



Iowa High Model United Nations
Legal Committee
Rights and Protection of Journalists in Conflict Areas
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Background

Since 1992, 896 journalists have been killed covering conflicts in the most dangerous parts of the world. Most of these deaths were not the result of accidents or crossfire but murder at the hands of political groups. The most dangerous country for journalists is currently Iraq. The deadliest year in the last 20 years was 2009 with 74 journalists killed. Besides those journalists killed in the field, many each year are imprisoned. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists “CPJ's worldwide census of imprisoned journalists finds 179 reporters, editors, and photojournalists behind bars, an increase of more than 20 percent over last year and the highest tally since 1996. Iran is the world's worst jailer of the press, with 42 behind bars”.

What Has Been Done/Past U.N. Actions

In June 2010, the United Nations Human Rights Council hosted a panel on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts. The main issue discussed by the panel was the issue of impunity in cases of harm done against journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, since 1992 88% of murder cases ended in complete impunity, with no justice for the deceased journalists. The panel confirmed that the “existing body of law should be sufficient to protect journalists even when they report from war zones, but they were unanimous in their conclusion that in almost all cases the perpetrators of crimes against journalists escaped justice”. “Frank La Rue, the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression told the Council that this serious problem cannot be addressed effectively unless there is a willingness on the part of States to address the protection of journalists at a national level. ‘Preventing impunity,’ he said, ‘is the most important deterrent...’”.

The subsequent report by the Human Rights Council referred to Security Council resolution 1738 (2006) that condemned attacks against journalists and called for an end to such practices. Journalists in the field are classified as civilians and as such, crimes against them are considered war crimes and violate the Geneva Convention.

Possible Solutions

The Human Rights Council panel proposed several possible solutions to this growing problem. “Hedayat Abdel Nabi, President of Press Emblem Campaign, said that the time had come to develop guidelines through a working group that would lead to a global agreement for the protection of journalists.” Suggestions included having States train their armed forces to protect journalists. The obligation of States to investigate violence against journalists was stressed. It was also recommended that the Human Rights Council assist States to rebuild their legal framework to create conditions that will help protect freedom of expression.

Questions to Consider

Are the existing laws sufficient to protect journalists in conflict areas and elsewhere?

Which, if any of the solutions proposed by the panel would protect journalists most? Which is the most feasible?

What effect does the legal designation of “civilian” have on the rights and protection of journalists?
Should they be given a different designation?

Consulted/Recommended Sources

www.cpj.org/reports/

<http://www.cpj.org/killed/>

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ProtectionJournalistsinarmedconflicts.aspx>

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/15session/A.HRC.15.54_en.pdf

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ProtectionJournalistsinarmedconflicts.aspx>

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/681/60/PDF/N0668160.pdf?OpenElement>



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