DPI NGO World Press Freedom Day - Summary

On Thursday 3 May 2018, the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) NGO Relations held a briefing celebrating the 25th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, entitled *Keeping Power in Check: The Protection of Journalists and Media Workers* co-organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists. The event started at 10 a.m. with a High-Level Opening session, followed by a panel discussion, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., which focused on guaranteeing the safety of journalists and all those who work in the field of media.

The High-Level Session was moderated by Ms. Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, Department of Public Information (DPI), who opened the Briefing by highlighting the UN’s commitment to the right for freedom of expression and the need to allow media workers to operate freely around the world. The panelists focused their remarks on the current challenges that journalists and media workers face in today’s environment. These challenges include increased violence towards journalists and media, and also a general mistrust of the content produced by journalists. During the segment, each panelist took a moment to remember the 10 journalists who were killed in Afghanistan on 30 April 2018. Furthermore, H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, highlighted that in 2018 alone, 32 journalists have been killed. H.E. Mr. Jan Kickert, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, Chair of the United Nations General Assembly Committee on Information, stated that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved without the work of journalists, as they are the very people who hold governments accountable and prevent corruption within countries around the world. Ms. Alisson Kent, CBC Radio-Canada, Second Vice President of the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA), followed up on these remarks by stating that “when you block a free media, you block the truth”. She explained that 262 journalists are currently in jail and mentioned that Turkey, China and Egypt are the most dangerous countries to work in as a journalist. Ms. Nicole Stremlau, Lead Researcher, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development; University of Oxford and University of Johannesburg, ended the session by introducing the Report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development. The UNESCO Report highlights the inequalities in media
audiences, media violence, the impact of media on migration and the intensification of the turn towards identity politics, she said. The first session concluded with a question and answer period where university students and audience members asked the panel questions relating to violence against journalists, the marginalization of citizen journalists and best practices for journalists working in hostile environments.

The panel discussion started with opening remarks from His Excellency Mr. François Delattre, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, who expressed his condolences to the families of all the journalists and media workers who gave their lives to inform us. H.E. Mr. Delattre pointed out that local media workers represent 90 per cent of reported murders and yet, attract little international attention. Mr. Ramu Damodaran, Deputy Director for Partnerships and Public Engagement Chief, United Nations Academic Impact, Outreach Division, DPI moderated the following panel discussion, wherein he reminded us of the importance of press freedom and the fact that, despite obstacles, it remains essential to establish measures to protect media workers, especially in governments that see the press as a threat. Ms. Marie Bourreau, Journalist, Correspondent for Le Monde and Radio France Internationale (RFI) at the United Nations in New York, continued the discussion by paying tribute to Shah Marai, Chief photographer who was killed last Monday in Kabul. She explained that fixers made considerable contributions to her work, often acting as her eyes and ears, and that media workers face greater risks than journalists. Ms. Elisabet Cantenys, Executive Director, ACOS Alliance, described the work of her organization by saying that it amplifies the role that media workers already have. She also highlighted the importance of local journalists, who work on highly sensitive stories and are often left in dangerous situations, and reminded the audience that without them, the world would not be able to get information about what is happening in some countries. Mr. Steve Coll, Dean & Henry R. Luce Professor of Journalism, Columbia School of Journalism talked about the criminalization of journalism, seen as a national security threat, and affirmed that press freedom rights are inseparable from other rights. Ms. Loubna Mrie, Photojournalist and student at New York University shared her personal story and explained her journey of becoming a journalist without having formal education in Journalism. According to Ms. Mrie, in Syria, where western journalists have limited access, she became an activist and documented what was happening in the country. At the end of the session, Jonathan Allen, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the UN stated that accountability from the media leads to better public policy, more honest government
and ultimately, stability, peace, security, and called on Member States to uphold human rights principles. He asked the panel for suggestions on how to persuade countries that are focused on their self-interest to promote press freedom. Ms. Bourreau explained that it is their role as journalists to shed light on the difficulties encountered by journalists and media workers in these countries. In order to achieve better press freedom in these countries, journalists need to promote it by speaking about it and writing articles about it. Both sessions featured questions from high school and journalism students. Representatives from NGOs focused on press freedom, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Border and Al Jazeera also made statements. The panel concluded the event by reaffirming that journalists and media workers work as a team and that they all should benefit from the same protections and security measures.