



**DSBMUN**  
**General Assembly**

**The Future of Globalisation**

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**Topic:** Addressing the Issue of Freedom of Press

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## II. Introduction

Freedom of press is something everyone needs, yet not everyone has access to. Journalism is widely referred to as the 4<sup>th</sup> branch of government and should serve to keep it in check, however, many countries have polarized newspapers, censored independent media or repressed the freedom of press, own media outlets and are in control of what is getting printed. Thus efficiently eliminating the system of checks and balances within a nation.

With backsliding democracies, polarization, echo-chambers and new debates on freedom of speech, are leading us to doubt the very foundations of press freedom. Constant surveillance and censorship of governments often blind the public, leaving the truth to be defended by the very brave few. Many journalists have been imprisoned or even assassinated for reporting issues that the government or certain individuals in power, were trying to hide from the public eye.

Securing a freedom of press and offering security to the journalists is something the General Assembly will have to attempt, in order to provide the public with the truth and with better quality journalism, to educate it. Especially at times like these, when according to the UNESCO the global trend to press freedom is down spiraling. With new restrictions for the media, more so online and large amount of mis and dis information the public trust in the media is decreasing every year.

## III. Definitions of Key Terms

### Freedom of press

The right of newspapers, magazines, etc., to report news without being controlled by the government. It correlates with the human right of freedom of expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, it is necessary to protect this right and stop any further attempts of governmental overreach, trying to silence journalists from reporting events, they deem unfavourable.

### Assassination

The act of murdering a prominent or important individual, usually with a political motive. An example of a journalist assassination is the one of Anna Politkovskaya, who was an ardent critic of Russia's actions during the Chechnya wars, as well as Putin's regime in general and who was shot in her apartment building in 2006.

### Checks and balances

Counterbalancing influences in a system, that usually ensure a balance of power. This is typically implemented in democratic political systems, in order to prevent an authoritarian rule and provide checks for the government.

### Journalism

Is the collection, preparation, and distribution of news and related commentary and feature materials. Distribution can take place on different platforms, including radio, print, as well as news broadcasts and internet media platforms. Sometimes dubbed the fourth branch of government, media is an important way to keep those at the top in check.

### Investigative journalism

It is an in-depth, sometimes undercover research of a topic, that is concealed, either deliberately by someone, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts. It is often extremely perilous, as many people in positions of power fight against these journalists constantly putting them in danger. It is crucial that this type of journalism continues to exist, due to the fact that it contributes greatly to freedom of expression and knowledge of the public.

- **Mis vs Dis-information**
- Both of these terms are used to describe fake news, yet there is a big difference in their meaning. Misinformation is misleading false information spread by an actor, who thinks it is true. Disinformation however, is false information that is deliberately deceptive.

## IV. History of the Topic

### Threats to journalists

UNESCO estimates that there have been 400 killings of journalists between 2016 and 2020. What's more around 9 out of every 10 perpetrators managed to get away with it. Other explicit dangers to journalists are threats, including death-threats, assassination attempts, political repressions and prison-terms, kidnapping, as well as retaliation to close family and friends among other. However, there are also implicit dangers to those

who unravel the truth behind diverse political regimes. These include the fear that many journalists feel, leading to self-censure, or being ostracized from their social circles.

When faced with these sort of threats and fears, some seek asylum in other countries or go away from the political scene, while others continue to work under a government that tries to silence them.

Although an overall decrease has been seen in the assassinations of journalists in the last decade, as the killings decreased in Africa and the Arab region, they have increased in the Latin America and Caribbean region, as well as in Asia and the Pacific, in comparison to the data collected 5 year prior.

Another important development we have seen in the last 5 years is the increase in journalist killings outside of countries experiencing wars, seeing as well over half of the mentioned killings took place in those regions.

The assassinations of a journalist is only the part of the problem. The other issue with these types of killing is how the deaths are treated. In 2021 87% of journalist killings cases have been unresolved or unreported. Low visibility, practically no investigation lead us to pushing the problem under the rug.

### Government owned media outlets and censorship

Moreover, there exist many other significant issues the global community is face with. Among them is governments owning media outlets, or the governments providing these with funding and having an incentive reason to control the information and censor parts of it

### Regimes, conflicts and post conflict nations

Freedom of press is put in danger in countries battling war, its consequences or the rise of populism. Countries in a state of war face a possibility of the government introducing more surveillance and censorship, under the pretext of a state of emergency. Post conflict nations oftentimes develop into new dictatorships, where while rebuilding the country, those in power enact censorship laws and oppress the press. Populism on the other hand, often blurs the line between press freedom, censorship, hate speech and so on.

### Free speech and hate speech

Lastly, a topic that member states need to address is hate speech. There exist various differing opinions surrounding the topic, and whilst some believe hate speech is essential for free speech, other are fully against it as it threatens to escalate conflicts. Countries have different legislations on this issue, and some nations avoid this grey-area as a whole.

The UN however believes, that the solution to hate speech is not by limiting or restricting it, but by imposing countermeasures. This means by having a reasonable number of counter-messages and other forms of “retaliation”. The exceptions to this norm are naturally messages of hostility, those that incite violence and call for discrimination, as these types of messages are forbidden under criminal law.

## V. Timeline of Events

1766

Sweden becomes the first country to introduce what is now recognized as the world’s first law supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information. Today, Sweden ranks as one of the highest countries on the press freedom index.

1948

Under the UN’s declaration of Human Rights, freedom of opinion and freedom of expression become universal human rights. The declaration passes with 48 votes in favour and abstentions from 6 soviet nations, South Africa and Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that the 6 soviet abstentions are widely attributed not to the freedom of press article, but are due to the freedom of movement article.

1985

Founding of Reporters without borders

2010

The start of the case of Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, a non-profit website which publishes leaked information. Accused of unlawfully helping former U.S. Army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning to steal thousands of classified diplomatic cables and military files, which were published by WikiLeaks in 2010. He now faces a possible 175-year prison sentence, due to 17 charges of espionage.

The classified documents contained information on US troops killing civilians in Afghanistan and the records of prisoners being tortured, both being atrocious war crimes. The US claimed that these documents could put lives at risk. There has been a lot of international backlash over his arrest and many protest for his freedom.

Covid 2020

The covid pandemic has delivered a substantive blow to freedom of press. Many countries, especially in eastern Europe, such as Slovakia, Poland or Bulgaria, have substantively fallen on the freedom of press index in the times of covid 19, as during the time of the pandemic censorship laws in many countries became harsher and more restrictive. Although it was usually to stop the spread of mis and disinformation, it

could easily be corrupted by those in power to further silence their critics and opposition.

While these measures were heavily criticized by some, they were thought to be sensible by others, seeing as freedom of press lead to the spread of the aforementioned mis and disinformation. Thousands of false facts targeting the web, the president suggesting injecting spray in the blood and several other fake news, were only made possible by press freedom.

### 2022 Ukraine

Ukraine is said to have catastrophic consequences for press freedom. Firstly, Russia setting a handful of new laws in place. Among them is the law about the spread of fake information about the countries' armed forces. Naturally what is true or untrue is something decided by the Kremlin, meaning calling the Ukraine invasion a war instead of a "special operation" would fall under the scope of disinformation, with sentences being up to 15 years of jail term.

But apart from the devastating effects it had on the already largely controlled Russian media, it has had consequences in invaded parts of Ukraine, where local broadcasters are forced to spread pro-Kremlin views, or otherwise shut down.

## VI. Major Countries Involved

*Reporters Without Borders (RSF)* is an international non-profit organization, which has a consultative status in the UN.

### Asia

#### Russia

Ever since the beginning of the Soviet Union Russia has had a difficult history with press freedom. Although after its collapse there was some improvement upon the harsh Soviet laws, since the start of Putin's reign there are evermore harsh laws imposed on journalists. The Russian government seems to stop at nothing in order to protect its legitimacy, going as far as assassinating journalists.

Some of the most prominent cases have happened during the Chechnya wars, where several war crimes were committed. Many reporters seeked to throw some light on the matter, one of these was Politkovskaya, a harsh critic of the war and Putin, who received several threats and experienced a false execution before being shot in her apartment building in 2006.

Although Russia's constitution states the following: "The freedom of the mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited." There have been several laws put in place that undermine this statement. Especially, since the start of the pandemic, due

to the fact that the government has had more legitimate reasons to implement more surveillance in an already watchful system.

### China

While the guarantee of “freedom of speech [and] of the press” is part of the Chinese constitution, it is routinely violated by the government itself. As a country that ranks 177 out of 180 on the freedom of speech and press scale, it comes as no surprise, that it is one of the largest journalist captors in the world, with over 120 journalists imprisoned. This is a tactic often used by China, in which they accuse independent journalists of such things as espionage or “3 pocket crimes” a term used to describe offenses that are so broadly defined, that they can be applied to almost any activity. The journalists are often put into solitary confinement for six months under “Residential Surveillance” at a Designated Location, where no trace of any legal representation is present.

The government views the press as a mouthpiece for the party and not an independent part of society that will provide checks for the government, but rather provide support for it. It shows in the fact that the largest newspaper ‘People’s Daily’ is owned by the CCP.

But as technologies develop their control must go in step with time. With the rise of internet, Beijing introduced “The Great Firewall”, a system used to block media websites, such as google or instagram, or certain aspects of these. Even educational websites such as Wikipedia have been blocked by the great firewall in 2019.

Lastly, one cannot keep Hong-Kong unaddressed. In the one country two systems Hong Kong was supposed to be able to keep its key freedoms for half a century after the British handover in 1997. In 2002 it was still ranked as one of the freest media locations in Asia, as well as on a global level. In recent years, despite all promises, it has been plummeting down, as independent media reporters are accused of terrorism and foreign propaganda while the government proceeds to slowly shut down independent media outlets.

### Taiwan

Taiwan has ranked well on the freedom of press index. However, the environment the journalists work in, has commonly been defined as “Toxic” where they are underpaid and seek sensationalism, instead of pursuing actual reporting, due to a lack of funds. Problems with mainland China also take their toll on Taiwanese press freedom. Beijing has often been accused of putting pressure on Taiwanese media owners, who have business interests in mainland China, as well as being suspected of organizing disinformation campaigns

### DPRK

As a country with some of the harshest restrictions on voicing opinions, it comes as no surprise that it ranks last on the freedom of press index. In the absence of pluralism, foreign and independent media, DPRK’s socialist party uses the media to voice their opinion and support for them often going as far as to spread disinformation.

As for other types of media and general control of the information that the public has access to, the situation doesn't seem any brighter. Without access to foreign media, without internet, but only an intranet available to them, and a constant threat of having your phone checked. Despite the harsh the sentences for spreading or even having foreign media, people in DPRK still sometimes manage to get ahold of news from around the world, by chiming in on foreign media television or radio channels.

## North America

### US

The First Amendment permits information, ideas and opinions without interference, constraint or prosecution by the government. Is what the American Constitution states. Nevertheless, according to RSF (Reporters without borders) the press was largely discredited during Trumps administration, something President Biden is trying to solve. Yet most critics of the US press agree that the main problems lie in the political polarization. It is a phenomenon in which opposing views grow more extreme and further apart leaving no room for the centre, therefore eliminating any chance for discussion or cooperation.

## Europe

### Denmark

Ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> on the freedom of press index, Denmark is regarded as one of the freest countries in that sense. With a variety of news sources, despite the small population increase the trust of the public in the media.

For print, online and broadcast media, Denmark has a council, whose 8 members are appointed by the president of the Supreme Court and journalists' associations. This serves to reduce and eliminate ethical violations, due to the fact that if a media outlet commits such a violation, the council can order them to publish a ruling and unless they do so they can face up to 4 months in jail.

### Norway

Norway is the Country with the most freedom of press, as its legislation allows it, in addition to having the media work under a common code of ethics. Its constitution guarantees said freedom as well as the freedom of access to information, both of which the government respects, leading to a good press and a well-informed public.

### Sweden

A country that is believed to have the first law protecting freedom of speech, it remains among the top countries on the freedom of press index. With restrictions such as hate speech and child porn, Sweden protects the freedom of speech and press of its citizens.

## Hungary

Since President Orbán came to power, he has continuously attacked pluralism in the media, as well as its independence. As many other authoritarian leaders, Orbán has used the COVID-19 pandemic to further restrict independent media, with the pretext of reducing the dissemination of mis and disinformation.

A large proportion of news outlets are owned by oligarchs who support Orbán's party. This makes it an uneven playing field for independent news, as they receive much less funding and constantly face the threat of becoming a government mouthpiece or even being shut down completely.

A great example for this is "Index", which once was one of the most popular independent news websites in Hungary. Then, however, Miklós Vaszily, a pro-Orbán businessman, took a 50% stake in the firm that controls Index's advertising and revenue. Just months later, the chief editor was fired. This however led to over 70 staff members resigning and saying they would not work for an Orbán propaganda site, and that the sacking was a clear interference and an attempt to apply pressure on the site. This is one of the many examples of European countries lacking press freedom.

## Middle East

### Saudi Arabia

The nation censors books, newspapers, magazines, films, television. The Saudi government closely monitors media and restricts it under official state law. The freedom of press is also limited on online media platforms through a content filter.

## VII. Questions a Resolution must answer

As it is visible throughout the globe, freedom of press has taken many blows in the last decade. Therefore, the resolution must answer the following questions.

Firstly, how will the member states mitigate the problems of censoring and surveillance. A possible solution would be a global checks and balances system, yet it is clear that many nations facing censorship, will not willingly share their data.

Secondly, how will the nations further ensure the security of freedom of press in countries where it is in danger and dire need of protection. These states are backsliding democracies, where freedom of press was once prominent, yet slowly becomes more and more limited under the state's control. This fragile state of press freedom is also widely faced by new democracies and countries which have recently undergone government collapses or coups d'état, as the new government, in hopes of gaining support or wanting to be seen as legitimate will often corrupt the press and transform it into a government mouthpiece.

Thirdly, the delegates will have to find a way to guarantee the safety of those working in the media, as they suffer from constant attacks and even from assassinations, risking their lives for freedom of press.

Lastly, the resolution will have to address the issues of mis/disinformation. These are crucial and are a problem for all member states. An example is the US Newspaper, Fox News. Being one of the most popular broadcasts in the world it spread mis and disinformation in the times of the pandemic, and a large part of the audience believed what was being said. The harmful effects of false information must be mitigated now.

## **VIII. Possible Solutions and Considerations for the Future**

### **International monitoring and shared information**

Increasing international monitoring of freedom of press which can be done through such means as, gathering information in official visits and countries providing more information, instead of leaving this job to agencies like RSF, is one of the possible solutions.

By allowing this, it would be much easier to locate the source of the problem in one or other country, because ethics violations or governmental suppression would be brought to light before the international community.

As many countries have legislation that allows freedom of press, yet the governments constantly violate these laws, having a third-party monitor, fine or impose court rulings to avoid press suppression would increase a governments accountability and visibility of what they do, as well as the problems they face.

## **IX. Conclusion**

Guaranteeing the freedom of press is essential for the further development of society, as it is a basic human right, as is the right to freedom of opinion, the right to safety and freedom of religion which are intrinsically tied with freedom of press. It is important to have some laws in place, as the spread of hate speech that can translate into violence and false information are on the rise. It is important also, to provide the public with correct information.

Nevertheless, freedom of speech must be guaranteed, as otherwise a government is left without checks and balances, losing its connection with the public. As the fourth branch

of government the press must not act as its mouthpiece, but its critic and a reporter of what is happening, serving primarily the public.

Providing safety, freedom and education is crucial, especially when the world is faced with backsliding democracies, political instability, polarization, the rise of populism and many more issues that have to be covered by the press. Freedom of press is a human right, as valid as any other, so it must exist, simply for the reason that it is the connection between the people and those who rule over them, a loss in this connection will inevitably result in the loss of freedom as a whole.

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