



# Safety of Journalists in Crises and Emergencies

International Day to End Impunity  
for Crimes against Journalists

Global Commemoration and Action,  
AU HQ, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,  
6 - 7 November 2024

## Concept Note

### 10<sup>th</sup> International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

Global Commemoration and Action

***Theme: Safety of Journalists in Crises and Emergencies***

*6 -7 November 2024,*

*African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

### Context

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the African Union (AU) will commemorate the 2024 International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) from 6-7 November 2024 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The event will be held at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, under the theme “Safety of Journalists in Crises and Emergencies”.

This year’s commemoration marks the 10th anniversary since the first IDEI was observed at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, in 2014. In 2013, the [UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163](#) established 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, following the killing of two *Radio France Internationale* journalists in Mali. This development marked a new phase in global recognition of the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity for crimes committed against them.

This year also marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the ACHPR), during its 36<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, held from 23 November to 07 December 2004, in Dakar, Senegal. Co-organizing of this year’s IDEI by UNESCO and the AU, therefore, is also an occasion to mark these anniversaries, acknowledge the positive impact the respective mandates have had on freedom of expression and the safety of

journalists, and strengthen the cooperation between UNESCO and the AU within the framework of UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa.

On World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, UNESCO organized a global conference in Santiago, Chile, under the theme "Press for the Planet: Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis." The conference, the global campaign, and over 70 events around the world highlighted the issues journalists encounter while reporting on the environment, the ways to enhance their safety and how to counter disinformation around the climate emergency. UNESCO also published an [issue brief](#) on the attacks perpetrated against journalists who report on environmental crises and emergencies.

The IDEI 2024 Global Commemoration is therefore an opportunity to reaffirm commitments to promoting and guaranteeing freedom of expression worldwide, strengthening international cooperation in ensuring the safety of journalists and media workers in crises and emergencies, and engaging national, regional and international stakeholders in finding solutions to address issues and challenges specific to Africa.

## Relevance of the theme

The theme of IDEI 2024, Safety of Journalists in Crises and Emergencies, is aligned with the objectives of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically [Sustainable Development Goal 16](#), to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". It also corresponds to the objectives of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which calls for a coalition-based and holistic approach to ensuring a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers.

The theme also aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, under [Aspiration 3](#), which seeks to promote "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law", as well as [Aspiration 4](#), which seeks to promote "a peaceful and secure Africa", with the goal of "strengthening governance, accountability and transparency as a foundation for a peaceful Africa". Furthermore, the theme is aligned to Principle 20 on Safety of journalists and other media practitioners contained in the [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa \(the 2019 Declaration\)](#), adopted by the ACHPR in 2019, which provides, *inter alia*, that "States shall guarantee the safety of journalists and other media practitioners." Therefore, this year's theme reaffirms and reinforces the common purpose between the UN system and the AU in promoting an enabling environment for journalists as the foundation of peace, democracy, accountability, transparency, and good governance.

## Purpose of IDEI 2024

In the context of the rise of conflicts and other crises, UNESCO and the African Union will join efforts with media stakeholders globally, to promote a broader discussion on the safety of journalists working in these contexts, including the prevention, protection and prosecution concerns of journalists affected by such challenges.

With the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists in its second decade of implementation, IDEI 2024 is an opportunity to strengthen stakeholder cooperation in the implementation of the Plan, particularly in Africa.

The occasion will also serve to strengthen the AU's contribution to the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, building upon the cooperation as part of the IGOs 'Light Touch' Task Force on the Safety of Journalists, and partnership with the PRC Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy and Governance.

The IDEI global commemoration again serves as an opportunity to advance UNESCO's planned [Global Roadmap for Information as a public good in the face of the environmental crisis](#), which was announced at the World Press Freedom Day 2024 in Santiago, Chile, and seeks to address various aspects to promoting safety of journalists covering environmental issues, as well as ways to advance information integrity, including countering disinformation on climate change. These include addressing the different threats to environmental information, such as climate disinformation and misinformation, climate change denial, and violence against environmental journalists, among others.

Furthermore, IDEI 2024 will be an occasion to take stock of the action plan developed by stakeholders during the 3rd African Media Convention, which took place in Ghana in May 2024. Progress reports from African media stakeholders will be presented during the IDEI, particularly on (i) Progress on the Development of the Pan-African Strategy on Media Information Literacy and Digital Competencies led by the AU Directorate of Information and Communication in partnership with UNESCO; and, (ii) Progress made in establishing a multi-stakeholder coalition to mainstream Freedom of Expression, Access to Information and the Safety of Journalists in the Africa Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Voluntary Self-Assessments processes led by UNESCO and AU APRM.

In addition, IDEI 2024 will provide an opportunity to address broader issues of the integrity of information within the framework of UNESCO's role as a knowledge partner to the G20. This will include discussing the implementation of the Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, and the specific actions that stakeholders must take to mitigate the risks associated with online harmful content in the context of crises and emergencies, while safeguarding freedom of

expression and the right to access to information. Furthermore, ensuring mitigation measures are in place to protect journalists and public-interest information.

Articulating the place of Africa in conversations regarding information integrity, South Africa will hold the G20 Presidency in 2025. It will be the first time an African country leads the Group of 20, coinciding with the African Union becoming a permanent member of the G20.

## Crises, emergencies, and their impact on the Safety of Journalists

Many journalists, media professionals, and associated media personnel exercise their duties in highly dangerous contexts. Too many pay unacceptably high prices, including death, enforced disappearance, torture, unlawful detention, and kidnappings for producing independent, reliable, and verifiable information. According to data UNESCO's Observatory of Killed Journalists, killings of journalists in countries experiencing conflict have risen, based on figures collected over the 2022-2023 biennium, highlighting a reversal of the previous five-year decrease in conflict-related killings since 2017. Given this trend, Africa has the highest number of ongoing conflicts, according to the [Secretary General's Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#) in 2023. UNESCO's [monitoring figures](#) indicate that by July 2024, at least 14 journalists had been killed in Africa in 2023-2024, the majority of whom were countries experiencing conflict.

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF), in 2024, at least 14 journalists had been disappeared or kidnapped in countries experiencing conflict in Africa. RSF also found at least 32 journalists were detained in countries experiencing conflict in Africa. By 1 December 2023, the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) reported that at least 47 journalists were being detained in 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, on defamation, censorship violation, anti-state, false news, religious insult, or retaliatory charges. According to the [International Press Institute](#), in June 2024, there were at least 38 press freedom violations in 14 countries in Africa, including physical, verbal and online attacks, as well as arrests and detentions. Five of these incidents involved female journalists.

Journalists working in climate disasters and other emergency situations are affected by similar threats and challenges to their safety. In May 2024, for World Press Freedom Day, UNESCO released a [report](#) revealing that 70% of journalists reporting on environmental issues had been attacked in connection with their work. Whether reporting on conflict, humanitarian disasters, climate or health crises, journalists continue to face disproportionate threats and higher levels of impunity for extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment, both offline and online. In Africa, the same [report](#) recorded 26 physical attacks and 55 legal, digital and censorship-related attacks since 2009. Attacks on journalists in these contexts undermine their critical role in providing independent, verified and

often lifesaving information in the context of crises, as well as their ability to act as an early-warning system.

Ensuring the free flow of information, including in crises and emergencies, is undoubtedly essential to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies and ensuring long-term stability, peace and security, and is, therefore, an imperative for duty-bearers, as clearly stated in Principle 20(7) of the 2019 Declaration which provides as follows: “In times of armed conflict, States shall respect the status of journalists and other media practitioners as non-combatants in accordance with international humanitarian law.”

### **Crises, and emergencies create “Zones of Silence”**

The impact of crises and emergencies on the free flow of information cannot be underestimated. [UNESCO has warned](#) of the creation of “zones of silence” in several ongoing conflicts due to the increase in conflict-related safety concerns of journalists and media organizations, impinging on their ability to engage in accurate and public-interest reporting.

The term “zones of silence” not only refers to an increase in the number of conflict-related killings but also to an increase in non-lethal attacks affecting the personal security, social and material conditions needed to work in psychological and physical safety. In this respect, since 2022, UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication’s [Safe Spaces initiative](#), for example, has contributed to a greater understanding of how to address the needs of exiled journalists by supporting consultations and national assessments, as well as by working with regional partners to establish hubs for the protection of exiled journalists. IDEI 2024 therefore provides another occasion to promote a broader discussion on the safety of journalists working in conflict and other crisis contexts, including their psychological safety.

The African Union (AU) has taken a proactive stance in promoting press freedom and protecting journalists across the continent. This commitment is reflected in various legal instruments, policy declarations, and institutional mechanisms designed to safeguard the rights of journalists and ensure a free and independent media landscape. The AU's perspective on the safety of journalists is rooted in its broader agenda of promoting human rights, democracy, and good governance. Below are key elements of the AU's approach:

## **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted in 1981 and also known as the Banjul Charter, is a foundational document that guarantees the right to information and freedom of expression. Article 9 of the Charter explicitly states that "every individual shall have the right to receive information" and "every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law." This Charter is a cornerstone for ensuring that member states uphold these fundamental rights, providing a legal framework that protects journalists and media.

## **Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (2019)**

The 2019 affirms the principles for anchoring the rights to freedom of expression and access to information in conformance with Article 9 of the African Charter which guarantees individuals the right to receive information as well as the right to express and disseminate information. The Declaration includes comprehensive provisions that underscore the importance of freedom of expression and access to information as essential components of a democratic society. Principle 20 specifically addresses the safety of journalists and other media practitioners, calling for the protection of journalists, especially in times of armed conflict and other crises. The Declaration stipulates that State actors must respect and protect the rights of journalists and refrain from imposing undue restrictions on the media.

## **Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa (ACHPR/Res.362(LIX)2016)**

The ACHPR has adopted a number of Resolutions on the safety of journalists, the most recent being [Resolution ACHPR/Res.468 \(LXVII\) 2020 on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa](#), adopted during its 67<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session held virtually, from 13 November to 3 December 2020. This Resolution, *inter alia*, calls on State Parties to ensure the safety of journalists, create a conducive environment for them to practice their profession, in addition to investigating, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators of attacks against journalists and other media practitioners.

## **Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information**

In 2004, the ACHPR, an organ of the AU established a special mechanism on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa to promote and protect freedom of expression and access to information in Africa. The Special Rapporteur plays a crucial role in advocating for

the rights of journalists, investigating complaints of violations, and engaging with States Parties to improve the legal and institutional frameworks protecting journalists. The special mechanism also collaborates with civil society organizations, media houses, and international partners to promote a safe and enabling environment for media practitioners across the continent.

## AU Agenda 2063

The AU's long-term strategic framework, Agenda 2063, envisions an "Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law" (Aspiration 3) and "a peaceful and secure Africa" (Aspiration 4). The Agenda emphasizes the importance of free and independent media as a pillar of democracy and a tool for promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance. In line with this vision, the AU advocates for the protection of journalists, recognizing their crucial role in informing the public, facilitating dialogue, and holding power to account.

## Challenges and Opportunities

While the AU has made significant strides in promoting the safety of journalists, challenges remain. These include the persistent issues of impunity for crimes against journalists, restrictive laws and regulations, and the lack of robust national protection mechanisms. Nonetheless, the AU's frameworks and instruments provide a solid foundation for addressing these challenges. The organization continues to work closely with member states, regional bodies, and international partners to implement its commitments and ensure that journalists can operate freely and safely, even in crisis situations.

## Mapping Key Challenges and Trends

### 1. Increasing Crises and Emergencies

Conflict-induced crises and the resultant humanitarian emergencies are increasing worldwide, not least in places like the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region, Europe, and the Middle East. Climate disasters are also increasing in frequency and impact. The African Union's Specialized Agency for disaster risk management estimated that in 2023 at least 15,700 people in Africa lost their lives to extreme weather disasters.<sup>1</sup> Around the world, several recent natural disasters have left the world shocked in their wake, like the massive landslides in Papua New Guinea in May 2024<sup>2</sup>, landslides in Ethiopia in July 2024, and the historic flooding in Brazil in 2024.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/rising-climate-death-toll-africa-underscores-urgency-cop28-action>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx778nq0jzyo>

<sup>3</sup> <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/journalism-doesnt-stop-how-three-local-digital-media-outlets-covered-historic-floods-in-brazils-rio-grande-do-sul/>



These tragedies are only the tip of the iceberg, with widespread damage and destruction of infrastructure, including media and communications infrastructure, as well as many other kinds of threats, including conflict-related and non-conflict-related trauma, the confiscation of equipment or denial of access to reporting sites. Large numbers of journalists are forced to go into exile, flee or stop working altogether in the face of these and other risks.

IDEI 2024 is an occasion to raise awareness of the risks to the safety of journalists working in crisis and emergency contexts to provide early-warning, accurate and life-saving information, the importance of ending impunity for crimes against them, as well as the need to foster the resilience of media outlets in conflict-affected countries, countering conflict-related disinformation and hate speech.

## 2. Inadequate Mechanisms for the Protection of Journalists working in Crises and Emergencies

Mechanisms for the protection of journalists are essential components of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. UNESCO, as part of the [reaffirming, recommitting, and repositioning of this UN Plan of Action](#) in 2022, has upscaled interventions to strengthen national and regional safety mechanisms. In this respect, two key UNESCO initiatives will be launched during IDEI 2024. These are 1) a **Global Repository of National Safety Mechanisms for Journalists** and 2) an **Issue Brief on National Safety Mechanisms for Journalists**, which includes recommendations for all stakeholders on the implementation of such mechanisms, encouraging a broad view of safety tailored to local safety contexts. In Africa, the second assessment on the [State of Media Freedom and the Safety of Journalists in Africa by UNESCO](#), is currently underway. The report is expected to also be launched during the second day of the IDEI 2024 conference.

## 3. Gender-Specific Risks in Crises and Emergencies

The impact of war on the journalistic profession is decidedly gendered. Women journalists face specific risks, such as gender-based violence, when on assignment in conflict zones and other crises and emergency situations.

IDEI 2024 will provide an important platform for regional stakeholders to discuss the safety of women journalists in crisis contexts, especially against the background of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, in the lead-up to the Beijing +30 in 2025, and given that Gender Equality is one of UNESCO's global priorities, along with Africa. Furthermore, these initiatives are

in line with the recommendations of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

## Objectives of IDEI 2024

- Raise awareness on the risks and challenges faced by journalists in crises and emergencies, including threats, harassment, and violence.
- Advocate for ending impunity for crimes against journalists, ensuring justice for victims.
- Enhance legal and institutional frameworks to safeguard journalists, especially in conflict and emergency situations.
- Raise awareness on the AU's and UNESCO's efforts in promoting press freedom and protecting journalists, including the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

## Schedule and Structure of IDEI 2024

**Day 1: Global Commemoration:** The global commemoration on 6 November will be divided into two sessions. The morning sessions will focus on global issues, including consulting participants on the key developments, issues and data points that will inform the 2025 World Trends Report on Freedom of Expression and Media Development, while the afternoon session will have a regional focus (Africa).

**Day 2: Day of Action:** 7 November will be a “Day of Action” to allow stakeholders and participants to organise and attend different types of activities. These activities will be action-oriented initiatives, such as the launch of reports and projects, a chance to hold strategic partnership meetings, trainings, workshops, and exhibitions, discussing continental, regional, and sub-regional action plans, and conducting information sessions.

**Events around the world:** This global event will also be the culminate a week of commemorations around the world, starting on the official date of this International Day (Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November).

**Global Campaign:** The global event will also mark the culmination of the IDEI 2024 Campaign, both on social media and in partnership with media around the world.

