

IMUN 2024 Research Report

Human Rights Commission Issue #4: The question of press freedom in times of conflict.

Freedom of the press is foundational to democracy and justice, providing the public with the necessary facts to shape opinions and hold power to account. This essential freedom faces significant challenges, particularly during times of conflict. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized this in his message on World Press Freedom Day, celebrated annually on May 3rd, highlighting the global threats faced by journalists and media outlets. In every corner of the world, press freedom is under attack, especially in conflict zones ("Freedom of the press").

During armed conflicts, the right to freedom of expression and access to information becomes even more crucial. However, parties to armed conflicts often attempt to control the flow of information, undermining these rights. State propaganda and disinformation campaigns are common tactics, complicating the response to such manipulation due to unclear legal frameworks. Recent conflicts, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war on Palestine, underscore the complex challenges faced by journalists and media outlets amidst intense political and military pressures ("The survival").

Legacy media outlets, while essential for public interest reporting, can also be vehicles for propaganda and incitement to violence. Social media platforms, with their problematic business models based on data collection and targeted advertising, have become significant drivers of conflict. Both state and non-state actors exploit these platforms to crush dissent, recruit members for armed groups, and incite international crimes ("The survival").

Journalists working in conflict zones face numerous dangers, including denial of access, censorship, harassment, arbitrary detention, and physical attacks. Despite these risks, journalists are considered civilians and should not be targeted. However, reality often contradicts this principle, necessitating stronger protections and recognition of the vital role of journalism during conflicts. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, presented a report to the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly in October 2022. This report addresses information manipulation during armed conflicts and offers recommendations to states and social media companies to counter disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech while preserving freedom of expression ("Freedom of expression").

Freedom of the press is indispensable for democracy and justice, especially during times of conflict. The challenges faced by the media in conflict zones underscore the need for stronger protections, better regulations, and robust support for independent journalism. By addressing these issues, we can ensure that the press continues to play its essential role in providing accurate information, exposing human rights violations, and contributing to conflict prevention and resolution. Delegates should approach the issue with consideration for their respective delegations' perspectives, motives, political and social climates. The debate could reach discussions regarding state-sponsored censorship, propaganda, the use of media in manipulating or causing physiological harm to individuals, the marginalization within which groups get attacked, or the breaches of human rights provoked by states or other parties on the press in times of conflict. Additionally, investigating the implications of misinformation which could provide insights into the evolving landscape of censorship and reporting in times of conflict. The question of the freedom of the press in times of conflict raises profound ethical and moral

questions. Understanding its motives, methods, and implications is crucial for developing effective debate on the topic.

Works Cited

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