

THE ALEXANDRIA DECLARATION ON PROTECTION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

In recent years, the incidence of internet hate has increased at an enormous rate. No other professional group is subjected to as many threats as journalists, and woman journalists are particularly vulnerable.

Female investigative reporters are often subjected to hate speech and threats, not only because they report on abuse of power, but because they are women. Undemocratic governments, religious organisations, organised crime, and extreme political organisations and individuals use threats and hate speech to silence the women throughout the MENA-region who are making their voices heard. This constitutes not only a threat to quality journalism, but also to equality and ultimately to democracy itself.

Online abuse must be dealt with in the broader context of gender discrimination and violence against women to ensure that the same rights that people have offline must be protected online.

We, women Arab journalists, from Morocco in the West till Jordan in the East, coming together at the Swedish Institute in Alexandria at a seminar commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act, the oldest in the world and an inspiration to many democracies, see an urgent need to acknowledge and respond:

We recognise both the need for freedom of expression and the problem of hate and threats in the society of today.

We expect associations and unions of journalists to take an active role in responding to threats against journalists, in particular women journalists.

We ask our colleagues, men and women, not to stay silent when women colleagues are subjected to threat, harassment and intimidation.

We request that publishers, unions and association of journalists work closely with legislators to improve the protection of journalists in vulnerable situations.

We invite colleagues to form networks of support and protection of journalists; and publishers and international donors to recognize the need for psychosocial and legal support.

We encourage leaders of civil society, business and religion to stand by women journalists who are defying death threats, sexual violations, physical and psychological abuse, hate speech or online intimidation while pursuing their professional calling to safeguard democracy.

We urge governments in the MENA-region and beyond to fulfil their fundamental responsibility on human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration and all the conventions developed thereafter.

We appreciate the Swedish government initiative to raise global attention on the threats and expect that this will materialize in improved support structures, including a UN Special Rapporteur with a mandate to monitor crimes against journalists and freedom of speech.

This declaration was adopted at a seminar organised by the Fojo Media Institute and the Swedish Institute in Alexandria 1-3 November 2016, in connection with the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalist, 2 November.

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