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An event to mark the World Press Freedom Day

**PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS IN EXILE:
TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AS A GROWING THREAT
TO MEDIA FREEDOM**

BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

Introductory remarks:

H.E. Mr Jonatan Vseviov, Secretary
General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of
Estonia



Ms Peggy Hicks, Director, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)



H.E. Mr Alexander Kmentt, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations Office and to the Specialized Institutions in Geneva



Ms Sharon Weinblum, Delegate General of Wallonia-Brussels, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva



Setting the scene:

Mr Andrea Cairola, Senior Programme Specialist, Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists Section, UNESCO



Andrea works at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on coordinating the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, including the administration of the Global Media Defence Fund, and backstopping media assistance in countries in crises. In previous assignments with UNESCO, he has been responsible for the organization of the World Press Freedom Day Global commemorations, and has been in charge of the Communication and Information programme in sub-regional offices for North-East

Ms Irene Khan,
United Nations
Special
Rapporteur on
freedom of
opinion and
expression



Asia (Beijing 2011-14), the Maghreb (Rabat 2015-18), as well as in the UNESCO office in Afghanistan (2003-04). Always dealing with media development and the promotion of freedom of expression, he has undertaken missions to the Middle-East, Central Asia, as well as Central and East African countries, and worked for specialized NGO International Media Support. Before that, he worked as an investigative journalist and a current-affairs documentary maker in his country of origin, Italy.

Irene Khan is the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression since 1 August 2020. Previously, Ms. Khan was Secretary General of Amnesty International from 2001 to 2009. From 2012 to 2019, she headed the International Development Law Organization (IDLO). As Consulting Editor of The Daily Star in Bangladesh from 2010 to 2011, Ms. Khan covered human rights, democracy and gender issues and supported independent media. She was Visiting Professor at the State University of New York Law School in 2011 and Chancellor of Salford University in the UK from 2009 to 2015. She began her professional career with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, working for 21 years at headquarters and in various country operations, including Chief of Mission in India and Deputy Director, Division of International Protection. Ms. Khan has received several awards, including the Sydney Peace Prize in 2006, for her contribution to human rights. Born in Bangladesh, she

studied at Manchester University and Harvard Law School.

Mr Yauhen Merkis,
Belarussian
journalist



Yauhen Merkis is a Belarussian journalist who covered the protests after the 2020 presidential election. He was repeatedly arrested by the police. In 2023, he was sentenced to four-year imprisonment on charges of creating or participating in an extremist group and facilitating extremist activities. He was released in 2025.

Panel discussion:

Professor Can Yeginsu,
Deputy Chair of
the High Level
Panel on Media
Freedom



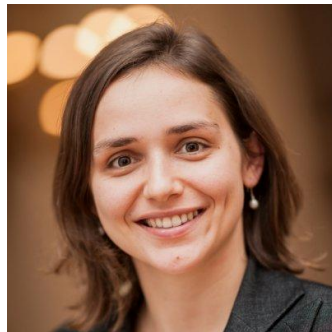
Professor Can Yeğinsu is an international lawyer. He currently serves as the Deputy Chair of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom. He is the lead author of the High Level Panel's Advisory Report On Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk, which has led to the establishment of visa schemes for journalists and human rights defenders in Media Freedom Coalition States. Professor Yeğinsu is a practising English barrister who is recognised as one of the United Kingdom's leading lawyers in human rights and international law. He currently represents Nobel Peace Laureate, Maria Ressa, and has acted as lead counsel for Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, the Wikimedia Foundation, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in cases before the European Court of Human Rights. Professor Yeginsu teaches international law at Columbia Law School and Georgetown University Law Centre. He is a Fellow of the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law at the University of Cambridge, and sits on the boards of English PEN, RSF, and the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

**Ms Benthe
Priester**, Policy
and Advocacy
Officer, Free
Press Unlimited



Benthe Priester is a Policy and Advocacy advisor at Free Press Unlimited, an international human rights organisation working on the mission to make independent and reliable information available to everyone. Before joining Free Press Unlimited in 2024, Benthe worked at the Human Rights Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Amongst other things, she coordinated the Dutch chairmanship of the Media Freedom Coalition. Benthe has a background in international relations, conflict studies and human rights.

**Ms Grażyna
Baranowska**,
Vice-
Chairperson of
the United
Nations Working
Group on
Enforced or
Involuntary
Disappearances



Grażyna Baranowska is a Professor of Migration Law and Human Rights at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Prior to that, she was a senior researcher at Hertie School's Centre for Fundamental Rights, leading a project on missing migrants funded by the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and worked as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Law Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research and teaching cover several topics in the areas of international law, international human rights law, and migration law, with special focus on disappeared and missing persons, border violence, and memory laws. She held fellowships inter alia from the European Union, German Bundestag, Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Foundation for Polish Science, Stiftung Mercator and Poland's National Science Centre. Next to her academic activities, she has worked as a Policy Advisor on enforced disappearances in the German Institute for Human Rights and was involved in drafting the General Comment on enforced disappearances and migration of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. She has also advised and trained litigators to UN bodies and the European Court of Human Rights and made submissions to the European Court of Human Rights in migration cases. In the past, she designed and directed several courses International Protection of Human Rights in Poland.

Ms Silke Voß-Kyeck,
Scientific
Associate,
Deutsches
Institut für
Menschenrechte



Dr. Silke Voß-Kyeck has been a research associate at the German Institute for Human Rights since 2019. She provides academic support to Barbara Lochbihler, the German member of the UN Committee against Enforced Disappearances. A key focus of this project is enforced disappearances in the context of migration. Dr. Voß-Kyeck is a political scientist and studied and received her doctorate from the University of Bonn. She previously worked for many years in the German section of Amnesty International and in the office of a Member of the European Parliament. For the "Forum Menschenrechte" (Human Rights Forum), she monitors and analyzes developments in the UN Human Rights Council. As a freelance writer, she also writes about human rights.

Ms Fiona O'Brien,
Regional
Director for
Europe and
Central Asia,
Committee to
Protect
Journalists



Fiona O'Brien is the Committee to Protect Journalists' Director for Europe and Central Asia. She started her career as a journalist, taking postings with Reuters in Nairobi, Baghdad and Beirut, and has also worked as an editor for the United Nations. She taught journalism at London's Kingston University, and previously worked for Reporters Without Borders as UK Director. Now based in London, she has been working on transnational repression for several years, with a particular focus on Iranian journalists.

Ms Joanna Szymańska,
Head of
Programmes
and Strategy for
Europe,
ARTICLE 19



Joanna Szymańska joined ARTICLE 19 in 2016 and is currently Head of Programmes and Strategy for Europe. She focuses on freedom of expression issues across the region – including media freedom, civic space, and digital rights. She is an experienced project coordinator, trainer, and researcher. In her current role, she leads regional strategy and multi-country initiatives supporting civil society, journalists and human rights defenders, with a particular focus on supporting communities at risk of digital repression and shrinking civic

space. She also contributes to ARTICLE 19's work on advancing international freedom of expression standards and policy frameworks.

Moderation:

Mr Renaud de Villaine, Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists Adviser, OHCHR



Renaud de Villaine has been working for more than ten years with OHCHR where he held various positions, including desk officer on African countries, field coordinator in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and legal advisor to the commissions of inquiry on Eritrea and Burundi. He is currently serving as advisor on media freedom and the safety of journalists. Before joining OHCHR, Renaud worked for non-governmental organizations both in Brussels and in Liberia. He holds a master's degree on human rights and humanitarian law at the University Paris II Panthéon-Assas.