

Security Council debate on

Protection of civilians: protection of journalists

Statement

by Mr. Tim Mawe

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[Check against delivery]

I would like to thank Lithuania as Council President for organising today's debate on this important subject. I would also like to thank Deputy Secretary General Eliasson for his briefing, and record our appreciation for Christophe Deloire and Mariane Pearl who have provided important personal insights today into this issue.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Madam President,

Journalists are key cogs in the civil society machine, and a free media has been a powerful force for positive change and democratic transformation everywhere. However, at present we are witnessing unprecedented infringements on journalists' freedom to do their jobs. Being a journalist, particularly in conflict situations, has rarely been more dangerous.

Too many governments continue to use repressive and out-dated laws to target individual journalists and activists. Intimidation and violence, assaults, arbitrary detention and even death are just some of the dangers faced by journalists. Where this occurs, basic freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly have been criminalised. We need to take such violations very seriously as they reflect and frequently foretell greater violations of human rights ultimately leading, if unchecked, to outbreaks of conflict.

All states have a duty to respect, protect and promote human rights, and it is crucial that journalists and other media actors, as part of civil society have the space in which to do their jobs free from violence and intimidation. A free and independent media is indispensable for democracy.

Supporting civil society space has been one of Ireland's key commitments for our membership of the UN Human Rights Council. In light of this, Ireland supported the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on Safety of Journalists at the 27th Session of the Council last September. This Resolution urges States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently.

Earlier, at the Council's 24th session, Ireland took the lead in presenting and negotiating a resolution – along with Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone and Tunisia – entitled "Civil society space: Creating and maintaining, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment".

In those resolutions we remind States of their obligation to respect and fully protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all individuals, including the rights to freedom of expression and opinion and to assemble peacefully and to associate freely, online as well as offline.

If these basic freedoms are respected, citizens can exercise their democratic rights, including that of dissent and meaningfully contribute to the governance of their state.

Madam President,

Ireland's policy for international development, *One World, One Future*, recognises the powerful role that a diverse, pluralistic and professional media environment can have in providing access to information and debate, and in ensuring the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression as recognised in international human rights law. The policy highlights the important contribution media can make in holding Governments and others to account and includes a commitment to support initiatives that can strengthen their role in key partner countries.

In Tanzania, for example, support is provided to the Tanzania Media Fund, which provides grants to media professionals and institutions in order to improve journalism standards, including investigative journalism. In Zambia, support is provided to the Media Institute of Southern Africa to support community radio stations, a source of over 80% of Zambians' current affairs information and an important tool for enhancing domestic accountability.

The World Press Freedom index reports that no journalists were killed in these countries in 2014. Other countries were not so safe, with 99 media personnel killed worldwide in 2014. And if the general trend continues, all but 9 of these crimes will go unpunished. This is not good enough and Ireland underlines the need to end the widespread impunity associated with attacks on journalists. Investigation, prosecution, conviction and punishment of such attacks make an essential contribution to prevention by deterring would-be attackers.

Unfortunately, attacks on journalists are often committed at the state's behest or with its tacit consent, exacerbating the problem of impunity.

Ireland is appalled by the terrorist attacks on freedom of speech, including the murder of journalists by groups such as ISIS. There needs to be accountability for all such actions, including where necessary and appropriate through referral to the International Criminal Court. In Ireland's case, we are working closely with our partners in the EU and through the United Nations to coordinate our efforts and to strengthen the tools at our disposal.

In conclusion, Madam President, Ireland joins with our EU colleagues in encouraging the Secretary-General to continue to include the issue of protection of journalists in armed conflicts in his report on the protection of civilians. We also encourage the Security Council to address the protection of journalists, including through public statements, reporting requirements for peacekeeping missions, and strengthening of mandates.

Thank you.

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