



INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SUPPORT (IMS):

# TAKING ACTION TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS

A journalist covers a protest in Baku, Azerbaijan demanding the release of political prisoners.  
Photo: IRFS

## IMS' SAFETY PACKAGE

### TRAINING

#### Journalism ethics

Training in principles of ethics and good practice, concerning the duties, responsibilities, and rights of journalists.

#### Media laws and codes of conduct

Legal training for journalists, press regulatory bodies, media lawyers, judges, and authorities to help ensure laws and codes of conduct are adhered to.

#### Conflict sensitive journalism

Training in journalism techniques that enables journalists to cover conflict professionally without fanning the flames of conflict.

#### Risk analysis

Courses that provide media workers with holistic knowledge of what to do when faced with danger, and how to avoid placing oneself in danger.

#### First aid skills

Training in first aid to enable journalists working in conflict to assist themselves and others.

#### Secure communications

Techniques that enable media workers to avoid having their phones tapped and online communications intercepted.

### PRACTICAL MEASURES

#### 24/7 telephone hotlines

An emergency phone line that media workers can call when in danger to receive appropriate legal advice or other emergency assistance.

#### Safe houses

Discrete places away from the firing line, where media workers and their families can seek refuge.

#### Safety funds for emergency assistance

Funds quickly available that cover legal assistance, medical treatment or safe passage for media workers under attack.

#### Safety equipment

Bulletproof vests, press jackets and other equipment that give media workers added protection.

#### Legal assistance

Legal expertise and funds to fight court cases.

#### Trauma counselling

Psychological help given to media workers who have witnessed traumatic events, as well as training in how to deal with such experiences.

### ADVOCACY

#### Monitoring attacks on media

Research and awareness-raising that draws attention to media safety issues and provides a basis for subsequent advocacy.

#### Dialogue between security forces and media

Facilitated discussions between media workers, authorities, and security forces aimed at making each party more aware of each other's roles.

#### Media law reform

Initiatives that seek to change laws that are used to intimidate and censor the media, and to ensure that media workers enjoy greater legal protection.

#### Campaigns promoting the safety of journalists

Awareness-raising among media workers, decision makers and the public about issues of media safety.

#### Coordinated international support

Collaboration between international partners in countries where media workers are under sustained attack.

#### Guides and handbooks

Resource materials on safety for media workers, media trainers and decision makers.

The mantra sounds so logical: "No story is worth dying for". Yet journalists and media workers continue to be killed, attacked and intimidated more than ever before. The critical threats they face at increasingly complex and interrelated levels – on battlegrounds and in cyberspace, from repressive governments to organised crime – require well-designed and carefully chosen approaches to make them less vulnerable.

IMS utilises a combination of methods and tools to enable local journalists and media workers to survive and continue to provide the public with accurate, reliable information under the most challenging of circumstances.

### THE IMS APPROACH TO MEDIA SAFETY

Our work on media safety goes beyond simply ensuring physical safety. Journalists and media

workers need to be able to assess and mitigate the risks they face, to deal with the psychological consequences of working in conflict, and to practice professional journalism under pressure.

The IMS approach to media safety combines training, practical measures, and advocacy. Some of the tools we use are reactive: designed to protect journalists and media workers when they are in danger. Others help prevent them from getting into danger in the first place. Rarely are all the tools used at once. Rather, they are applied strategically to suit the needs of the media and the political contacts in each country.

**Training** ranges from basic first aid and learning how to make a risk analysis of the working environment to enabling journalists to produce stories that are professional and which defuse rather than exacerbate conflict. Where possible, IMS qualifies local trainers to deliver training in



First aid training in Sudan. Photo: Michelle Betz/IMS

indigenous languages and adapt course content to their local context.

**Practical measures** cover legal advice and trauma counselling, logistical support, and

safety equipment. When there is an immediate need for protection or for taking journalists out of harm's way, we employ safe houses where they and their families can seek refuge. We also make telephone hotlines available that journalists in danger can call for advice and assistance. IMS also administers safety funds to help journalists under attack to seek refuge, and to pay for urgent medical treatment or legal assistance.

**Advocacy** spans local and global campaigns on media safety aimed at influencing both media and government policies and practice. Media violations are documented and, where possible, the evidence is used in court. IMS also supports the production of handbooks for journalists on safety. At a local level we encourage dialogue and understanding between journalists and members of the government and security forces to overcome mutual mistrust.

## PUTTING OUR APPROACH INTO PRACTICE

Before intervening anywhere, we assess the needs of journalists in the country concerned. We do this in close consultation with local partners and other international press freedom organisations to ensure that subsequent interventions address local priorities and complement existing efforts.

In an armed conflict or in areas of human insecurity, our response is likely to include personal protection equipment and training in conflict sensitive journalism to ensure journalists are protected from further attacks, and avoid exacerbating the conflict with their coverage.

In countries where a democratic transition is underway, but some repression or pockets of violence remain, our efforts may focus on trying to influence policies and practice through advocacy and media law reform. In an emerging democracy, media also have a crucial part to play in furthering dialogue and peace by practicing journalism according to recognised professional standards.

In authoritarian states where there is little possibility of influencing government policies, our priority may rather be to ensure journalists are less susceptible to intimidation or surveillance by providing legal protection or training in secure online communications.

To be effective in the long run, our safety work must be anchored in local organisations and ultimately integrated into government policy. Therefore, our media safety initiatives are implemented through trusted and influential local organisations and individuals, as well as with international bodies. Launched in 2012, the **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** provides a common platform on which media and civil society organisations, UN bodies and crucially governments can share and harmonise their approach to improving the safety of journalists. In partnership with UNESCO and Open Society Foundations, IMS will be rolling out the Plan over the coming years in Pakistan, Nepal, South Sudan, Iraq, Honduras, and Mexico.

### Afghanistan: The personal cost of surviving a story

Aasif used to work for one of Kandahar's most prominent media outlets. A young and committed journalist, he reported critically on the Taliban and the Afghan government. He was aware his writings might cause him and his family trouble, but dedicated to his trade he felt compelled to go on.

After months of continuous threats from the Taliban and the Afghan intelligence agency, including warnings that he would be stoned to death unless he ceased his reporting, the intelligence agency paid a visit to Aasif's workplace while he was away on business. They also stopped by his home to threaten and mistreat his wife.

Following this escalation of threats, Aasif's employer contacted the coordinator of the IMS-founded Afghan Journalists' Safety Committee in Kabul. After investigating the case and verifying the threats against Aasif using its network of provincial representatives, government authorities, tribal elders, and other sources, the Safety Committee determined his threat level at 5, the highest level on a scale from 1. This warranted immediate protection and evacuation of Aasif and his wife.

While they sought refuge in a safe house at a secret location, the Safety Committee and IMS arranged the practical details of their evacuation out of the country. Aasif and his wife were provided with new passports, but fearing that their family members might suffer revengeful attacks, they were torn between whether to go or stay. After days of unbearable contemplation they decided to flee. The couple now lives in Europe, but remain traumatised by their experience. Members of their family have since been killed as an act of retribution by the Taliban.

#### The IMS Afghanistan safety mechanism

The Afghan Journalist Safety Committee manages a country-wide safety mechanism which includes a Freedom of Expression monitoring unit that documents violations against journalists; a provincial safety team, a 24-hour telephone emergency hotline, safe house facilities, a safety fund for emergency support and practical safety training for journalists that includes trauma counselling and conflict sensitive journalism training.