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Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Department for International Law, Human Rights
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Office of the High Commissioner for
Human Rights

Information from Sweden on the cooperation with United Nations agencies, organizations, funds and programmes and other steps taken within the framework of the UN Plan of Action to address the safety of journalists, both online and offline

Safety for, and combating impunity for those who threaten or exercise violence against journalists are areas that must be prioritised to a greater extent in multilateral fora and in individual countries. Threats and violence online and offline, and even killings of journalists are a growing problem that constitutes a threat to freedom of expression and democratic debate. Women journalists are often particularly subjected to threats or violence. Accountability for this type of crime and violations needs to be ensured. In armed conflicts across the globe, journalists are the targets of summary executions, violence and threats of violence.

Sweden has long been working to improve the safety of journalists. This is a clear priority within our foreign policy and involves reactive and proactive measures, such as support for training initiatives to promote independent journalism in general, to deal with and prevent threats and violence. In many cases, corruption and lack of rule of law play a central role in the safety of journalists.

The Swedish government therefore continues to work to improve the safety of journalists, partly by strengthening accountability for violence, threats of violence and other types of harassment against persons who exercise their right to freedom of expression and opinion.

The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has provided funding to *Fojo Media Institute* and the *Swedish Institute of International Affairs* for their pilot study on

the possibilities for setting up a centre for preventing and combating violence, hatred and online threats against journalists. The study focuses on media outlets and individual journalists, in particular women journalists, in various regions. The findings suggest that the situation of women journalists is very similar to that of women human rights defenders, i.e. they are more often than their male colleagues subjected to violence, threats and incitement to hatred, not seldom of a sexual nature.

The Swedish government has also supported a course for journalists at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo. The course aims at strengthening knowledge of the protection that IHL provides for media.

Sweden is also part of the Groups of Friends for the Safety of Journalists in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna and actively supports the resolutions on this topic in the UN, both in Geneva and in New York. In addition, Sweden has been leading the Human Rights Council resolution on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet, most recently presented at the 38th session of the HRC (June 2018). The resolution was ground-breaking in the sense that it was the first agreed text establishing that human rights apply online as well as offline.

Sweden supports many different actions for press freedom and the safety of journalists, and is currently the largest donor of voluntary contributions to UNESCO (800 million SEK).

The Swedish government, through Sida, financially supports several organizations working with freedom of expression online as well as offline. Among these organizations are Association for Progressive Communications, Article 19, and Access Now.

Finally, Sweden is a staunch supporter of the OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media, and has since 2015 provided financial support to several projects aimed at mapping, preventing and combating the vulnerability of female journalists on the internet. A particularly successful example is the project *Safety of Female Journalists Online*.

In 2017 the Swedish Government adopted a National Action Plan named “Defending free speech” to address threats and hate speech against journalists, elected representatives and artists. The Action Plan aims at

strengthening three main areas: measures for deeper knowledge of threats and hatred, support for those exposed, and strengthen the work of the judicial system. An important purpose was to underline the need for preventive measures such as increasing knowledge and awareness about the situation – and measures contributing in developing policy's and routines for handling threats and hatred. The overall aim is to safeguard an active democratic debate and avoid self-censorship.

For example, the Government has tasked the Media Institute Fojo at Linneaus University to develop support for journalists and editors that are subject to threats and hate. This includes building up a knowledge bank and initiate a service offering advice and support. Journalist freelancers and smaller media companies are important target groups.

In 2016 the Swedish Government tasked the University of Gothenburg to carry out a study mapping Swedish journalists' exposure to threats, harassments and violence. This quantitative study was published in 2017. It showed that around every fourth journalist has been subjected to threats, violence or harassment. The Action Plan builds on studies but also on dialogues with stakeholders through a series of round tables. This process included national and local media, the political parties, NGO's and public agencies, for example.