

LmunA 2026

Research report

Forum: GA 3

Issue: Strengthening the Protection of
Journalists and Media Workers in Zones of Armed
Conflict

Student Officer: Marijn Scholten & Annika Maassen van den Brink

Position: Deputy Chair & Chair of GA 3



LMUNA

Lorentz Lyceum
Model United Nations
Arnhem

Introduction

Journalists and media workers play a crucial role in documenting armed conflict, reporting violations of international war, as well as providing civilians with reliable information. Working in zones of armed conflict however places journalists in big risk of violence, non consensual detention, torture, and sometimes even death. Because journalists report human right abuses, war crimes and corruption they are often targeted to prevent this information from getting out.

The increasing use of fake news and censorship has only further complicated the ability for journalists and media workers to operate safely and adequately. The protection of people who provide accurate and impartial information has only become a more and more important international concern as armed conflicts continue to rise across the globe.

International law already recognises journalists as civilians and therefore provides them with protection under international humanitarian law when these journalists are not actively participating in hostilities. Despite these protections, there remains a big gap between what is expected and the implementation in conflict zones. Because there are multiple armed actors involved in these conflicts as well as often a weak enforcement it can sometimes be difficult to ensure that the established protections are respected in practice.

The consequences of failing to protect journalists go further than the media itself. When journalists are unable to safely report from conflict zones, civilians living both inside and outside these conflict zones may lose access to essential information, while governments and international organisations may have less to no reliable evidence about events taking place in these conflict zones. This can make it extremely difficult to prosecute perpetrators for war crimes and human rights violations. Strengthening the protection of journalists and media workers is therefore of extreme importance in upholding freedom of speech as well as in protecting civilians, and making sure accountability is still being upheld.

Definitions of key terms

Journalists

Individuals who gather, investigate, verify, and communicate information about events and issues to the public through forms of media such as newspapers, television, radio, or online platforms.

Media workers

Individuals involved in the production, distribution, or technical support of media content. This may include journalists, photographers, camera operators, editors, producers, and other personnel working within the media sector.

Armed Conflict

A situation involving sustained armed violence between states or between a state and organized non-state armed groups, or between such groups, resulting in significant levels of violence and insecurity.

LmunA 2026

Conflict Zone

An area in which armed conflict is actively taking place or where ongoing violence creates significant risks to civilians and other individuals present in the area.

Press Freedom

The right of journalists and media organizations to gather, publish, and distribute information without undue interference, censorship, or retaliation from governments or other parties.

Freedom of Expression

The right of individuals to seek, receive, and communicate information and ideas through different forms of media without interference.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

A part of international law that regulates the conduct of parties during armed conflict and seeks to limit the effects of warfare, particularly by protecting civilians and individuals who are not participating directly in hostilities.

Censorship

The suppression or restriction of information or other forms of expression done by a government or other authority, particularly when intended to prevent certain information from reaching the public.

Disinformation

False or misleading information that is deliberately created or distributed with the intention of deceiving the public or influencing their understanding of an event or issue.

Arbitrary Detention

The detention of an individual without sufficient legal justification, due process, or a valid basis under applicable law.

Journalist Protection

Measures and safeguards intended to prevent violence, intimidation, detention, harassment, or other forms of harm against journalists and media workers while carrying out their professional duties.

Impunity

The failure to hold individuals or organizations accountable for violations of the law, including attacks or other crimes committed against journalists and media workers.

General overview

The protection of journalists and media workers in zones of armed conflict has been an international concern for decades, particularly considering that these conflicts have increasingly placed civilians and media personnel in dangerous situations. During major conflicts throughout the 20th century, journalists have increasingly become exposed to battlefield violence, detention, censorship, and restrictions on their right to report independently. Conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Bosnian War, and the Gulf War show the dangers that journalists face while working in areas of active violence. At the same time there have been advancements in communication and broadcasting information from conflict zones to reach international audiences which makes the roles of journalists even more important in documenting events and informing the public.

After the end of the Cold War, the nature of armed conflicts has changed considerably. The increasing involvement of non governmental armed groups such as: militias, insurgent organizations, and terrorist groups have created new challenges for journalists working in conflict zones. Unlike conventional wars with clearly identified states, modern warfare is clouded with multiple actors with different political and military objectives. Journalists may therefore face threats from several sides. The development of digital media has also changed the way conflict is reported, allowing information to be spread rapidly while at the same time increasing the risk of online harassment, cyberattacks, and disinformation

The safety of journalists is particularly important because independent media can provide information that would otherwise remain unavoidable to the public. Journalists in conflict zones can provide evidence for prosecuting war crimes and human rights violations while at the same time documenting the conditions faced by civilians in these areas. Local journalists are often especially important because they may be able to access areas and information that international journalists cannot. However they may also lack the resources and protection that is available for journalists working for larger media organizations. Attacks on journalists can therefore have consequences beyond the individual victims, as they can reduce the amount of reliable information going out of an ongoing conflict.

The international legal framework provides several protections for journalists working during armed conflict. International humanitarian law considers journalists to be civilians and protects them from being targeted, if they do not directly participate in hostilities. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols establish protections for civilians and therefore also journalists during armed conflict, while the United Nations has repeatedly emphasized the importance of protecting journalists and upholding freedom of expression. Despite these ongoing protections, attacks against journalists continue to occur, demonstrating the difficulties involved in enforcing international law and holding perpetrators accountable. Strengthening the protections for journalists and media workers therefore remains an important issue for the international community.

LmunA 2026

Major parties involved

The United States of America

A major international actor that supports press freedom and journalist safety through diplomatic initiatives. The United States is also involved in discussions surrounding the protection of journalists in conflicts such as in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The Russian Federation

An important party in discussions surrounding journalist protection due to restrictions on independent media and the dangers faced by journalists covering conflicts involving Russia, particularly the war in Ukraine.

The People's Republic of China

A major international actor whose policies regarding media freedom, censorship, and access to information are relevant to discussions about journalist protection.

The State of Israel

A significant regional actor in relation to journalist safety, particularly due to the dangers faced by media workers reporting on conflicts involving Israel and Palestinian territories. The safety and access of journalists in these conflict zones have become major international concerns.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

An organization that works to make sure international humanitarian law is being upheld and also promotes the protection of civilians during armed conflicts. Its work is relevant to journalists because journalists who are considered civilians are generally protected under international humanitarian law when they are not directly participating in hostilities.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

An international non-governmental organization focused on defending press freedom and protecting journalists worldwide. RSF documents attacks against journalists, monitors threats to media freedom, and advocates for stronger protections for media workers, particularly in conflict zones.

Timeline of Key Events

1949 – The Geneva Conventions were adopted, establishing important protections for civilians and other persons not directly participating in hostilities during armed conflicts.

LmunA 2026

1977 – Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions was adopted. It specifically recognised the protections afforded to journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict.

1993 – UNESCO established World Press Freedom Day, which is observed annually on May 3rd to promote awareness of the importance of press freedom and remind governments of their responsibility to respect it.

2006 – The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1738, specifically condemning attacks against journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict and reaffirming their status as civilians under international humanitarian law.

2012 – The United Nations adopted its first *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, establishing an international framework to strengthen journalist safety and address crimes committed against media workers.

2013 – The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2117, which further addressed threats against journalists and media professionals during armed conflict and called for greater protection and accountability.

2015 – UNESCO adopted the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, reinforcing international efforts to prevent attacks against journalists and combat impunity for crimes against them.

2022–Present – The war in Ukraine and other ongoing armed conflicts have continued to highlight the dangers faced by journalists and media workers, including death, injury, detention, censorship, and restrictions on access to conflict zones. International organisations have continued to call for greater protection and accountability.

2026 – International efforts to strengthen the protection of journalists and media workers continue, with ongoing discussions surrounding the enforcement of international humanitarian law, accountability for attacks, press freedom, and the safety of journalists working in conflict zones.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The international community has made several attempts to strengthen the protection of journalists and media workers during armed conflicts. These efforts have mainly focused on establishing legal protections while also promoting press freedom. However despite these efforts attacks and threats against journalist are still at an all time high, showing that there are still significant gaps between these established protections and their implementation

LmunA 2026

Geneva Conventions (1949)

The Geneva Conventions established important protections for civilians and other people who are not directly participating in armed conflicts. These protections also apply to journalists as long as they do not actively participate in these conflicts as well. These Conventions created an important foundation for protecting journalists working in conflict zones.

Additional Protocol I (1977)

Additional Protocol I further strengthened the protection of journalists working in areas of armed conflict. It recognized that journalists who were undertaking dangerous professional missions were civilians and therefore stated that they should receive the protections provided to regular civilians under international humanitarian law. These protections however depend a lot on if the parties of a conflict respect said laws.

UN Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006)

In 2006, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1738. This resolution specifically addresses the safety of journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel during armed conflict. The resolution strongly condemned attacks and violence against media workers and also once again reaffirmed that journalists are considered civilians and therefore are protected under international humanitarian law. It also called on parties in armed conflicts to respect their obligation to international law.

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012)

The United Nations developed the Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity to create a more coordinated international approach towards the protection of journalists. It focused on preventing attacks as well as addressing impunity for crimes against journalists. The plan also encouraged for cooperation between governments and international organisations.

UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015)

In 2015, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2222, which also focuses on strengthening the international focus on protecting journalists in conflict zones. It called for greater respect towards international humanitarian law and encouraged states to prevent and investigate attacks against journalists as well as hold perpetrators accountable.

UNESCO Initiatives

UNESCO has played an important role in promoting journalist safety and press freedom through multiple programmes focused on preventing violence against journalists and addressing

LmunA 2026

impunity. UNESCO also monitors and reports on killings of journalists and promotes international awareness of the risks faced by media workers

Remaining limitations

These attempts show that the international community has established several important protections for journalists and media workers. However significant challenges still remain. International rules are not always followed and way too few perpetrators of attacks against journalists are held accountable for their actions. The continued occurrence of attacks, arbitrary detention, and censorship demonstrate that creating these international protections alone is not enough. Improving enforcement and accountability remains an important part of addressing this issue.

Possible solutions

Many countries lack strong and effective systems to protect journalists and media workers in zones of armed conflict. Existing protections are not always properly enforced, while journalists may also lack access to safety equipment and training. Delegates should consider how national and international frameworks can be improved so that journalists can receive the protection they are entitled to while respecting freedom of the press and the independence of the media.

International cooperation also plays an important role in addressing the issue. Attacks against journalists can involve multiple countries, especially in an international conflict which makes accountability difficult. Delegates should consider ways to improve cooperation between governments and international organisations to ensure that those responsible for violating international law are held accountable.

Bibliography

International Committee of the Red Cross (n.d.). *Rule 34. Journalists*. [online] *Customary International Humanitarian Law Database*. Available at:

<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule34>

United Nations Security Council (2006). *Resolution 1738 (2006): Protection of civilians in armed conflict*. [online] *United Nations*. Available at:

[https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1738\(2006\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1738(2006))

United Nations Security Council (2015). *Resolution 2222 (2015): Protection of journalists in armed conflict*. [online] *United Nations*. Available at:

[https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2222\(2015\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2222(2015))

UNESCO (n.d.). *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*. [online] *UNESCO*. Available at:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action>

UNESCO (n.d.). *Safety of journalists*. [online] *UNESCO*. Available at:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists>

LmunA 2026

United Nations (1949). *Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*. [online] *United Nations Treaty Collection*. Available at:

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2075/volume-75-I-973-English.pdf>

International Committee of the Red Cross (1977). *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)*. [online] *International Committee of the Red Cross*.

Available at: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977> (article 79)

United Nations General Assembly (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. [online] *United Nations*. Available at:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.). *OHCHR and the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity*. [online] *United Nations Human Rights Office*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists>

United Nations Human Rights Council (2012). *The safety of journalists*. [online] *United Nations Human Rights Office*. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/RES/21/12>

Reporters Without Borders (n.d.). *World Press Freedom Index*. [online] *Reporters Without Borders*. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/index>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (n.d.). *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. [online] *UNESCO*. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/world-media-trends>