



**“Dangerous Assignments: Safety of women journalists”
14 March 2018, New York**

Keynote Speech

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am very pleased to be here at the United Nations Headquarters for this panel, “Dangerous Assignments: Safety of women journalists”. My thanks to the hosts, the CPJ as well as to the delegations of France, Greece and Lithuania for inviting me to speak about the safety of female journalists.

It’s a hard time for safety of journalists and it’s an even harder time for safety of female journalists.

Women journalists face the same risks as their male colleagues as they cover the same news as reporters, and as investigative forces. They are increasingly visible and take the same professional risks. But they are specifically targeted as women.

The most recent attack against an investigative journalist was the murder of Ján Kuciak in Slovakia. But we remember it was only October last year that Daphne Caruana Galizia was murdered in Malta for her investigation on corruption in her country. A few month before that it was Kim Wall a Swedish journalist who was sexually assaulted and killed on assignment.

Others have been forced to flee their homes - like Tatiana Felgenhauer, stabbed in Radio Echo Moscow offices. Several have decided to leave their home country, like Yuliya Latynina from Novaya Gazeta after an attack in front of her home. Her fellow Novaya Gazeta colleague was Anna Politkovskaya, killed in Moscow in 2006.

Many journalists are threatened these days because of their work on corruption, their criticism of those in power, but also because they are now designated as the enemy of the people by the populist leaders everywhere.

But I want to underline the specificity, and the quantity of the threats against female journalists, especially online, which have reached an unprecedented level.

Before a journalist is murdered, he or she is often threatened, harassed – sometimes physically, and often psychologically. More and more, most of these threats happen online but are just as serious with very real consequences for journalists. Attackers take advantage

of the anonymity of the online space to inundate journalists with death threats and hate messages over Twitter, Facebook or email.

Women, especially, are subjected to the most vitriolic and sexually explicit online attacks. Women journalists face a double burden: attacked as journalists working in a global environment that is increasingly more difficult and dangerous. And they are also attacked as women, just for having a voice and daring to use it in the public sphere.

The harassment of women journalists online has an impact on the public at large. It affects the kinds of voices we hear, the stories we read, and ultimately the freedom and quality of the societies we live in.

Women's participation in the media and other visible public spaces is clearly under threat.

Today I will take this opportunity to speak about some of the women who take daily risks to continue reporting, and who speak out to offer their testimonials of harassment to us.

I would name Arzu Geybullayeva, a journalist from Azerbaijan working from Turkey, and who has been the target of an extensive online abuse campaign including dozens of death and rape threats. She has been labelled a terrorist. But despite continued daily harassment she has become an even louder voice for media freedom, speaking openly about online and physical intimidation of journalists.

I would name Humayra Bakhtiyar, a journalist from Tajikistan, who now lives in exile in Germany after threats against her escalated. Members of her family were targeted with physical violence because of her writing.

I would mention Jessikka Aro, a Finnish journalist whose experience with online harassment shows that even in a country ranked number one for media freedom, online harassment is easily mobilized to try to silence women. Aro faced a massive backlash from pro-Russian trolls including text messages from people pretending to be her deceased father.

There are many reasons for such attacks: the will to intimidate, of course. But also machismo, pure cowardice and an attempt to exploit women's vulnerability to try to silence them, which, in fact, underestimates their courage.

One root cause is probably the mass sexualisation of women. Women's bodies are objectified to sell everything from cars to propaganda.

In the media, women's experiences are treated as "niche" or special interest, not applicable to the general public. Women are extremely under-represented among people who are quoted and interviewed. Women, although more and more visible in the field of journalism are also still significantly under-represented in the management of the media. These factors reinforce gender inequality, and normalize a distorted view of women.

Throughout the course of our project on the safety of female journalists online, we have worked with journalists from countries all over the OSCE region.

We have seen this distorted view of women result in regular attacks and hatred. They are targeted in dangerous and disturbing ways, with a barrage of blatantly sexist, explicitly

threatening misogynistic messages of hate. A female journalist may feel insecure in any setting, not knowing who is watching and following her, where the threats are coming from, or how likely they are to manifest themselves in a physical attack.

For those who have been targeted with online abuse there's often nowhere for them to go: no support networks, few or no resources, and often very little assistance from authorities.

Female journalists often hear from law enforcement the following recommendations when it comes to online abuse and harassment: bring someone to accompany you in public, delete your social media accounts, turn off your computer or perhaps move elsewhere.

In other words, get a body guard, shut up or relocate. These measures may perhaps improve safety, but fall pathetically short of addressing the role of journalists to travel freely, ask tough questions and engage in public discourse.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no such thing as freedom of expression if it is the privilege of some, with the exclusion of others. Freedom can only be inclusive. For all.

Our full-scale awareness campaign has magnified the voices of women journalists speaking clearly and courageously. We hope this will provide a better understanding of the reality of journalists' everyday experiences of online harassment.

We know that online harassment discourages women from online participation, but there's more we need to know. For instance, what is the correlation between self-censorship and threats of sexual violence? How can we use the existing legal framework better to protect journalists online and hold to account those who threaten them?

In 2018 we'll invest much of our time in compiling research to better answer these questions and identify strategies that take into account issues such as trauma, counter-speech initiatives and support mechanisms for women media professionals.

But apart from research, we also need action.

No solution will be found effective if authorities – policy-makers, law enforcement – but also the news rooms, fail to see the bigger impact of abuse and gender-based harassment: they distort the media landscape and threaten plurality and the future of the free press.

First and foremost threats have to be looked at seriously and there should be no place for impunity.

Just last week, in the Russian State Duma, a high profile public official encouraged a group of women journalists, who had been sexually harassed at work, to find another job. This is not acceptable. Public officials must take more responsibility for ensuring a climate of safety for journalists.

Law enforcement agencies need to make it a priority to tackle the issue and treat an online threat of violence as seriously as an offline threat.

Media organizations should support colleagues who receive threats, and create a culture of gender equality, in the news room and in their reporting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The situation looks and is alarming. And yet, if we – as societies, as policy makers, as stakeholders, as citizens - hold ourselves accountable and demand action against the online intimidation of female journalists, I am convinced we will tackle so many other issues preventing women's necessary and full online participation.

In closing, allow me to quote Daphne Caruana Galizia's sons, who came to Vienna and gave a keynote address to the OSCE in December, commemorating their mother's death and calling for action to better protect journalists like her. They said: "The free flow of facts and opinions, the stock and trade of journalists, creates societies that are fairer and freer. It creates societies that are richer and more resilient: in other words, societies that are worth living in."

My Office will do all we can to create and sustain this type of society and to continue to support each and every voice that seeks to be heard.