

Security Council

BCNMUN VII

Security of the Press: Ensuring Protection for Journalists in Latin
America

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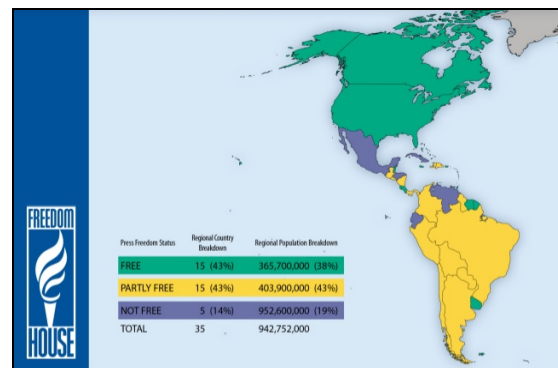
Topic: #3

Chair: Joe Alkubeh

Position: President

Introduction

Journalists in many regions and countries have their work censored, forbidden from being published, or are restricted from entry to certain areas. Those territories include areas of conflict and areas where governments or organizations do not want the rest of the world to know what is going on inside of them. Governments and organizations enforce certain restrictions on the press because of several reasons.



One reason is that they might criticize the government or organization, and that might cause the public to protest against the actions that certain organizations are taking. For example, if journalists report that certain government officials are corrupt, the public might start asking for changes in the government and the removal and persecution of the targeted officials. This would destabilize the government and could result in the removal of certain officials, especially those that are corrupt. Another reason is that an illegal organization could be criticized or reported. For example, if a drug trafficking gang which is very common in Latin America was being criticized then that may cause the journalist to be oppressed by two sides. The first side is the government because when the public finds out about the brutality or other illegal actions that those gangs might be committing, then the government is pressured into taking action against those mafias. Government officials could be strongly against combatting those gangs because they themselves could be benefiting from the illegal actions that the mafias are committing. Actions that the government officials could take are putting journalists in prison or even having them being sentenced to death. The second side that might oppress the journalists is the mafia or illegal organization. Because those organizations do not have official power that they could persecute the journalists with such as throwing journalists into prison, they take a more brutal approach. Actions that mafias may take (and have taken in the past) include murdering the journalists or kidnapping them.

The issue that remains today is the lack of protection that journalists receive. Being a journalist in many regions of the world today could be one of the most dangerous professions, especially in Latin America. Freedom and Security of the Press is not only publishing without restrictions, but also not fearing the consequences that might follow. Because of the technological advances in our world today, any journalist wishing to reach the public and make a difference can be tracked and located. This leaves many journalists vulnerable to whom they criticize. For example, when Mexican journalist Cecilio Pineda Brito criticized the Mexican government, he was tracked and killed. This situation does not only happen with journalist criticism, but also can happen when journalists try entering areas where gangs have high influence and want to hide what is going on inside certain areas. This happened on the Ecuadorian-Colombian border with a media team of three where they were kidnapped when they tried reporting the drug situation on the border between the two countries.

Although freedom of the press is seen as an essential element in all democracies, even the world's biggest ones support or restrict freedom of the press based on their needs. For instance, when foreign powers are looking to take military or monetary action (ex. supporting certain groups or imposing economic sanctions) against another country, they might rely on the media to help them find excuses before the public. For example, when the United States went to war against Iraq in 2003, they did not only rely on the reports stating that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of mass destruction, but also on the media's publications that Saddam Hussein's regime was oppressing the Iraqi citizens. On the other hand, governments would like to limit freedom of the press when they or their allies are being criticized, especially if it is from a local news agency because of the fear of an uprising or rebellion.

Definition of Key Terms

Press

All the media and agencies that print, broadcast, or gather and transmit news, including newspapers, newsmagazines, radio and television news bureaus, and wire services.

Espionage

The use of spying by governments/organizations in order to acquire the plans or secrets of other governments/organizations.

Freedom of Expression

The ability of an individual, organization, or community to express their opinions without censorship or the consequence of legal punishment.

Defamation Law

A law in the United States that protects an individual and organizations from the spread of false information and protects from slander. Most countries have their own version of the Defamation Law.

Background Information

Latin America is one of the worst regions in the world for journalists in regards to journalist safety. Murder, kidnapping, and incarceration rates are all high, and general oppression has been a long standing problem. There have been many movements in Latin America to protest the oppression of journalists by the government and to protest the little action done by their governments to protect journalists from terrorist organizations.

From the beginning of 2019 up to July, 9 journalists have been reported to be killed in Latin America. Mexico (7), Colombia (1), Honduras (1) (RSF). Up to July 2019, 5 journalists have been reported to be imprisoned in Latin America dishonestly by governments, this is aside from oppression by independent organizations. Brazil (1), Nicaragua (2), Venezuela (1), Peru (1) (RSF).

El Comercio Journalist Kidnapping

In March 2018, two journalists and a driver that worked for a Colombian Newspaper, “El Comercio,” were kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a Colombian Guerilla rebel group. The FARC is a terrorist group loyal to the Colombian Communist Party, actions they take include, bombings, assassinations, hijackings, and protection to drug smuggling which allows them to earn millions of dollars annually (Britannica). The journalists from “El Comercio” were on their way to do a documentary on the situation in the area of the Colombian-Ecuadorian border. The Colombian-Ecuadorian border at the time was known to be dangerous due to the presence of terrorist groups and the presence of mass drug and human trafficking.

RSF (Reporters Without Borders) launched an investigation and called for the responsible authorities to take action. The Ecuadorian President, Lenin Moreno, said he would give the rebels a 12-hour ultimatum to send proof of the lives of the hostages or else he would authorize military action along with the Colombian armed forces, and a photo of the two journalists and driver was sent out to the media within those 12 hours. Following investigations concluded that the journalists and driver were assassinated, but neither the Ecuadorian or Colombian government took action in response (Nalvarte).

Caracas Journalist Protest

On September 23, 2018 a group of journalists organized a protest in Caracas, Venezuela demanding respect for freedom of the press. The protest was organized mainly in response to the “El Comercio Journalist Kidnapping” in Ecuador along with other abuse directed towards the press such as the imprisonment and harassment of the Venezuelan press by the police and intelligence forces. Venezuelan authorities “regularly block news outlets and social media or arrest critics who speak out online,” (Nugent). The RSF ranked Venezuela as 148th out of 180 countries on the “Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index”

Cecilio Pineda Brito

Journalist Cecilio Brito was assigned to cover drug trafficking issues in the Mexican state of Guerrero, where drug trafficking gangs are extremely powerful. Brito knew that this task might be the reason for his death, but he still took it. Brito criticized both the drug trafficking gangs and the government stating that government officials had inner connections with the gangs. Those inner connections included government officials being bribed to let the gangs move freely and even officials having large shares within the gang’s money. Because of this, Brito was wanted by drug traffickers and other anonymous sides and received numerous death threats. An attempt to murder him by an anonymous party took place in September 2015. Mexican police deemed Brito at “high risk,” and he benefited from the “federal mechanism for protection for human rights defenders and journalists created in December 2012,” (IPS). In addition, Mexican police offered Brito a shelter in Mexico City that was considered safer than his dwelling at the time, but he declined the offer.

In the following October, the protection measures were canceled and later in March 2017, Cecilio Brito became the first journalist to be murdered in Mexico in 2017 which is deemed the most dangerous country in Latin America for journalists. Following Brito’s murder, Mexico faced six weeks of terror towards journalists in which three were killed and two were shot but survived. His murder followed by the six weeks of oppression towards journalists proved to the world that Mexico’s Federal Mechanism for journalist protection was not a working system and that Mexican and Latin American journalists needed a new source of protection.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Reporters Without Borders

Reporters Without Borders is a non-profit organization based in Paris, France that works on achieving protection of information and free press. RPS constantly calls for immediate action to be taken by local governments and the international community.

United States of America

Although the United States claims to have complete protection of freedom of expression as stated in the first amendment, many journalists and news agencies are punished due to the “Defamation Law” and its loopholes. The “Defamation Law” is a law in the United States that protects an individual and organizations from the spread of false information and protects from slander. In many cases in the United States, an organization claims to have been a victim of slander, simply in order to damage their competitors. With the US’s wide range of global influence, it influences its allies to keep their states’ media about anything unfavoring America’s Latin American allies to a minimum.

Russian Federation

The Russian government is projected to the world by its opponent’s media as an enemy to Freedom of the Press, this opens the Russian Federation to criticism from the world’s governments and civilians. However, the Russian government puts all its effort into shifting the world’s attention away from Russia by manipulating the media. For example, Russian media shows Guaydo’s supporters in Venezuela to be legitimate and portrays them as a way for the country to develop, as opposed to other western media. With Russia’s massive global influence, it’s allies keep their states’ media about anything unfavoring Russia’s Latin American allies to a minimum.

Peru

Journalists in Peru face oppression when they report corruption, social conflicts, and drug trafficking issues. Peruvian journalists also face a hard time against the manipulation of the defamation law that has been adopted in Peru. The “El Comercio” organization in Peru is the dominating media stream both online and in-print; dominating the news industry in Peru both economically and by influence.

Dominican Republic

Due to the fact that the media in the Dominican Republic is controlled by few parties, many journalists face difficulties in reporting freely. Journalists that tackle issues such as drug trafficking and/or corruption face threats of being put in prison or even murdered by drug trafficking-mafias and government officials. In 2016, Dominican journalists lived huge progress towards freedom when the legislation repealed a law stating that one can be put to prison if they violate the defamation law making it harder for officials to manipulate the laws as they wish.

Ecuador

After the “El Comercio Kidnapping” on the Colombian border, Ecuadorian journalists no longer benefit from the protection that they were promised by the constitution. After current Ecuadorian president, Lenin Moreno, was elected, tensions between the government and Ecuador’s private media went down as Moreno promised to amend the 2013 Organic Law on Communication. The LOC is a law that was passed by the National Assembly of Ecuador that consists of a series of restrictions on what the media can publish. However, this law was misused to fire journalists and put them in prison (Martinez).

Germany

Germany has expressed its interest in strengthening its relations with Latin American countries as they see them as natural allies (DW). Germany’s Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out in a press conference that Germany along with Latin American countries can work together to stand up for “democracy, human rights, and fair rules,” (DW).

Germany repeatedly announces its will to work with Latin Americans in order to promote peace and security throughout the Southern American countries.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1948	Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights With the adoption of the UDHR, the world has a universal document that can be used to guide governments in terms of what to accept and what not to by their governments in respect to the international community. With this document, Freedom of Expression is granted globally.
September 11, 2001	9/11 Terrorist Attack The US government uses the 9/11 Terrorist Attack as an excuse to access private information
2008-2013	Medium-Term Strategy 34 C/4 A medium-term strategy is adopted by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that includes working on making access to media available for everyone and helping achieve protection for journalists and news agencies in oppressing countries.
2015-2017	First Journalist murder of 2017 After journalist Cecilio Brito covered a drug trafficking case, his head was wanted for two years until he was the first journalist to be killed in Mexico in 2017.
March 2018	“El Comercio” Kidnapping A couple of journalists were kidnapped near the Colombian-Ecuadorian border while they were on their way to do a report on t the situation in the region.
September 23, 2018	Caracas Journalist Protest After many actions of oppression towards journalists and mainly the “El Comercio Kidnapping”, journalists and civilian supporters of Freedom of the Press protested in Caracas, Venezuela asking for immediate action to be taken to stop oppression of the media.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

November 13, 2017: Resolution ([A/C.3/72/L.35/Rev.1](#))

A resolution targeted to protect journalists. The resolution targets concerned United Nations departments, condemns actions oppressing journalists, and requests concerned departments and governments to take the actions they deemed necessary in order to ensure that all journalists within their member states are protected.

Year of Issue: 2007. Years of Effect: 2008-2013: Resolution: Medium-Term Strategy 34 C/4

A medium-term strategy is adopted by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that partially targets the help of access to media and the help of achieving Protection for journalists and news agencies in all member states.

May 27, 2015: Resolution ([S/RES/2222 \(2015\)](#))

This resolution was adopted in 2015 by the UN Security Council due to the oppression of civilians in conflict areas and specifically journalists and media professionals. The resolution calls upon member states to create and maintain laws that protect freedom of the media.

December 18, 2013: Resolution ([A/RES/68/163](#))

This resolution was adopted in the 68th session of the UN General Assembly in 2013. This resolution targets the oppression that takes place against journalists and encourages and calls upon member states to take actions mentioned in the resolution.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The Federation of Journalists of Latin America and the Caribbean (FEPLAC)

The FEPLAC is an organization that works on the protection of journalists and social workers in Latin America. Its goal is to provide all journalists with the protection needed in order to be able to provide to the world news that is uncensored and free from any media regulation.

Possible Solutions

Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists

A program started by the Mexican Government in 2008 with help from the United Nations in order to provide support and protection to any journalists and/or professional working to promote human rights that are deemed at risk. This can include being threatened by gangs such as the case of Cecilio Brito. The most common way of protection provided by the government is police patrols.

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