

Forum: Disarmament & International Security

Issue: Ensuring Global Press Freedom

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PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Hello delegates of the Disarmament and International Security Committee, My name is Eve and I am delighted to welcome you all to the topic of ensuring global press freedom.

It is with great honour to say that this is my first Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School MUN conference, in which I will be present throughout the two two days of the conference, to help anyone through the process if need be. I hope you all enjoy the experience of this conference as much as I know I will. Try to get as involved as you can and don't be afraid to get stuck in !

This study guide will cover topics such as the issues faced by the press in specific countries, as well as the threats against press freedom and censorship of the press, all in a summarised form, so I recommend also doing your own research on the topic to further your knowledge and understanding.

If you have any questions before the day, please feel free to contact me by email, at 3344@queenelizabeths.kent.sch.uk

Kind regards,
Eve Culver



TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In the modern age the right to freedom of expression is extremely fundamental, the rise of different media platforms has meant that these can now be used to both bring societies together, but also shape the public's opinion. The power and influence these mediums now hold means that any violation of this right is of much greater significance, and it is now crucial to maintain one's ability to exercise this right freely in order to preserve society.

This right is both recognized and guaranteed by almost all the United Nations' member states, yet limitations can still be put in place by national governments surrounding freedom of expression in the media. In some cases unfortunately these limitations can be extremely severe and can have major consequences on individuals such as journalists and activists who are involved with such media. Certain governments have attempted to control the media through both 'diplomatic' approaches such as introducing new laws, however also using less systematic approaches, both threatening and carrying out violence and arrests in many cases. In Argentina, Javier Milei, once elected as their president in December of 2023, boasted about his assault on the free press and went as far as to shut down the country's biggest news agency.

Unfortunately, the rise of practices such as populism (especially in the west) by politicians has further provoked an already increasing lack of trust for information sources that are unbiased, therefore further undermining the integrity of all media. Fake news has also become widespread in the political sphere, and heavily affects the trust between journalists and the public. It has started to lead to more individuals losing faith in all journalism, even those that are practising legitimately. Additionally, this growth of fake news has meant that it is now an effective defamation tactic, allowing people to ruin the reputation of media companies and journalists of opposing beliefs.

Furthermore, we are starting to see an increase of authoritarianism globally, which directly poses a threat to the preservation of freedom of expression, as leaders restrain opposition voices in order to maintain their authority. Over the last two years we have seen a sharp rise in killings of journalists, especially as a result of war. Since the 1st of January 2024, 37 journalists and media workers have been killed, with a further 573 that are currently detained. Wars such as between Israel and Gaza have been particularly deadly for journalists, with this war being more deadly than any single conflict since the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) began recording these numbers in 1990. The most dangerous place in Europe to work as a journalist is now Ukraine following Russia's invasion. However the issue extends beyond war zones, with journalists who are covering issues such as corruption and crime are at high risk of kidnapping, violent attacks or even murder.

To conclude, the press are currently at threat, from physical attacks such as kidnappings and murders, from legislation that aims to silence them, and from societal shifts that have led to a complete lack of trust for all news outlets. It is extremely important that we begin to make changes in order to reduce these issues. The press is a vital part of society that we are extremely reliant upon, if it is being threatened then so are our chances of a fair and just society.

KEY TERMS

Media: The primary means of communication for a collective. This incorporates all forms and mediums for narrowcasting or broadcasting, for example: television, radio, internet, newspapers and magazines.



Censorship: The prohibition of communication, speech or other information, which may be considered politically incorrect, harmful, or inconvenient as determined by institutions such as media outlets, governments or other forms of authority. The main motives for censorship are:

- Moral and Corporate
- Religious
- Political
- Military

Media Censorship: This is the suppression of any parts of news, films etc. that are considered harmful, politically unacceptable or a threat to security. Simply put, it is the suppression of open public discourse and free speech, or any information that is considered objectionable.

Journalist: A Journalist is someone who collects, writes and distributes news or information for newspapers, magazines, or news websites or prepares news to be broadcast to the public.

Freedom of the press: freedom of the media/press is the concept that it is a freely exercisable right to expression and communicate using various types of media, both printed and electronic - with this being especially important for published materials. This freedom is only truly met with the absence of interference from an overreaching state.

Fake News: also known as "yellow journalism", fake news is misleading or completely false information that is presented as legitimate news reporting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Origins of the Press (16th Century)

In 1605 the first weekly printed newspapers were published in Germany, these covered information including politics in Italy and Europe and were typically by the government, especially in France. In 1695 the English government decided to relax censorship on these newspapers which caused them to flourish in cities such as London, Boston and Philadelphia.

The concept of press freedom emerged almost simultaneously as the press itself became commonplace. The potential for the individual to challenge power structures, made several authorities, both political and religious, so worried that they sought to suppress publications that they considered subversive.

The Age of Censorship

The Soviet Union is an example of one of the longest lasting and most extensive censorship eras of the 20th Century. The USSR imposed its strict censorship system on all occupied countries and satellite-states, in 1946, the BBC started broadcasting radio services for Soviet citizens and many other radio stations from around the globe followed suit, following which the USSR decided to start blocking these radio frequencies used by foreign stations .

Another example of these extreme forms of media censorship in history is in Nazi Germany. The Nazi party gained control of all media within the country in order to better share their beliefs and erase any political opposition. Additionally, they set up the 'Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda' which was responsible for all media, as a result of this any articles or broadcasts not in accordance with the Nazi ideology were not allowed to be broadcasted or published, and any journalists with opposing views to the the regime were imprisoned.



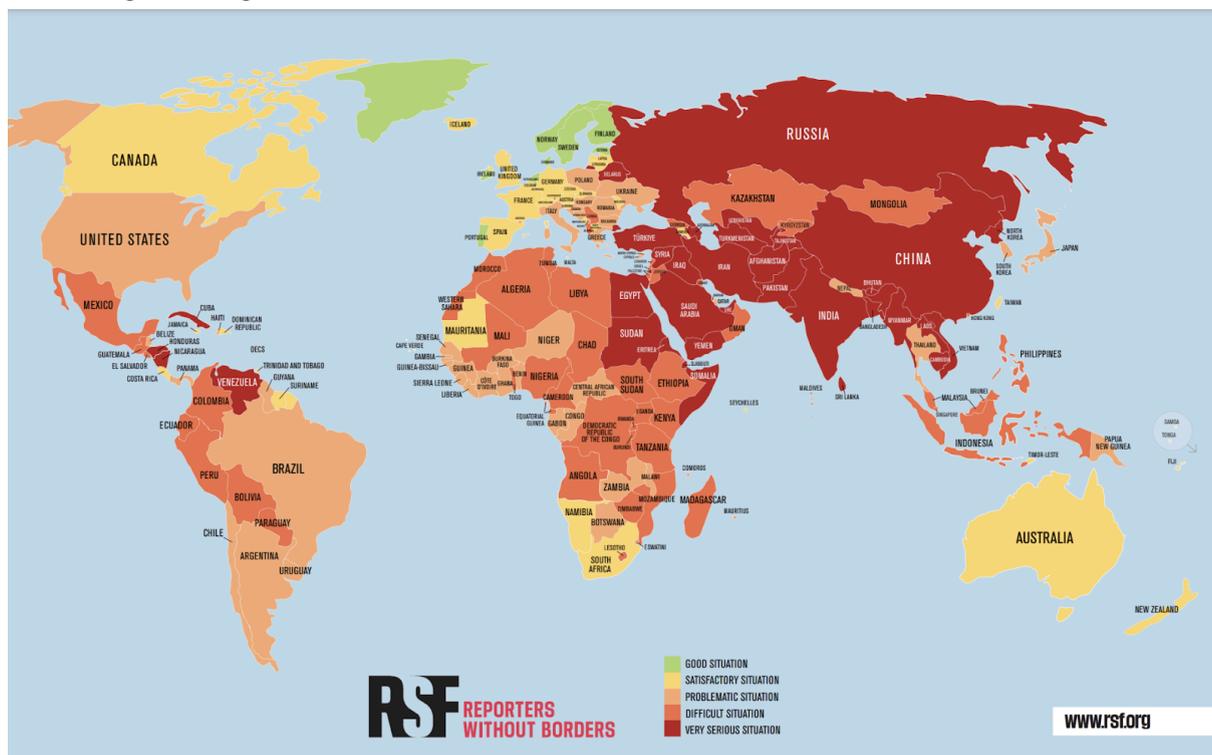
First Major Action Taken

Once it was clear this phenomenon was a genuine issue, the United Nations decided to take action, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10th December 1948) formally recognized how vital it is to protect freedom of expression. It made extensively clear that any forms of media censorship is unjust if applied without limits and without respecting this right. Unsurprisingly however, this declaration was not enough to put an end to violations of this right and there were still several widespread attacks on freedom of expression mostly occurring in non-democratic governments.

Current Day

The recent rise of things such as social media has brought about discussions concerning media censorship once more. However, despite the developments these sites bring, allowing an increase in availability of information to all, such sites have also led to several issues following their curation of what information is allowed on their platforms, and has led people to question how possible it is to fairly and safely control the flow of information online.

Unfortunately, to this day we see widespread violations of human rights such as freedom of expression, and a global lack of press freedom - Reporters Without Borders (RSF) creates a yearly index which gives each country/territory a score ranging from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best possible score and therefore the highest possible level of press freedom. They calculate said score using both quantitative measures (such as number of abuses against media and journalists) and qualitative analysis (of things such as responses by journalists working in that country) to determine the countries score, below you can see the world map produced by this index - red indicates a low score and green a high one.



MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Reporters Without Borders is a key organisation involved in trying to better the freedoms and rights of the press globally, they do important work such as creating records and reports of violations against the rights of journalists and starting conversations with bodies like the UN about ensuring global press freedom. For more information see the 'Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue' section below.

Russia

Russia is currently ranked 162/180 in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024. A majority of independent media have been banned or blocked since their invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,. Furthermore, all sites that aren't banned are subject to military censorship. The state and Kremlin allies own all of the remaining media outlets, the employees to these companies are also given orders as to subjects that must be avoided, issued by the president's office, and must heavily censor themselves.

All journalists are at constant threat of extreme legal charges based on very vaguely worded draconian laws, many of which are suddenly and hastily adopted. The invasion of Ukraine also led to several new legal changes, with parliament creating amendments to current jurisdiction meaning that anyone spreading "false information" about the Russian armed forces and other Russian state bodies can now be punished with up to 15 years in prison. Additionally there has been a large increase in the amount of charges labelled as a journalist using "extremism" and "condoning terrorism".

China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) conducts a campaign of repression against journalism and the right to information worldwide, in the eyes of the regime the media's only function is to be a mouthpiece for the party, and to help spread state propaganda throughout the country. Techniques such as surveillance, detainment and even torture are used when journalists and bloggers that work independently report on "sensitive" information. Additionally all of the press must receive and regularly renew a 'press card'. To do so each journalist must download an application called 'Xuexi Qiangguo' that can collect their personal data. This mobile app is primarily designed to teach the user by offering ideological courses - more specifically courses and videos on the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) doctrines.

Within the PRC's constitution there is a guarantee of "freedom of speech [and] of the press", however the regime violates this right to information routinely. Additionally, they use so-called "pocket crimes" such as "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" to try to silence journalists - a term created by Chinese law experts which describes offences that are extremely vague and broadly defined so that they can be applied to almost any activity. On top of these charges, independent journalists be legally placed for six months under "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" ("RSDL") in China's "black prisons", this is solitary confinement where they are deprived of legal representation and may be subjected to torture.

China is one of the worst countries globally for press freedom, the RSF's World Press Freedom Index ranked China number 172/180 in 2024 an improvement from 2023 where they were ranked 179th, with 108 reported press workers currently detained within the country - change must be made in the country to ensure the freedom of press.



Afghanistan

In August 2021 the Taliban gained power within Afghanistan, following which 43% of Afghan media outlets 'disappeared' within the next three months, of the 12,000 journalists in the country more than two-thirds left the profession, with eight out of ten women journalists being forced to stop working. The women remaining in the profession have to deal with mountains of restrictions such as no access to official sources and no travelling without a chaperone. Adding on to this they have to deal with extremely low to non-existent wages, alongside harassment and other abuse.

Journalists are strictly forbidden from in any way criticising the Taliban and must self-censor to ensure this does not occur. Other subjects including the status of women and other minorities within society, religion, and human rights in general are completely off-limits for the press. Journalists also have to send all of their articles to a local department of information and culture in some provinces so that they can be checked before publication - with Taliban sometimes employed at media outlets in order to monitor them. Furthermore, all social media is closely monitored. Currently there are only a few Afghan media outlets which provide independent coverage of the country's news, all of which are exiled, this means that to access independent news coverage Afghans have to turn to international or exiled news outlets, meaning that only those with internet access can actually see such uncensored news.

In September 2021, just a month after the Taliban came to power, they enacted the "11 rules of journalism" - a set of laws which have helped to pave the way for greater persecution of journalists. The General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) arrests members of the press seemingly arbitrarily, they keep them isolated from the outside world and torture them for periods ranging from a few days to several months. Additionally those working with media groups that have been exiled or foreign media are heavily targeted, accused of spying and of giving a negative image of the Taliban.

Afghanistan currently sits at 178th in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index, ranking 164th or greater in all indicators, with it being ranked 179th in legislative, social and security indicators.

Iran

Article 24 of the Iranian constitution guarantees press freedom, but the 1986 press law (which was amended in 2000 and 2009 to take account of online publications) gives the authorities several reasons to overrule this, for example they must ensure that journalists "do not offend the clergy and the Supreme Leader" or "endanger the Islamic Republic". Because of this journalists and other independent media in Iran are met with constant arbitrary arrests and heavy sentences given by grossly unfair trials. The independent media is often accused by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of being manipulated by foreign forces which further ruins the reputation of such media sites in the eyes of Iranians and leads to more persecution of press that are members of said companies. Additionally as the head of the country's main political, military and judicial institutions, he can directly order these arrests of journalists, and then sentence them to long prison terms - this power even allows him to sentence individuals to the death penalty.

The country's society, especially the youth and women are fighting for more freedom and respect for fundamental rights, including the freedom of information, however tackling any subjects related to religion and women's rights continues to be problematic within Iran, despite the people's efforts the country currently sits at 176th in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index.

On 16 September 2022, 22-year-old Iranian woman Mahsa Amini died in a hospital in Iran under suspicious circumstances. Although Iran's stated that she had a heart attack and fell into a coma whilst being held at a police station, eyewitnesses reported that she was severely beaten and that she died as a result of police brutality - this proof of police brutality caused a wave of protests within the country. During these protests more than 70 journalists were arrested in an attempt by the authorities



who were stopping at nothing to prevent coverage of the protests. Even Iranian journalists based abroad were subjected to pressure ranging from online harassment to death threats.

North Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) tightly controls all information within its country and very strictly prohibits independent journalism - it is one of the worlds' most authoritarian regimes and is ranked 177/180 in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index.

The main way that both Kim Jong-un and his ancestors have kept control of North Korea is through propaganda, censorship and surveillance, with Kim Jong-un personally overseeing the media to ensure it only shares content praising both him, his party and the military. North Korea's constitution specifically mentions freedom of the press in Article 67 and mentions its necessity, however the regime consistently ignores this principle.

Recently the regime has begun to allow their people to use smartphones, however it has ensured that it controls any communications using said devices through technical measures they have developed. Any North Koreans that are caught looking at online media sites that are based outside the country can be sent to concentration camps. Journalists have also been sent to forced labour camps, deported, arrested or even killed if they are found to deviate from the party's narrative in any way, all of which being done to ensure the countries complete isolation from the rest of the world.

Minor Countries

Almost all countries globally have a role to play in this issue, with only a handful of countries including Norway, Ireland and Portugal being in a 'good situation' when it comes to their press freedom, according to the RSF's 2024 index. Additionally it is important to note that many western countries still have extremely poor levels of press freedom - this is an issue that is by no means localised to a region, it spans all continents and political ideologies.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Event	Date
First weekly printed newspapers published	1605
Swedish parliament passes Freedom of the Press Act	2 December 1766
Press freedom ratified in the US constitution	15 December 1799
BBC starts broadcasting radio services for citizens of the USSR	24 March 1946
UN Conference on Freedom of Information	March-April 1948
UN Declaration of Human Rights states that any form of media censorship is unjust	10 December 1948
Committee to Protect Journalists founded	1981
Iran introduces 1986 Press Law	19 March 1986

Committee to Protect Journalists begins compiling records of journalist fatalities	1992
World Press Freedom Day proclaimed by UN General Assembly	December 1993
The Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union defines media freedom as a fundamental right	7 December 2000
Committee to Protect Journalists publishes first Annual Impunity Index	2008
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights urges Chinese government to lift restrictions on media access in Tibet	2012
Special report by Committee to Protect Journalists finds 25 journalists were killed while on duty in 2019	2019
Iranian activist and journalist Rouhollah Zam executed on vague national security charges	12 December 2020
Nicaragua police raid offices of last remaining print newspaper, La Prensa, shortly before a general election	13 August 2021
Taliban enacted '11 Rules of Journalism'	September 2021
Russian publication Novaya Gazeta's editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov given the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize for 'efforts to safeguard freedom of expression'	8 October 2021
Vladimir Putin introduces bill introducing prison sentences of up to 15 years for publishing 'knowingly false information' about the Russian military	4 March 2022
European Media Freedom Act adopted	26 March 2024

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Over the decades several actions have been taken by communities around the world in order to tackle the issue, and there are multiple organisations that play a key role in attempting to preserve press freedom.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Reporters Without Borders (or 'Reporters sans Frontières' in French) was founded in 1985 in France, and is an international organisation whose goal is to promote press freedom worldwide. RSF's mission is to 'Act for the freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism and defend those who embody these ideals', and carry out many projects in order to ensure this.

They work to improve both the physical and digital safety of journalists, training journalists in these areas. Additionally they work to promote journalists' safety within war zones - providing equipment such as bulletproof vests and helmets to journalists working in such high-risk areas. On top of this they provide assistance for reporters forced to flee with their asylum applications, and help these individuals with legal action when they are victims of abuse,

Furthermore, the organisation has worked to compile a large database of research towards actual violations of press freedom, and each year several reports that include rankings of countries around the world by their degree of press freedom are published by the organisation.

Finally they work towards other things such as the unblocking of censored websites - supporting multiple initiatives to try and achieve these goals, and use major mobilisation campaigns to call upon governments, international organisations and citizens to denounce attacks on freedom of information and to adopt better legal protective standards to ensure this freedom.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

This committee was formed in 1981, and is a nonprofit organisation that works internationally, and helps to conduct research towards how press are being obstructed worldwide, and safeguarding the press' human rights and freedoms of those in the press

Amnesty International

Amnesty International has played a key role in attempting to stop journalist imprisonments in major countries like China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Furthermore, it has also ensured to send these cases on to the UN to try and enact some large scale change. Following their efforts, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution on 'Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity' during its 68th session in 2013. This resolution declared that the 2nd of November is now the International Day to end Impunity, helping to grow awareness for the issue.

Through work done by the above listed organisations and many others, multiple resolutions have been passed concerning censorship, some of which being directed towards media and the press - however the major issue that still remains is the actual implementation of programs to make sure these rights are actually not being impeded

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Legislation promoting and protecting press freedom

Losing global press freedom has global implications, including the potential for the spread of extremist ideologies if journalism and the media is controlled or restricted by a country with an agenda's government. The debate on future solutions often centres on furthering legal protections and policies of the press. The primary goal of this would most likely be to further ensure journalists ability to exercise rights to free speech and to serve as a message to countries who don't value press freedom, that security and protection of journalists is taken seriously. Holding other governments accountable for crimes against journalists or attacks on the media is also incorporated within legislation protection of the press.

Showing zero tolerance for attacks on the press

Showing zero tolerance for attacks on the press is another possible solution as attacks on journalists and media workers are the most serious form of censorship. Democratic governments should demonstrate their commitment to protecting the work of the press by vigorously defending journalists from verbal harassment, online and offline, and from physical threats, assaults, and harm, this includes ensuring that public authorities thoroughly and swiftly investigate all attacks on journalists.

Refraining or reducing surveillance on journalists



Even in democracies, the surveillance state is growing. Democratic states should adopt rigorous human rights safeguards protecting journalists and civil society from unlawful government surveillance. Governments must ensure that the surveillance of communications by state agencies and law enforcement is permitted only in the most exceptional cases so as to not promote excessive surveillance on the press and potentially harm the free speech within their own and other countries due to normalisation of surveillance.

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