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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Concept Note

*Research Project on the Safety of Journalists as a potential
Indicator of Good Governance, Democracy and Development.*

20 February 2014

Research Project on the Safety of Journalists as a potential Indicator of Good Governance, Democracy and Development.

Summary:

A steering committee of international organisations oversees a three month research project that investigates correlations between trends in the safety of journalists and indicators related to democracy and development in general, and in particular to state fragility and good governance. The initiative aims to contribute to promoting the safety of journalists and the recognition of the importance of enhancing the universal right to freedom of expression in the global "Post-2015 Development Agenda".

Background:

Freedom of expression and its corollaries of press freedom and freedom of information are fundamental rights as well as enablers of many goals, as acknowledged in the recent High-Level Report on the post-2015 Development Agenda, commissioned by the UN Secretary General.[1] The goals enabled by freedom of expression include good governance, transparency and access to information, empowerment of women and youth, ending poverty, and ensuring stable and peaceful societies.

A fundamental condition for freedom of expression and its corollaries is the safety of journalists. It is widely acknowledged that killings of journalists and threats towards them have a multiplier effect. These crimes not only violate the right to press freedom and the right to life; they also shrink the overall information environment and can stimulate self-censorship. When, as is frequently the case, attacks on journalists go unpunished, this negatively affects how the rule of law is perceived in society and undermines efforts to promote good governance.

It is for these reasons that the safety of journalists has wide impact and significance. Therefore if freedom of expression is to play its enabling part in democracy and development, the safety of journalists is a vital precondition.

Against this background, several international developments can be singled out for attention:

At its recent 37th Session in November 2013, UNESCO's General Conference passed a resolution that highlights the importance of promoting, in the post-2015 Development Agenda, three key concerns: freedom of expression; universal access to knowledge and its preservation; and free, pluralistic and independent media, both offline and online. The resolution described these as indispensable elements for flourishing democracies and to foster citizen participation.

On 22 March 2012, Council of Europe (COE) Secretary General[2] proposed, in a thematic debate paper, to "co-operate with UNESCO and other UN agencies involved in the

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[1] *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*. Report of panel established by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and co-chaired by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron. http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/

[2] See http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/CDMSI/SG%20Inf%20(2012)6_en.pdf

implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity." He further encouraged COE Member States to "contribute to the concerted international efforts to enhance the protection of journalists and other media actors, by ensuring that legal frameworks and law enforcement practices are fully in accord with international human rights standards." He added: "The implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is an urgent and vital necessity."

At the same time, the UN system has initiated a wide consultation around the development agenda after 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals which have set the pace for many policies. This opens the possibility to investigate additional possible evidence to underline the arguments by the High-Level Report about the importance of a free, pluralistic and independent media.

Purpose of the proposed research project:

Building on these developments, in October 2013 UNESCO proposed to the Council of Europe a joint research project to investigate trends in the safety of journalists as an indicator of other factors in a society – particularly those related to democratic and development issues. One particular focus is in relation to what many actors in the development community have categorized as "fragile states"; seeing such situations as one of the largest obstacles to peace, democracy and development. The question that arises within this perspective is to what extent there are correlations between journalists' safety and the increasing or decreasing fragility of a given state. For purposes of this concept note, fragility can being broadly defined in terms of issues such as information flows, respect for the rule of law, state ability to provide various public goods and development services, the state's capacity to fight organized crime and terrorism, and a culture of social cohesion.

The findings of the proposed research into correlations could demonstrate empirically whether the safety of journalists can be used as an indicator, in the sense of revealing the tip of a submerged iceberg of many other dynamics in a society. If evidence confirms that increased attacks on journalists could be taken as a warning sign of growing fragility of a society more broadly, it may also be the case that improved safety of journalists represents a step towards stability, democracy and development.

Without pre-empting the findings of a research project into these matters, it could be that they do indeed suggest this kind of correlation and consequence. If so, freedom of expression, and especially journalistic safety, could be better integrated into strategies to promote democracy and to inform post-2015 development decision-making. The outcome in turn could be increased support for media development as a field that is critical to wider development and democratic objectives.

Safety of journalists:

In 2013, 91 journalists were killed, according to UNESCO's list of assassinated journalists.[3] The pattern over the years has been that only a small fraction of the killers are brought to justice.

In this context, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted in 2012 by the UN Chief Executives Board, and welcomed in 2013 by the UN General Assembly, is a significant step on the road to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Plan brings together the UN family, other international organizations, national governments, media and civil society to combine forces to stop the killing of journalists and the accompanying impunity which serves to perpetuate the cycle. The UNESCO Work Plan endorsed by the Organization's Executive Board on the Safety of Journalists, adopted in 2013, adds further impetus. Additionally, the UN General Assembly[4] in 2013 and the Human Rights Council[5] in 2012 have also adopted a specific resolution on the safety of journalists. Progress on the promoting the safety of journalists has been made to date, and World Press Freedom Day provides an annual opportunity to strengthen and expand existing efforts.

The UN Plan of Action is currently being implemented in Pakistan, Nepal, Iraq, and South Sudan. Additionally, parts of the UN Plan of Action are being adapted and implemented in Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, and Tunisia. Indicators were developed in 2013 under UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication to measure the safety of journalists at the national and the global levels.

The potential partners in this proposed research have activities or interests in the safety of journalists. Institutions like OSCE and COE have direct programmes that deal with the topic. The World Bank and the OECD provide briefings and training to journalists, and such investment is undermined if the recipients are not safe to do their work.

Building on existing research:

It is important to locate the proposed study in a wider literature review. A range of data sources are available on the safety of journalists, such as statistics compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists, and UNESCO itself.

In addition, there are the recently developed UNESCO Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSIs) which will be carried out in seven countries during 2014. These are built on the established methodology of the UNESCO Media Development Indicators (MDIs), and are being piloted in Pakistan, Honduras, and Guatemala. The JSIs serve to identify the actions that are taken by the various relevant stakeholders in four major categories: (i) the UN and other intergovernmental bodies operating directly in a country; (ii) State and political actors, (iii) civil society and academia, and (iv) media and intermediaries. Further research as proposed in this project

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[3] http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/press-freedom/unesco-condemns-killing-of-journalists/lists-by-year/2013/

[4] See http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/68/propslist.shtml

[5] See http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/21/12

could help illuminate if there is wider possible significance of the findings of the Journalism Safety Indicators.

Other relevant research includes, for example, the assessment undertaken by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, titled "The Globalization Of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment". This could isolate specific instances in which the safety of journalists could potentially influence how organized crime is reported as a development issue.

The BBC Media Action has produced valuable information about the complex role of media and communication in regard to peace-building and war-mongering in selected conflict and post-conflict countries.[6]
http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publicationsandpress/policy_fragile_states.htmlBbc

The project would also investigate potential interoperability with emerging indicators for Sustainable Development Goals such as by the UN's Sustainable Development Network, and also existing governance indices, such as:

- the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators:

- Ibrahim Governance Index (Africa)

- UNDP Governance Indicators

 The research project will entail comprehensive literature study, and will included elaborated conceptualisations of what indicators will be selected for investigation and what data can be mobilised. This can be enriched by combining insights and interests through co-operation with the Council of Europe, and other actors. In this regard, OSCE and the World Bank have agreed to join a steering committee for this research initiative.

Risks:

There is a risk that correlations may not be found, and the exercise therefore will not have proved fruitful. On the other hand, empirical observation does suggest that as societies descend into fragility and non-development, the safety of journalists does worsen, and such a hypothesis at the least merits research attention. The answers will be mapped objectively and through empirical work. If indeed journalists' safety is an indicator of much more than its own condition, this would constitute powerful evidence for impacting on general debates about the value of free expression. If correlations are not shown, that in itself will be a finding of interest.

Proposed research process:

The modality for the research would be to invite organizations such as COE to join a steering committee whose tasks would be to elaborate terms of reference for the research, and secure sufficient funds to this end. A broader advisory group may be created as well, to provide advice concerning the design of the work and feedback on the findings.

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[6] *Fragile states: the role of media and communication*
http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publicationsandpress/policy_fragile_states.html

The scenario then is that suitable researchers be identified and contracted, and deliverables overseen by the steering committee according to an agreed timetable. The envisaged research should commence ideally in April 2014 and be completed within three months. The estimated cost is circa $30 000. The results may be published individually or jointly, but will be copyright free, and available to the broader public. Particularly, the steering committee partners may be able to use the findings within their governing bodies and in their work with other stakeholders.

Conclusion:

The proposed research will benefit from the input of key partners, who will scope and co-manage the process of execution. The findings will contribute to broader debates and processes, and could prove to be of special interest to those whose institutional processes and mandates are related to safety, good governance, democracy and/or development.

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