



United Nations officials highlighted the need to defend freedom of expression and ensure the safety of journalists, noting that 2012 is set to become one of the deadliest years for media workers covering not just conflicts but also illegal activities in their countries.

“More than 100 journalists have been killed so far this year, making 2012 the deadliest year for the media since UNESCO began keeping records on the killings of journalists. And we are only in November.” the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Irina Bokova, said in her message to the [2nd UN Inter-Agency Meeting on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) in Vienna, Austria, on 22 November.

The meeting, attended by UN agencies, independent experts, governments, media houses, and civil society organizations will discuss the most pressing issues facing freedom of expression today and will create a new UN strategy to improve the safety of media workers and effectively prosecute those who commit crimes against them.

Of the journalists killed this year, 32 were killed as a result of the Syrian conflict and 18 were killed in Somalia. However, the overwhelming majority were not war correspondents, Ms. Bokova said, but local reporters covering illegal activities such as drug trafficking and illegal logging.

“We must break the vicious cycle that silences journalists, deprives society of important voices and frightens other citizens, preventing them from speaking out,” Ms. Bokova said in her remarks delivered by UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information in Vienna, Janis Karklins.

Ms. Bokova reiterated UNESCO's commitment to promote journalists' safety and fight against impunity globally, and encouraged participants at the meeting to share best practices and build partnerships to raise awareness about press freedom.

During the opening of the meeting, which ends tomorrow, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, emphasized that attacks on media workers have a far-reaching effect on society, threatening to silence all citizens.

“These attacks – not only the many murders and physical assaults, but also the countless abductions, the acts of harassment, the illegal arrests, the arbitrary detentions – have an impact that reaches well beyond the personal suffering of the person involved” he said.

“They chill press freedom and the right of everyone to live as informed citizens in peaceful societies. They aim to silence the journalist and, by extension, all of us.”

In particular, Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal pointed to the rising number of journalists targeted during conflicts, as was seen most recently in the Gaza crisis.

“In the past week alone, in Gaza and southern Israel, we have seen disturbing reports indicating that journalists and their offices have been targeted during the conflict. We condemn such attacks and I urge all sides to respect the civilian status of journalists and their right to carry out their professional duties,” Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal said.

The new UN Implementation Strategy on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity for 2013-2014 will need to take into account the changing media environment to ensure laws protect not just journalists but also bloggers and new media reporters, Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal added.

The 2nd UN Inter-Agency Meeting on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was convened by UNESCO and co-hosted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) and the United Nations Development Programme (

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