

Statement by Frank Smyth  
Senior Advisor for Journalist Security at the Committee to Protect Journalists  
to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner  
at the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council  
Panel Discussion on the safety of journalists  
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Good morning. I am honored to be a part of this esteemed panel including figures and friends whose work I have long admired, and to be addressing this all-important international body for the defense of human rights.

My name is Frank Smyth and I am the Senior Advisor for Journalist Security at the Committee to Protect Journalists, the independent, international press freedom watchdog. I am also the Founder and Executive Director of Global Journalist Security, a firm dedicated to providing integrated physical, digital and emotional self-care safety training to journalists and human rights defenders worldwide.

Please know, too, that while I advise the nonprofit Committee to Protect Journalists or CPJ, I am speaking here this morning for myself. And, to save time, please allow me to tell you from the start my main point.

The United Nations and its various bodies deserve great credit for having brought direly needed attention to the cause of journalists at risk worldwide. But we still need to take two more important steps.

First, we in the press freedom and freedom of expression community must be precise and clear in our language, and focus on what has long been and remains the greatest threat to both press freedom and freedom of expression and at-risk journalists worldwide: The disturbingly consistent and alarmingly high rate of impunity for murdering journalists literally around the globe. We need to say that clearly and unequivocally for everyone including every Member State to hear.

Second, individual Member States, especially those where unsolved journalist murders are common, need to start taking concrete steps toward finally bringing the murderers of journalists to justice. Unfortunately, in nearly nine out of ten journalist murder cases worldwide, no one is ever prosecuted at all.

What is the leading cause of journalists' deaths?

In a word, murder: Most of the 1055 journalists killed since 1992 did not step on a landmine, or get killed in an airstrike, or in a car bomb, or get shot in crossfire, or die in any kind of terrorist attack or engagement between armed forces. No, more than two-thirds, or 67 percent of all journalists killed worldwide --at least 703 since 1992-- have been murdered outright in direct reprisal for their reporting. Slain by assassins like two men, one with a gun on the back of a motorcycle, or a lone gunman waiting in a journalist's apartment building, or unknown assailants who later dump a journalist's remains, perhaps bearing signs of torture, by the side of a road

How often are journalists murdered?

Since 1992, a journalist has been murdered at least once every two weeks, or every 13 days. The murdered journalists are almost invariably local reporters like Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz whose remains were found earlier this year in Veracruz, Mexico, or Vyacheslav Veremiy who was beaten and shot by a mob a week later in Kiev, Ukraine, or Shan Dahar who was shot in the back weeks before while filming outside a pharmacy in Larkana, Pakistan.

What could be worse than that?

--Worse than murdering journalists? Only one thing: Murdering journalists with impunity. Because if the killers, including both the triggermen and the people

behind them, get away with it, the impact of killing one journalist is to effectively silence countless more. If we have learned one thing in recent decades, it is that violence against the press sharply reduces the possibilities of holding wrongdoers accountable, and the chances of criminal and corrupt activity being brought to light.

How often do the murderers get away with assassinating journalists?

They get away with it almost all the time, or in 88 percent of all journalist murders since 1992.

For us here today the issue of murdering journalists with impunity --should be, must be-- the priority of any viable international effort to defend press freedom and freedom of expression. The real issue facing journalists today is not one of "safety," and, I say that as someone who has a direct interest in helping to train journalists and others help navigate dangers in hostile environments around the world. The real issue, instead, is one of impunity, or how to bring the murderers of journalists to justice.

On this score, last year's U.N. report on the safety of journalists seems, well, timid. The report raised the notion of "Impunity for attacks against journalists." But without being more specific, even while adding that it "is a serious and pervasive problem." The report goes on to note that "there is near total impunity in cases of violations of the right to life of journalists," using legal language instead of a clearer term like murder.

Only later does the report raise for the first time the issue of "the murder" of journalists where no one has "been held accountable." Yet the report still fails to juxtapose the two terms to simply say: impunity for murder.

If we were in a newsroom, I'd say we buried the lead. In fact, it seems like the lead has been intentionally stuck in the mud.

There are no doubt reasons --rarely spoken out loud-- why a U.N. body might prefer to be indirect. So as not to offend Member States. But those same reasons now point us squarely to a conundrum that both the U.N. action plan and we, as advocates, must confront. On the one hand, we need a consensus among Member States for any plan to go forward. No doubt about that. But if we were to go forward, we must do so in a way that makes the plan we choose worth continuing. Because anything else would, at the end of the day, not help.

The Committee to Protect Journalists' Courtney Radsch noted last month in a letter to the Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: "Despite increased attention by the international community and Member States" to journalist killings since the adoption of the U.N. Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, "there has been very little progress made in both limiting the number of journalists imprisoned or killed and in bringing those killers to justice."

One reason that little progress has been made may be the lack of cooperation from Member States.

We all know that there is a difference between jail and murder. When states or, for that matter, insurgent, terrorist, criminal or other irregular armed groups jail or kidnap journalists they bring scrutiny upon themselves for denying journalists their voice. But when a journalist is murdered, or silenced forever, the perpetrators all too often enjoy the benefits of plausible deniability.

Another uncomfortable fact may help explain why U.N. bodies have been reluctant to directly address the issue, as this fact concerns the role of various authorities in many Member States. Insurgents, terrorists, criminals and others all murder journalists. But, according to CPJ research, when it comes to journalist murders since 1992, government authorities are suspected of being responsible for more than one-fourth, or no less than 28 percent of all journalists' murders worldwide.

This fact may help explain why nearly half of the Member States failed to respond to requests by the UNESCO Director-General for voluntary information on the status of judicial inquiries as of mid-2013, according to the UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development report earlier this year.

It seems that the U.N. action plan has come to a crossroads. We have successfully brought more attention to the issue of journalists being imprisoned, attacked and killed. That is a very big and important step, and it is a credit to the work of many working both within and outside of U.N. bodies.

To go forward from here, however, we need the cooperation of Member States. We need you to provide data on the status of judicial progress in journalist murders, whether or not much, or even any progress has been made. But let's at least start taking note of the issue to begin a real discussion.

And we need you, the individual Member States, to each commit to taking concrete measures to finally start bringing the murderers of journalists to justice. No one suggests that would be easy. But nothing would do more to advance the goals we have agreed to here.

Thank you.