent conflicts, alongside restrictions on independent media access to conflict zones, raises serious questions about whether these protections are being systematically respected, and whether existing accountability mechanisms are adequate to the scale of the problem.

BLOC POSITIONS

Western Bloc (European Union, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia)

Western states have historically positioned themselves as leading advocates for press freedom within the Council and have co-sponsored successive resolutions on the safety of journalists, including the 2025 resolution led by Austria. At the same time, the bloc's credibility on this agenda has been complicated by developments within its own borders: RSF's 2025 Index recorded the United States falling two further places to 57th, attributing the decline in part to growing domestic distrust of the media and increasing hostility toward the press in political discourse, while the bloc as a whole is affected by the economic pressures on media ownership and financial sustainability that RSF identifies as a newly dominant global threat. The European Union has separately advanced the Anti-SLAPP Directive and the European Media Freedom Act as regional legislative responses, which Western delegates may cite as models for global standard-setting, while remaining attentive to the reality that economic and ownership-based pressures on editorial independence are increasingly a Western problem as much as an authoritarian one.

Eastern Europe and Russia-Aligned States

Russia, Belarus, and a number of Central Asian states have pursued a legislative model of press control centred on foreign agent registration requirements, extremism statutes, and state ownership or control of major broadcast media. These states typically frame Council scrutiny of their domestic media laws as an infringement of sovereignty and a politically selective double standard, arguing that Western states apply national security exceptions to their own media in comparable ways. Delegates from this bloc should be prepared to defend their domestic legal frameworks in these terms while engaging constructively enough to avoid total diplomatic isolation within committee.

Asia-Pacific Bloc

The Asia-Pacific region presents the most internally varied bloc on this agenda. China and Myanmar are, respectively, the first- and second-worst jailers of journalists globally, and both frame domestic press restrictions as necessary for social stability and national security. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan maintain comparatively strong press freedom protections and have periodically supported Council resolutions on journalist safety, while states such as India, Indonesia, and the Philippines occupy a middle position, combining formally democratic protections with significant informal pressures including ownership concentration, defamation litigation, and, in some cases, targeted violence against local reporters covering corruption or organised crime. Asia retained its position in 2025 as the region with the single largest number of imprisoned journalists worldwide, at 110, roughly a third of the global total.

Middle Eastern and North African States

States in this bloc range from active parties to armed conflicts with severe documented impacts on journalist safety, most acutely Israel and the Palestinian territories, to states such as Saudi Arabia, which the 2026 RSF Index specifically penalised for repeated acts of violence against journalists in 2025, and Egypt, which maintains one of the region's largest journalist prison populations. Qatar and Tunisia, by contrast, co-sponsored the 2025 Council resolution on journalist safety, reflecting a more engaged posture, though

delegates should research each individual state's domestic record carefully rather than assuming bloc-wide uniformity.

Sub-Saharan African States

African states present a similarly wide range, from countries such as Gabon, which improved sufficiently in the 2025 Index to move from a "problematic" to a "satisfactory" rating, to the Sahel region, where the 2026 Index recorded the single steepest national decline of any country in the world in Niger, driven by armed group activity and the suppression of independent reporting by ruling military juntas following recent coups. Many African delegations will emphasise the interaction between state fragility, armed conflict, and press freedom, as well as the continuing legacy of colonial-era media laws that remain on the books in several states and are periodically invoked against journalists today.

Latin America and the Caribbean

This bloc is characterised less by state repression in the classical sense and more by the systemic threat of organised-crime violence against journalists, particularly those reporting on corruption, trafficking, and local governance failures, as illustrated by the 2025 murders that drove sharp ranking declines for Ecuador and Peru in the 2026 Index. Several Latin American states, including Brazil, co-sponsored the 2025 Council resolution and have separately advocated for the Inter-American human rights system's jurisprudence on journalist safety to inform global standard-setting, particularly regarding a state's due diligence obligation to protect journalists from non-state violence. Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela, by contrast, represent the bloc's most restrictive cases, with independent media in each functioning only in severely diminished or exiled form.

UNHRC AND UN SYSTEM PAST ACTIONS

The Human Rights Council and the wider UN system have built a progressively more detailed body of resolutions, mechanisms, and reports addressing the safety of journalists and press freedom over more than a decade. Key milestones include:

- UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012) — the foundational UN system-wide coordination framework, developed by UNESCO and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board, establishing the inter-agency mechanism and the Network of Focal Points on the Safety of Journalists co-chaired by OHCHR and UNESCO.
- A/HRC/RES/21/12 (2012) — the Council's first dedicated resolution on the safety of journalists, condemning attacks and violence against media workers and calling for cooperation with UNESCO's monitoring mechanisms.
- A/HRC/RES/27/5 (2014) and A/HRC/RES/33/2 (2016) — successive resolutions expanding the framework, the latter (A/HRC/33/L.6, led by Austria) specifically welcoming the Freelance Journalist Safety Principles and the International Declaration on the Protection of Journalists, and linking journalist safety explicitly to Sustainable Development Goal 16.10.
- General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/163 (2013) — proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, in commemoration of the assassination of two French journalists in Mali, and called on member states to implement concrete measures to counter impunity for crimes against media workers.
- A/HRC/RES/39/6 (2018) — reaffirmed Council concern over the safety of journalists covering public demonstrations and protests.
- General Assembly Resolution 78/215 (2023) — requested the Secretary-General to report to the eightieth General Assembly session and the sixty-first Human Rights Council session on the safety of journalists, with a specific focus that year on those reporting on climate change, environmental, and disaster issues, including women journalists.
- A/HRC/RES/59/15 (7 July 2025) — the most recent dedicated resolution on the safety of journalists, adopted without a vote and co-sponsored by more than 70 states under the leadership of Austria, Brazil, France, Greece, Morocco, Qatar, and Tunisia, introducing new operative language on SLAPPs, digital surveillance, journalist safety in armed conflict and occupation, and gender-based online harassment.
- UNESCO Director-General's Biennial Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity — the primary UN system tracking mechanism for judicial follow-up on killings of journalists, consistently finding that roughly nine in ten cases remain unresolved.
- CPJ and RSF annual reporting (non-UN, but formally cited in UN documentation) — the Committee to Protect Journalists' annual Prison Census and Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index are the two most frequently cited independent data sources in Council debate and Special Rapporteur reporting on this agenda.

- International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, 2 November — commemorated annually since 2013, with the 2025 global theme dedicated to raising awareness of AI-facilitated gender-based violence against women journalists.
- Reports of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression — the mandate holder produces annual thematic reports to both the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, and undertakes country visits and individual communications with states regarding specific cases of journalist persecution.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMA)

- To what extent can the Human Rights Council meaningfully hold states accountable for the arbitrary arrest and prolonged pre-trial detention of journalists, given that such detentions are frequently conducted under domestically "legal" but internationally objectionable statutes?
- What obligations, if any, should states bear for protecting journalists from non-state violence, including organised crime, given that a substantial share of journalist killings worldwide are not carried out by state actors?
- How should the Council address the growing use of SLAPPs and other civil litigation as tools of press suppression, given that these mechanisms typically operate through ostensibly independent judicial systems rather than direct executive action?
- What concrete regulatory measures, including export controls, could realistically limit the sale and deployment of commercial spyware against journalists, without granting states a pretext to restrict legitimate security cooperation?
- How can the international community close the impunity gap for killings of journalists, given that nearly nine in ten such cases remain judicially unresolved more than a decade after UNESCO began systematically tracking the figure?
- Should the Council develop more specific standards for journalist safety in armed conflict and occupied territory, distinct from and in addition to existing international humanitarian law protections, and if so, through what mechanism?
- What role should "foreign agent" and similarly framed legislation be permitted to play in regulating media funding, and where precisely should the line be drawn between legitimate transparency requirements and de facto criminalisation of independent journalism?
- How should the Council respond to economic and ownership-based pressures on press freedom, which frequently operate legally and are therefore harder to condemn through traditional human-rights language than direct censorship or violence?
- What protections should be extended to journalists operating in exile, including safeguards against transnational repression targeting them or their families who remain in their country of origin?
- How can the Council ensure that any resulting resolution translates into measurable, monitorable outcomes rather than restating existing commitments that states have shown a pattern of not implementing?

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

1. <https://www.un.org/en/safety-journalists>
2. <https://www.unesco.org/en/threats-freedom-press-violence-disinformation-censorship>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/councilofeurope/posts/the-new-report-on-the-tipping-point-press-freedom-2025-shows-that-journalists-in/1409490364553593/>
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9. <https://cpj.org/special-reports/2025-journalist-jailings-remain-stubbornly-high-harsh-prison-conditions-pervasive/>
10. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/press-censorship>

IMPORTANT NOTE: As stated at the outset of this guide, this document is a starting point for orientation only and is not, in itself, a valid or citable source of evidence during committee sessions. Delegates are expected to substantiate claims made in caucus and in working papers with primary sources drawn from the list above and their own independent research.