

**United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**

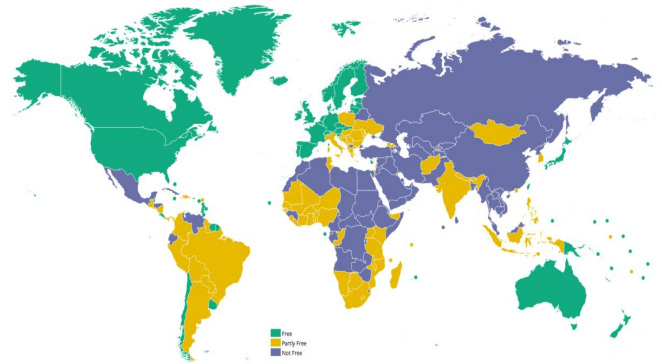
**MetMUNC XLVIII**

**Topic: Freedom of the Press**

**Chairpeople: Ross Ostrager, Kenny Fischer, Alyssa Reiss**



Freedom of the press is the principle that communication and expression through various media is a guaranteed right to exercise freely. This important right is described in Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which states that people have the right to “impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”<sup>1</sup> That is to say, this freedom is established to prohibit the government’s involvement in the distribution of information and opinions throughout society.



**Graphic 1:** Map that specifies which countries currently have freedom of press (green), partial freedom of press (yellow), or no freedom of press (purple).

Unsurprisingly, freedom of the press first became an issue with the introduction of mass media. The birth of the printing press launched not only the beginning of censorship, but also the increased intervention of officials on basic civic abilities. For example, In 1501, Pope Alexander VI issued a notice that required printers to submit their drafts to church officials before publication to prevent heresy.<sup>2</sup> In later years, John Peter Zenger, publisher of the New York Weekly Journal, was accused (but then acquitted) of libel charges brought by New York Gov.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/21312-freedom-of-the-press.html>

William Cosby after Zenger voiced his negative opinions on Cosby's governing.<sup>3</sup> Both instances show that some type of boundary or check was necessary to regulate the government's control and influence on what was communicated via media. These needed boundaries would soon take the shape of a broad, yet understandable principle—freedom of the press.

Although not a new concept, the freedom of the press today remains more relevant and important than ever. In our current world, however, this principle does not have the ideal support and therefore effectiveness necessary to maintain the safety and security of writers worldwide. As shown in Graphic 1, a multitude of countries do not utilize, require, or exhibit freedom of the press. Inevitably, debate and controversy arise as the rights of writers and journalists are at the height of their importance; our changing world constantly and continuously facilitates an increase in news, reports, and journalism in general. Because their abilities are suppressed by their countries' laws and power figures, journalists all around the world feel threatened and unable to fulfill the variety of duties their job requires.

One such example of a journalist being threatened by their government was in Djibouti earlier this year. In October, reporter Osman Yonis Borogeh, who works for a radio station named La Voix de Djibouti, was tortured, beaten, and recorded naked by police. In an attempt to gain information about his other co-workers as well as question him about his political affiliations, police blindfolded Borogeh and took him to an isolated location to be "questioned." Before releasing him, the police officers threatened to release the recorded videos if Borogeh continued with his journalist activities. The Djibouti police viewed Borogeh and his radio station as a threat to their power and therefore tried to threaten him in order to silence him.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ushistory.org/us/7c.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/djibouti-journalist-beaten-and-arrested-twice>

The freedom of the press is a barrier that protects society from authoritarianism and tyranny by the government. Without it, power holders around the world obtain an increasingly high amount of control and influence over subjected peoples' ways of life. Our world now faces these dangers because of the current suppression of freedom of the press. In most cases, conflicts between governments and journalists arise when the journalist expresses an idea or opinion that either clashes with a governmental belief or portrays the mentioned power figure in a negative light. In response, many authoritarian governments retaliate in a suppressive manner in an attempt to prevent further damage to their political image. The forms of suppression implemented by these governments vary; they may choose to torture, blackmail, imprison, or even assassinate an uncooperative writer. The justification for these means of hindering the journalists' abilities is the idea that their writings pose a threat to the said government. Other means of justification are largely just cover-ups of the same thing. One such example is in Turkmenistan, a nation that already has extremely limited internet access. The government has forced citizens to remove satellite dishes on the pretext of them "ruining the view of the city."<sup>5</sup> However, behind any reasoning for the intervention of the government on the press's freedom, there lies the constant and overall idea of control and power over society.

Several journalists have encountered similar circumstances to those described above. In Saudi Arabia, a popular case revolving around the lack of press freedom recently occurred. Journalist Jamal Khashoggi served as editor for the Saudi newspaper *Al Watan*, turning it into a platform for Saudi progressives.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, following backlash, Khashoggi fled Saudi Arabia and

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/24/turkmenistan-war-satellite-dishes#>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/jamal-khashoggi-chose-to-tell-the-truth-its-part-of-the-reason-hes-beloved/2018/10/07/4847f1d6-ca70-11e8-a3e6-44daa3d35ede\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/jamal-khashoggi-chose-to-tell-the-truth-its-part-of-the-reason-hes-beloved/2018/10/07/4847f1d6-ca70-11e8-a3e6-44daa3d35ede_story.html)

went to the United States where he became a journalist for the *Washington Post*. There, he wrote columns that criticized Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the kingdom's direction and advocated for reform in his country.<sup>7</sup> After the Saudi royal family and government caught wind of his pieces and Khashoggi returned to the Saudi consulate for documents related to his upcoming marriage, he was said to have been killed within the consulate because of his writings. Following investigations, it was concluded that Khashoggi was killed in the consulate, with the commonly accepted idea that it was premeditated murder ordered by Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi exemplifies the exact problem we face today: governments interfering with writers' abilities to air their honest opinions, and sometimes, taking a violent turn to prevent it further.

This is just one example of the dangers that arise with the lack of the freedom of the press. Writers in every country face the possibility of coming under fire for their work, and without security derived from the guaranteed freedom of the press, they face an everyday challenge of putting themselves at risk of clashing with the government while actively choosing to do what they love in order to inform the general public.

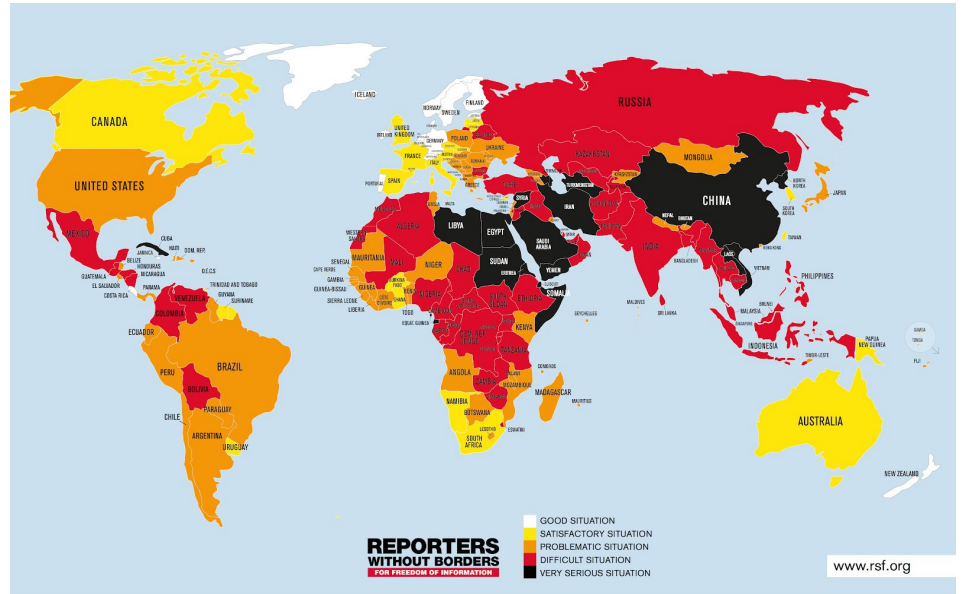
Every year, the non-profit organization Reporters Without Borders publishes a report on the state of press freedom throughout the world. It uses a metric called the World Press Freedom Index to determine the level of freedom the press has in 180 different countries. According to the 2019 index, 43 of the 180 countries in the study were considered to be in a satisfactory situation or better in regard to freedom of the press. The other 137 countries are considered to be in a problematic situation or worse.<sup>8</sup> Even more troubling are the 19 countries classified as having a

---

<sup>7</sup><https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399>

<sup>8</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

“very serious situation,” a classification made up of authoritarian governments. Most notably, Turkmenistan and North Korea have been alternating as the worst countries on the World Freedom Index for many years, with Turkmenistan overtaking North Korea in 2019.



**Graphic 2:** Map of the world on the world freedom press index scale (see helpful links for enlarged and interactive map).

Today, the main way in which people are fighting for press freedom is through protest and action. In 1993, the General Assembly proclaimed May 3rd to be World Press Freedom Day. The day not only promotes awareness towards the lack of free press in many nations, but also the dangerous situations many journalists endure in the field. As many as 99 journalists and media workers were killed in 2018, with that number most likely being higher.<sup>9</sup> Along with journalists being killed, the day brings to light the journalists who have been detained by police in their country as a result of their work. Even governments themselves have started their own campaigns and movements. The former UK Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, along with Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, hosted their own conference on media freedom earlier this year.

<sup>9</sup>[https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1033552?utm\\_source=miragenews&utm\\_medium=miragenews&utm\\_campaign=news](https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1033552?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news)

Many of the nations that lack freedom of the press lack other rights at the same time. Their people are usually oppressed by their governments, and they may even have a strong military presence over them enforcing these restrictions. One such example of this is in Sudan, where a local Al-Jazeera television office was shut down by authorities. There were protests that lasted two months, demanding more freedoms, including freedom of the press. The result of these protests was at least nine journalists dead and no rights guaranteed. Armed Sudanese troops with machine guns broke up the protests, and any requests to continue them were shut down.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the world, journalists have many struggles. Many journalists live in unsafe conditions, such as war zones where some may be killed in crossfire and combat. At least 302 journalists have been killed since 1992 in these conditions.<sup>11</sup> There are also many nations where the people cannot even report freely without the intervention of the government whether it be through censorship, or producing the news themselves.

It is our job as the UNHRC to discuss the extent to which press freedom should be allowed in our member countries and how we can expand it to protect as many journalists as possible.

---

<sup>10</sup><https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/sudan-army-protest-site-threat-closes-al-jazeera-office-190530234405647.html>

<sup>11</sup>[https://cpj.org/data/killed/in-combat/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&typeOfDeath%5B%5D=Crossfire&start\\_year=1992&end\\_year=2019&group\\_by=year](https://cpj.org/data/killed/in-combat/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&typeOfDeath%5B%5D=Crossfire&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=year)

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How much freedom does the press in your nation have to report the news?
2. What is your country's score on the World Press Freedom Index?
3. What events regarding freedom of the press have taken place in your country?
4. How many journalists have died from your nation?
5. Has your country taken a clear stance on the situation?
6. If your country does not support freedom of the press, why? What actions does it take to censor the media?

### **Helpful Links:**

1. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>
2. <https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology> (info about how the WPFI is calculated)
3. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/decline-in-global-freedom-of-press-reporters/>