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CENTRE FOR FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA (CFOM), UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, U.K.

CFOM PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON THE NON-REPORTING OF AND THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST IN CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY (SUMMARY)

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2012 was the deadliest year for journalists so far: 123 journalists were killed in the line of duty that year and the number in 2013 was also high, with 91 killed journalists. Between 2006-2013 593 journalists were killed.¹ However, the deaths of journalists as well as threats and violence against them are only rarely reported in the mainstream media: between 1985 and early 2014 only 397 articles/references could be found in all UK national and local newspapers. The discrepancy between the number of killed journalists and the number of articles shows that these crimes receive only very little – too little - media coverage.²

In order to ascertain mainstream media's priorities concerning crimes against journalists as an issue in their coverage and output CFOM interviewed 11 leading UK journalists, editors and Heads of High Risk³ in 2013. These interviews confirmed that editors indeed do not prioritise reporting crimes

¹See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002301/230101E.pdf> and <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/int-day-to-end-impunity/international-day-to-end-impunity-2014/about-the-international-day-to-end-impunity/>

² As a follow up from this preliminary pilot study, CFOM intends to undertake a large scale and detailed content analysis that would explore news articles on the killings of journalists and issues of impunity with regard to the following questions (amongst others): What cases get most coverage? Which are the most sustained in terms of follow up stories? Does there appear to be any link between such coverage and a subsequent judicial process or lack of one (impunity)? What is the source of content - is it agency copy or does it have a by-line? Is there any evidence of a proactive journalistic response as distinct from a reactive response to a particular event? Are any of the events reported linked to specific anniversaries? What sources are cited - NGOs, families, colleagues, authorities, UNESCO? To what extent is the wider significance of the killings of journalists and the issues of impunity included?

³ Sunday Times: Managing Editor; Independent: Editor; The Guardian: Reader's Editor, former Managing Editor, and board member INSI; Telegraph: Foreign Editor; BBC: Producer; Head of High Risk; Deputy Head of Newsgathering; ITN: Managing Editor; Head of Security; City University: UK Director, INSI.

against journalists.⁴The interviewees cited three main reasons for this: first, editors commonly expressed the view that first, reporting about journalists isn't necessarily something that journalists should routinely do, and second, that such stories are mostly not inherently newsworthy. Third and importantly, editors believed that audiences/readers are likely to be uninterested or resistant to stories about attacks on journalists or the related issue of impunity.

CFOM has since undertaken three different preliminary pilot research studies into public attitudes towards the crimes against journalists to test this last point above. It has conducted a series of focus groups with a cross-section of the UK public and designed two surveys: one addressed to journalism students at the University of Sheffield and one addressed to journalism educators across the world. The preliminary findings can be summarised as follows:

1) Focus groups

Between July and October CFOM conducted a series of six focus groups with 39 participants in London and Sheffield. The data collected allows for CFOM to draw the following four conclusions with regard to the question of whether the public is interested in reporting on crimes against journalists (for details see the attached report): First, a majority of participants thought that the media coverage of the killings of journalists and other crimes concerning journalists is insufficient. Second, participants were interested in both crimes against Western and non-Western journalists. Third, participants believed that it is the news's role to inform the public about what is going on in the world in terms of political conflicts and wars. Participants considered crimes against journalists to be part of these conflicts and as such, they needed to be part of the coverage. Fourth, participants who were part of the focus groups that were held after the James Foley execution condemned the media reporting of this execution for its focus on horrible images and for their sensationalising style of reporting. They criticised the lack of context, interpretation, explanation and analysis. Overall, the participants **did not** agree with the frequently voiced editors' belief that the public does not want to read about crimes against journalists, or that these crimes should not be prioritised in coverage.

2) Survey journalism students

Two hundred and fifty five journalism students⁵ were surveyed and asked about their knowledge about crimes against journalists and their appetite to be taught about journalism safety and related issues of impunity as part of their journalism curriculum. The survey revealed two things: first, 41% of the students admitted knowing 'nothing' or 'little' about crimes against journalists. Second, 95% of the students stated that it was 'important', 'very important' and 'most important' that they are educated about the threats faced by

⁴ It is important to stress that this is not to say that the staff at the news organisations do not take the safety of their own journalists into account.

⁵ The sample consisted of 255 level 1 undergraduate and master students from Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield.

journalists all over the world. These two findings resonate with the focus groups findings: there is little knowledge and yet a rather strong desire for more information.

3) Survey journalism educators

CFOM designed an online survey which was sent to journalism educators across the world.⁶ The responses⁷ revealed two main findings: First, a lack of awareness: 57% of journalism educators were unaware of UNESCO and other UN bodies/ agencies action plan on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. Accordingly, journalism educators neglect to teach these issues in their curriculum. More specifically, 62% stated that their course does not focus on the dangers faced by journalists in particular regions or countries and 46% were unaware of any initiatives on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in their specific country. Nevertheless, the interest to be involved in an education network that focuses on the issues of safety of journalists and issues of impunity was high: 62% of journalism educators across the world expressed interest in joining such a network.

The results of the survey resonate with the media content analysis that revealed that crimes against journalists only rarely get covered and with the findings from the focus groups outlined above. Increasing public awareness of crimes against journalists and ultimately of the action plan on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity can only be achieved by wide media coverage. Interestingly, the focus group discussions also revealed that the UN is perceived as passive rather than pro-active, too lenient and ultimately, risking to become irrelevant (see attached report).

Based on the preliminary findings presented above CFOM believes that it is imperative to undertake further large scale research in collaboration with the journalism educators who expressed interest in joining a global University Network (see above)⁸ around two main axes:

1) Public attitudes

- a. Examine in more detail the extent and nature of public appetite for news stories on crimes against journalists and the issues of

⁶ Responses were received from a variety of countries: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Thailand, Ukraine, UK, USA. The survey was sent to 80 countries in which journalism schools were identified by looking at the World Journalism Education Council listings. However and due to limited funding for the project, it wasn't possible to translate the survey in any systematic way which probably affected response rates. A larger scale project would therefore build in a translation cost, target more countries and also utilise the network contacts that have been built up in different countries through this pilot survey in order to encourage higher response rates.

⁷ 61 questionnaires were returned. Although the response rate to the survey might appear low, it is nevertheless an indicator of global interest that merits further exploration. See footnote 6 above.

⁸ This research also aligns with UNESCO's focus in the UN Action Plan on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity on lack of media houses' engagement in reporting crimes against journalists.

impunity. Several aspects of the audiences' engagement with these types of stories will be explored – such as the public's interest in stories per se, how the public's interest may be kindled or elevated and why.

2) Current media reporting:

- a. Explore what is actually reported (a more detailed media content analysis of UK and global mainstream media: see footnote 2 above).
- b. Examine why most cases of crimes against journalists and issues of impunity do not get reported (more interviews with journalists and editors, and deeper exploration of their volunteered, reasons for the non-reporting of these stories⁹). In other words: What are the professional, occupational, geographic, economic and ideological (conventional wisdom) reasons for why the media watchdog has not alerted the public loudly to issues of anti-media violence and impunity, which impede the media's own vital work and deprive while societies of the right to impart and receive information without fear? Are the media not concerned to find out why out of 430 cases of journalists' killings from 2007-2012 only seven resulted in a conviction?¹⁰

Explore why the UN actions in this field are rarely reported, despite rising sharply up the UN's own agenda in recent years, both in response to the increasing scale of violence targeting journalists and in recognition of the negative impact of attacks on the media on accountable government, exposure of corruption and crime, and the wider welfare of whole populations.

⁹ At the BBC/CFOM 2014 London Symposium Guy Berger, Director of Freedom of Expression and Media Development UNESCO and Peter Horrocks of BBC Global News questioned the absence of focus on these issues and pointed to possible reasons for the relative lack of such reporting. These were that such news stories may 'sound like special pleading for our own kind/profession' and the belief that 'such coverage is liable to expose our own news staff to greater threats'. Other reasons could include the journalists' proximity to the government, concerns about the media's self-image, traditional ways of assessing news priorities etc. At this point these reasons are speculative and further research will be needed in order to generate more reliable findings.

¹⁰ BBC/CFOM 2014 London Symposium Guy Berger, Director of Freedom of Expression and Media Development, UNESCO.