Input by the Department of Global Communications
Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly on Safety of Journalists
17 May 2019

The Department of Global Communications (DGC) carried out a diverse range of activities around the world in support of the Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, using its multilingual and multimedia platforms and outlets, and the global network of UN Information Centres (UNICs) to disseminate messages, raise awareness and mobilise support globally and at the country and regional levels.

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

The Department provided full support to the marking of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists in November 2018, and the related Truth Never Dies campaign of UNESCO. In the run-up to the Day, the multimedia, multilingual media tool kit on the campaign developed by UNESCO was widely disseminated by DGC, including its network of UNICs, through their mailing lists to the media, governments, the civil society and the public at large, and on their digital platforms. A video message of the Secretary-General for the day was recorded and disseminated widely. The observance of the Day, both at the UN Headquarters in New York and UNESCO's flagship event in Beirut, Lebanon, were covered by DGC's news and social media teams on all their platforms and channels, in the six official languages plus Kiswahili, Portuguese and Hindi. The Secretary-General's message was highlighted in all the stories.

World Press Freedom Day

The Department also continued, in collaboration with UNESCO, to organize the annual World Press Freedom Day observance at the UN headquarters in New York. Under the theme, "Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation," the event in May 2019 brought together over 500 representatives from the Member States, UN entities, civil society, youth organizations, academia, as well as the media. The event highlighted the UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, awarded to Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo who were put behind the bars in Myanmar for their investigative reporting.

The DGC's news and social media teams provided extensive coverage of the World Press Freedom Day. The event in New York was carried live by UNTV and UN Webcast. Multimedia stories, also on UNESCO' main observance event held in Addis Ababa, were written and produced in the six official languages and in Kishwahili, Portuguese and Hindi, and disseminated through DGC's platforms and channels, and to partner broadcasters; and an interview was conducted with Moez Chakchouk, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, from Addis Ababa. The Secretary-General's video message was disseminated widely, also by the UNICs around the world.

DGC's social media team also followed and cross-promoted on its popular platforms the social media messages and campaigns of UN entities on safety of journalists and press freedom, in the six official languages and in Kiswahili, Portuguese and Hindi.

The Department maintains a dedicated page for each of the Days on the main website, un.org, in the six official languages. They were updated with information on the annual observance, posters and banners, toolkits, schedules of events and messages for the day.

UN Information Centre (UNICs)

The UNICs have played a vital role in helping raising awareness and mobilising support at regional and country levels. Together with a wide range of partners, including the UN Country Teams and the local UN Communications Groups, UNICs around the world actively promoted the messages of the UN on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, including the UN Plan of Action.

The messages of the Secretary-General for the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists and the World Press Freedom Day were disseminated, and in many cases translated into local languages. Many UNICs organized their own activities to mark the Days. For example, during the reporting period, UNICs in Antananarivo, Beirut, Bujumbura, Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Moscow, Ouagadougou, Rio de Janeiro, Tashkent, Tehran and Yaoundé mobilised support for the Days through a range of activities that included workshops for university students and roundtables with the participation of journalists.

Working with national broadcasters, some UNICs also took to the airwaves to highlight the messages of the Secretary-General and the work of the UN on safety of journalists. For example, in December 2018, UNIC Dar es Salaam contributed to a Kiswahili radio programme of the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation to discuss the work of the UN in the country, including on the issues of the freedom of the press and human rights. In May 2018, the Italian Desk at UN Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) Brussels worked with RAI, the national public broadcasting company of Italy, to disseminate the video message of the Secretary-General on World Press Freedom Day. Many UNICs also engaged the audiences in the digital space, for example mobilising support for the #TruthNeverDies campaign of UNESCO.

The Department continued throughout the year to highlight the issue in many other creative and impactful ways. For example, since November 2018, as part of its Ciné ONU programme, the UNRIC Brussels worked with government, public and private partners to screen "Under the Wire," a film about two journalists covering the Syrian conflict. These screening events were followed by a panel discussion in five Ciné ONU events in Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom, which were organized jointly with UNESCO and external partners such as the British Museum, the UK Mission, Irish Aid, etc.

International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East and the annual Training Programme for Palestine Journalists

In the context of General Assembly-mandated special information programme on the question of Palestine, the Department regularly draws attention to the issue of journalists' protection, including through the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East and the annual Training Programme for Palestine Journalists.

The 2018 Seminar, held from 5 to 6 September in Moscow, dedicated one of its four panel discussions to the theme of protecting journalists covering conflicts. The panel featured journalists from Israel and Palestine, along with experts from UNESCO, Committee to Protect Journalists and Amnesty International. The Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also participated in the discussion.

As part of its training programme for Palestine journalists, the Department works with the New America's Open Technology Institute, based in Washington D.C., to organize a workshop focusing on digital safety and online protection. The issue of safety and protection has been a recurring theme in the training. In one of the earlier programmes, participants produced, as part of their graduation project, a short film about the dangers that face journalists while covering conflict.

Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship

The issue is also regularly featured in another training program organized by DGC, the annual Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalism Fellowship for young journalists from developing countries. In 2018, the programme commissioned the Freedom of the Press Foundation to conduct a digital security training for participants. The programme also connects fellows with press freedom advocates at the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Throughout the year, DGC's news and media outlets featured public pronouncements by the Secretary-General, senior UN officials, UN entities and human rights experts on the issues, including on individual cases.

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