Human Rights Committee: New resolution on the safety of journalists

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On 29 September 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a new resolution on the safety of journalists ('the Resolution') (for a recent Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the safety of journalists, see IRIS 2016-5/3). Shortly after its adoption, the Council of Europe and the human rights organisation Article 19 welcomed the new Resolution as "ground-breaking" and "comprehensive".

The Resolution builds upon multiple prior resolutions and decisions of the United Nations (UN) entities that focus on the safety and protection of journalists specifically or more generally on the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy in the digital age, and human rights on the Internet (see IRIS 2011-10/1). The Resolution reiterates the previously expressed unequivocal condemnations of all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers, and the prevailing impunity for such attacks and violence, and calls upon states to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers. Likewise, the Resolution urges states to do their utmost to prevent violence, threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, and to create and maintain, in law and practice, a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference.

In addition to focusing on general issues of physical safety and integrity of journalists in peacetime and during armed conflicts, the Resolution draws particular attention to a number of specific issues that the UN has not yet sufficiently addressed. First, the Resolution specifically and unequivocally condemns specific sexual and gender-based attacks on women journalists, both online and offline. Second, it calls for the immediate and unconditional release of journalists and media workers who have been arbitrarily arrested or detained. Third, the Resolution calls upon States to pay particular attention to the safety of journalists during the periods surrounding elections. Fourth, the Resolution emphasises the vital importance in the digital age of encryption and anonymity tools for journalists to exercise freely their work and their enjoyment of their rights to freedom of expression and to privacy. Accordingly, it calls upon states not to interfere with the use of such technologies unless the restrictions used comply with international human rights law.

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The Resolution concludes by requesting the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare, in consultation with the states, a report with an overview of available mechanisms concerned with ensuring the safety of journalists and to submit it to the Human Rights Council at its 39th session.

Resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the safety of journalists, A/HRC/33/L.6, 26 September 2016

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/33/L.6

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