

# JOURNALISTS' SECURITY IN WAR ZONES

## LESSONS FROM SYRIA



A Report by



THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

In Cooperation with

Cover photo credit:

**Narciso Contreras**, *Free Syrian Army soldiers and freelance photographers Cesare Quinto and Javier Manzano seek cover, under sniper fire in the Shaar neighbourhood of Aleppo, Syria, July 2012*



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Samir Kassir Center

Center for Media and Cultural Freedom



THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

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## Foreword

When the Samir Kassir Foundation launched the SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom in 2007, it intended to establish a resource centre that monitors and denounces violations against journalists, media professionals, artists and intellectuals in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. The mission statement of the centre also included the provision of support to journalists facing repression and life-threatening conditions, and building journalists' capacity to meet the highest professional and ethical standards.

It was clear at the time that Syria would be the most challenging operating environment. Repression, arbitrary detention and forced exile of journalists were all too common practices. The eruption of the Syrian conflict in March 2011 made the situation far more perilous. Syria has become the most dangerous place on earth for local and international journalists alike. The risk of abduction is higher than in any other region in the world, and even the most conservative figures put the death toll of journalists and citizen journalists killed in the field at, respectively, more than 50 and 100 since March 2011.

Yet, foreign reporters, photojournalists and filmmakers are still going there, braving ever-greater risks, to shed light on one of the most tragic humanitarian emergencies in recent memory. However, the increased danger and the multiplication of abductions and killing have pushed most international media outlets to refrain from sending their staff on the ground. Most of those who cover the conflict in Syria today are freelancers, who may not have undergone the appropriate hostile environment training and cannot rely on the support of established news organisations in situations where they are most at risk.

In this context, it was highly important for SKeyes to organize a retreat, in a calm and peaceful environment, for international journalists covering Syria to reflect on the challenges they face on a daily basis. They, better than anyone, could answer critical questions: What are the true security conditions on the ground? What are journalists' expectations from their employers? What is the best behaviour to adopt in case of abduction? What can journalists expect from their governments? What kind of assistance is available for freelance journalists? How can war reporters deal with post-traumatic stress disorder?

More specifically, the meeting aimed at reaching consensus on a document outlining a series of minimum working standards for journalists in conflict zones. SKeyes will share this document with other journalists covering the conflict in Syria with the hope it will serve as a starting point for discussions between journalists and their employers, defining the conditions and requirements that should always be taken into account before sending reporters into the field. A broad endorsement of the minimum standards will contribute to strengthening the negotiation power of journalists and improving their protection.

Finally, SKeyes would like to thank the European Union for supporting this initiative; Reporters without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Rory Peck Trust and Human Rights Watch for their trust and active contribution to the success of the meeting; and Shane Farrell, the author of this report.

**Ayman Mhanna**

Executive Director

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# Executive Summary

The face of journalism has changed radically in recent decades. As news agencies, for the most part, have to grapple with reduced budgets, freelancers are now providing an ever larger share of news content. The result has been that an increasing number of ambitious but untrained aspiring journalists can have content published if it meets the standards set by the news outlet. Yet, these standards are often limited to the quality of content, rather than the means by which it was acquired. Rarely, for instance, do news outlets provide freelancers with minimum standards of security training or equipment. Among staff journalists the situation is generally better, even though some of the largest news outlets do not provide insurance coverage for staff reporting from conflict zones, not to mention fixers, drivers or other locals who are so vital in the gathering of news content.

The argument often raised by employers is that the onus is on the freelancer to prepare adequately for the job at hand. Also, many journalists simply do not raise the issues with employers in the knowledge that there are often less security conscious journalists who may be willing to do the job. In war zones, however, this lack of emphasis on security is a grave concern particularly since it is widely believed that the deaths of so many journalists every year in war zones could have been prevented had they or their colleagues been better prepared.

Stories of journalists entering conflict zones without basic equipment or first aid training are all too familiar; so too are reports of news outlets washing their hands of responsibility regarding commissioned freelancers. This needs to change, and it can, so long as enough voices in the industry back initiatives to implement minimum working standards.

This was the objective of a retreat for international journalists who have reported from Syria since conflict broke out in early 2011: to produce a set of minimum professional and safety standards for journalists reporting from conflict zones and their employers, drawing on their experiences and challenges in the field.

What follows is an outline of a series of discussions held over the three-day retreat among some 45 journalists, photographers and filmmakers, which led to the production of a minimum standards document. Participants discussed their greatest personal, security and professional challenges faced when reporting from Syria, including experiences with kidnappings, news blackouts, computer encryption, cultural sensitivity and post-traumatic stress disorder. Their recommendations are outlined in the “Minimum Working Standards for Journalists in Conflict Zones” (appendix 1) and “Recommendations to Press Freedom Organisations” (appendix 2).



# Introduction

## Background

The following is a summary of a conference held in the Al-Bustan Hotel in Beit Mery, Lebanon, from 12-14 July 2013, which was attended by 45 journalists who have reported from inside Syria since conflict broke out there in March 2011. The attendees, who included both staff reporters and freelancers from a wide range of media, discussed difficulties they faced reporting from conflict areas and helped produce guidelines for reporters and news outlets commissioning articles, pictures and videos from war zones. The event was hosted by the Samir Kassir Foundation's SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom with the participation of representatives from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters without Borders (RWB), the Rory Peck Trust (RPT) and Human Rights Watch (HRW).

## Changing shape of journalism

Journalism has changed radically – some say irreversibly – in recent decades. The proliferation of freely available information online, a shift towards newsgathering through social media websites like Twitter (particularly for breaking news), and the phenomenon known as 'citizen journalism' are just some of the realities of the modern age that are changing the face of journalism, causing newsrooms to shrink and squeezing budgets.

News outlets are adapting to this new reality in different ways: some outlets are charging users for

online content to generate extra income, while others fear doing so will merely drive customers away. Some newspapers are simply publishing fewer pages or, like the UK-based Independent, selling cheaper but smaller versions of the paper<sup>(1)</sup>. Most are cutting down on staff numbers<sup>(2)</sup> or, in the more drastic cases, a whole body of journalists (like the Chicago Sunday Times, which fired all of its full time photographers earlier this year)<sup>(3)</sup>.

Across the board, news outlets are adapting to budget cuts by increasingly relying on freelancers rather than staff reporters to provide content. This is now a burgeoning aspect of the industry. Yet, there is often a lack of standardisation or even guidelines of best practice to ensure the highest standards of journalism and safety are maintained. Many outlets will accept work from conflict zones even if the journalist does not have basic safety training and acts in a way that might endanger others. The most egregious example of this in recent times, perhaps, is an article published by Vice Magazine in 2012. The title is indicative: "I went to Syria to learn how to be a journalist and failed miserably at it while almost dying a bunch of times"<sup>(4)</sup>. Freelance journalists by and large are serious, hard-working and professional. But because of the nature of the job, which technically does not require training and can be done cheaply, it will always draw in 'war tourist' types that do a disservice to the profession.

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1. The Independent's 'i' newspaper was first launched in October 2010. At £0.20 (£0.30 on Saturday) it is considerably cheaper than the main Independent paper, which retails at £1.40 for weekday editions, and £1.80 and £2.20 for the Saturday and Sunday editions, respectively. The 'i' consistently sells more than the larger paper.
  2. See, for example, The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism annual report 'The State of News Media 2013'. The report, which examines US media, estimates that "newsroom cutbacks in 2012 put the industry down 30% since 2000 and below 40,000 full-time professional employees for the first time since 1978." Available at <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2013/overview-5/>. For comparative purposes, a general discussion of the shrinking newspaper industry in the US and the UK can be found here: <http://www.themediabriefing.com/article/abcs-newspapers-circulation-decline>.
  3. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/business/media/chicago-sun-times-lays-off-all-its-full-time-photographers.html>
  4. Sunil Patel, 'I went to Syria to learn how to be a journalist and failed miserably at it while almost dying a bunch of times,' *Vice*. Available at <http://www.vice.com/read/i-went-to-syria-to-learn-how-to-be-a-journalist>
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Additionally, there is the more common issue of the well-intentioned but inexperienced freelancers with an ambition to break into journalism or to expand their profile. These individuals are often primarily motivated by having content published and generally are not overly concerned about salary or conditions of work. In an industry facing major financial difficulties, it can be very tempting for news outlets to pay low rates for content acquired. However, this comes with a multitude of implications, including that of driving more experienced journalists towards better paid professions and causing the freelancers to cut corners on important elements such as preparation, training and equipment. This can, in turn, increase the security risks for both the freelancers and the people they are dealing with in the war zone. This subject will be looked at in the section entitled “Dealing with Employers”. What should be kept in mind at this point is that the challenges faced by journalists and commissioning news editors are vast and that the quality of news reporting will inevitably suffer further if both groups fail to adapt to the implications of a rapidly-evolving shift in information gathering and news dispersal.

## Editors’ dilemma

It should be noted that some media outlets are refusing to accept content from freelancers or, more specifically, freelancers who have not undergone basic first aid or security training. The UK Sunday Times famously refused to take copy from freelancers following the death of their veteran war correspondent Marie Colvin, who was killed while reporting from Homs in February 2012. The Sunday Times reasoned that doing so would encourage others to take “exceptional risks.”<sup>(5)</sup>

Other outlets, such as Radio France and the major British broadsheets have adopted a similar policy.<sup>(6)</sup> Nevertheless, the practice is controversial, and many freelancers have expressed their criticism of such a stance saying that it should be up to them to decide whether the risks are worth taking and that the implementation of such policies prevents important stories from being told.

But, while the jury is still out when it comes to the morality of accepting stories from freelancers reporting from conflict zones, there is a growing realisation within the industry that concrete action is needed to address such issues. In recent years, a number of initiatives have been taken to improve overall practice in an effort both to maintain high standards while ensuring that journalists work responsibly and to high security standards. The Frontline Freelance Register,<sup>(7)</sup> for instance, is a body of freelancers whose members promise to adhere to a basic code of conduct with a view to ensuring responsible journalism. Additionally, Frontline Club produced a white paper entitled “Newsgathering Safety and the Welfare of Freelancers”<sup>(8)</sup>, which outlines some of the most significant issues faced by freelancers, including digital training and insurance problems. Meanwhile, press freedom organisations and journalists’ unions are continuing their efforts to provide journalists with advice and information, including on the most affordable insurance and security training rates available to journalists.

## Discussion points

The Samir Kassir Foundation hosted this retreat for journalists who have reported from Syria to add impetus to these drives that aim at improving the

5. See, for example, Gavin Rodgers, ‘Sunday Times tells freelancers not to submit photographs from Syria’, *Press Gazette*, 5 February 2013. Available at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/sunday-times-tells-freelancers-not-submit-photographs-syria>

6. This includes the Guardian, Observer and the Independent. For more information, see <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/broadsheets-back-sunday-times-decision-decline-freelance-submissions-syria>

7. <https://frontlinefreelance.org/>

8. ‘Newsgathering Safety and the Welfare of Freelancers,’ a white paper by the Frontline Club, 6 June 2013. Available at [http://www.frontlineclub.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Safety-Report\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.frontlineclub.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Safety-Report_WEB.pdf)

quality and safety standards of journalism. With this in mind, the three-day seminar took the form of a discussion between attendees, rather than the usual panel-focused format of conferences. Many of the journalists knew one another or were familiar with the work of other participants, which contributed greatly to the relaxed atmosphere of the event.

The seminar was divided thematically into sessions covering the following four areas: safety in the field; dealing with employers; dealing with governments; dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder.

This report will outline the main discussion points in each session with a view to providing an insight into some of the biggest challenges faced by

journalists who have reported from inside Syria since the conflict began in March 2011. In some instances, the summary of the discussions will be supplemented with information gleaned from other sources available online and duly referenced.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that during the closing sessions of the retreat participants worked in smaller groups to build a set of recommendations for both journalists intending to work in conflict zones and their employers. The recommendations were then combined to form the attached “Minimum Working Standards for Journalists in Conflict Zones”, which will hopefully contribute towards establishing a basic set of procedures for journalists and their employers in order to improve the safety standards and working conditions of staff journalists and freelancers alike.

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# Overview and Expectations



Photo credit: **Mani**, *On the frontline with FSA fighters with the reporter Jonathan Littell*, Baba Amr, Homs, Syria, February 2012

Among the talking points of the opening session, which established expectations for the conference, were:

- the responsibilities of employers to the journalist and his/her fixers;
- benefits and drawbacks of media blackout in cases of kidnapping (and moral issues surrounding blackouts of journalists' abduction vis-à-vis non-journalists); and
- information on the nature and availability of equipment.

These will be discussed at length in the sections covering the thematic sessions.

Another noteworthy issue, which was briefly discussed in the opening session but was not brought up in later sessions, is the question of cultural sensitivity. Two journalists with Arab backgrounds felt that, on occasions, some Western journalists were not deeply in tune to the local conservative culture and were prone to making faux pas that were likely to offend Syrians or, worse, put the journalists or their colleagues in danger. This was countered by one journalist who said: "I think all of us here are experienced enough and are aware of cultural sensitivities on the ground in Syria." The discussion quickly moved on, but not before one participant highlighted how one male journalist at the conference wore an ear piercing in

the field, which apparently raised some eyebrows among Syrians. While this is a minor example, and it is unwise to jump to the conclusions, it is not inconceivable that, sometimes, foreign journalists are not as aware of cultural sensitivities as they think they are and that for reasons of respect, preferable working conditions and safety, this knowledge deficit should be addressed. This could also be extended to language skills. Even a basic grasp of a local language or dialect demonstrates respect and can potentially get someone out of a very difficult spot.

On a related note, it was emphasized that journalists should have an understanding of and empathy for religious issues in any situation where they are likely to be dealing with religious individuals. In the case of Syria, and most Muslim-majority countries, knowledge of the fundamentals of Islam should

be heavily emphasised. In more extreme cases, a deeper understanding could save someone's life<sup>9</sup>.

The session ended with several journalists who recently returned from Syria recounting their experiences. Participants were especially gripped when one journalist proceeded to recount his tales from the Damascus countryside. Having managed to cross into rebel-held areas, subsequent government advances prevented him from escaping as exit routes were sealed off. For his own safety, he had to remain with rebels for four months before managing to escape back out of the country.

The exchange of personal experiences from the field gave a strong indication of the fluid battleground in Syria and how adaptable journalists have to be when the situation changes on the ground.

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9. In a safety manual aimed at individuals expecting to work in a war zone, author Rosie Garthwaite details how a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff member was kidnapped by Islamist militants in Chechnya and managed to save her own life using her knowledge of Islamic religious verses. As the author explains, before the MSF staff member was about to be shot, "she suddenly remembered the call to prayer, which she had heard so many times in her childhood. The kidnappers started arguing about how it was a sign from God and decided not to shoot her. She was eventually released." Rosie Garthwaite, *How to Avoid Being Killed in a War Zone*, p.34 (Bloomsbury: 2011).

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# Safety in the Field



Photo credit: **Manu Bravo**, *Tank shell explodes in Al-Arqoob neighbourhood of Aleppo – Syria, October 2012*

There is no doubt that the situation on the ground is now more dangerous than ever. Kidnappings are becoming more frequent and professional, and this would largely explain why fewer journalists are entering Syria than ever before<sup>(10)</sup>. Despite the danger, very few journalists said they used security contractors. None of the freelance journalists at the conference could afford such protection while some of the more experienced reporters were quite disparaging, referring to security contractors

as “muscled-up beefcakes,” “without cultural sensitivity” and a “waste of money.”

## Crossing points

Journalists reporting from the rebel side almost invariably enter Syria through crossing points outside government control, most commonly through Turkey as it is believed to be a safer and more accessible border than Lebanon.

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10. For a recent overview of this topic, see:

- Tom A. Peter, ‘Why fewer ground reports are emerging from Syria’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 July 2013. Available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2013/0731/Why-fewer-ground-reports-are-emerging-from-Syria>
- Rick Gladstone, ‘Journalists in Syria Face Dangers of War and Rising Risk of Abduction’. *The New York Times*, 9 August 2013. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/10/world/middleeast/journalists-in-syria-face-dangers-of-war-and-rising-risk-of-abduction.html?\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/10/world/middleeast/journalists-in-syria-face-dangers-of-war-and-rising-risk-of-abduction.html?_r=2&)
- Patrick Cockburn, ‘Violence is one thing, but what causes real terror is the threat of kidnapping’, *The Independent*, 11 August 2013. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/violence-is-one-thing-but-what-causes-real-terror-is-the-threat-of-kidnapping-8755853.html>

However, many of these crossings are becoming increasingly perilous. Bab al-Hawa and Aazaz were singled out as common crossing points that have become highly dangerous in recent months. Much of the danger, according to participants, lies in the fact that the territory frequently changes hands. The border zones are often under the control of radical Islamist groups or criminal gangs, making the risk of kidnapping much greater than in the past. These nefarious individuals are believed to be monitoring border crossings in order to pick up foreigners at a later stage and hold them for ransom.

In general, loitering around checkpoints was considered potentially very dangerous, and if vehicle swaps were necessary this ought to be done as speedily as possible. Similarly, spending multiple nights at the same location was strongly discouraged, as it increases the likelihood of information being passed to kidnappers regarding the journalist's location.

Participants debated the risks and advantages associated with receiving the protection of one of the fighting brigades (*katiba*). While this might provide some security, caution is always required. One of the most experienced journalists offered his advice on crossing borders and reflected more generally upon the changing nature of reporting in Syria:

*"Nowadays, you must set up your story from outside, pop in and out as quickly as possible - long gone are the days of doing two or three week trips."*

## Kidnapping

What followed was a discussion of what to do in cases of kidnapping. One participant had to deal with two cases of friends being kidnapped and stated, in no uncertain terms, that "in each case the rumours were very damaging." In a different case, rumours of a journalist's impending release

actually prevented his being set free. In other cases, the rumours had raised the hopes of the kidnapped journalist's friends and family and played havoc on their mental state when these rumours turned out to be false.

There was no consensus on whether systematic news blackouts – an informal agreement among journalists, employers and families, not to publicise news of a kidnapping – is the best approach. A majority of participants felt that it was the best practice, but others argued that it depends very much on the case and the preferences of the family. Those against blackouts made the point that publicising someone's case can pressure their government into negotiating with the captors and may help dispel views that kidnappers might have about the person they abducted being a spy. Some participants lamented the double standards among some journalists, who would adhere to a blackout of fellow journalists, but are quick to report kidnappings of non-journalists. Some journalists made it clear to their employer in advance whether they would want a blackout or not. In short, it depends on the individual journalist and the specific case at hand.

The discussion moved towards means of avoiding kidnapping, particularly when it comes to common sense use of internet communications sites. Online forums, including secret Facebook groups, were not deemed reliable places to post sensitive material. This is true for a range of information, from details about a kidnapped colleague to information regarding one's planned entry to Syria. As the representative from a major press freedom organisation said:

*"If I can tell who's going into Syria based solely on their Facebook posts, imagine what the regime or some fighting groups, with far more resources at their disposal, can do. Frankly, it's very foolish to post information as sensitive as that online."*

## Communications and security

Participants then discussed the topic of preferred working procedures once journalists were inside Syrian territory. Some journalists like to work completely under the radar, without fixers and relying on local connections. However, this seems to have been the minority view. Others, particularly those working for more established outlets, encouraged colleagues to plan the trip meticulously and to have trusted contacts in each area they are planning to visit before they arrive. Though, it was pointed out that in some cases it is preferable not to fix a meeting but rather show up, conduct interviews and leave as quickly as possible afterwards. All journalists appeared to have some form of a communication plan tailored to their own preferences and the realities on the ground through which they would touch base with a trusted contact at regular intervals to update them and make it known that they are safe.

The discussion transitioned seamlessly to methods of data protection. The key advice was to install TrueCrypt, a software that enables one to easily hide data on computers. One of the most useful features of TrueCrypt for journalists reporting from conflict zones is the ‘Hidden Volume’ feature, which enables the user to have two different passwords with each password opening up a different set of data. Typically, one set of data includes sensitive content while the content of the other is innocuous. In cases where a user is coerced into revealing his/her password, that person can give out the password which opens up data that is inoffensive. Software like TrueCrypt is difficult to trace, even for those who are aware of the technology. But, such applications are only effective if users diligently follow the instructions and remember to encrypt data routinely.

Other communication devices carry their own risks. Caution was expressed on the need for journalists to delete phone numbers and not to bring in their smart phones as these could endanger the journalist’s contacts. Several participants admitted that they had not minimised information on their phones. Participants also debated whether SIM cards can be traced in the phone even when the device is switched off. Phone and Skype calls were deemed especially dangerous and easy to intercept. Their advice was to use VPNs or TOR<sup>(11)</sup> to encrypt conversations, a method practiced by three quarters of the attendees. Any cellular or satellite phone conversation should also be very short and it was highly advised not to make several calls from the same location.

## Reporting responsibly

On the topic of reporting on sensitive issues, several journalists revealed that they had been firmly asked – by local fighters, fixers or activists – not to write about foreign fighters or Islamist radicals. But, there are ways to get around this, for instance by securing the approval of the heads of local *katibas* and the foreign fighters themselves.

There was also criticism of freelancers seeking out ‘sexy’ stories about Islamist fighters and foreign jihadists, which only provides a partial view of what is happening in Syria. There was some anecdotal evidence of Syrians becoming increasingly angry at journalists who repeatedly asked to meet with foreign fighters, even in areas where they are not known to be present. Journalists are often overly attracted to ‘juicier’ stories rather than towards giving a more balanced picture of what is taking place. But, sometimes editors are equally at fault, as Italian journalist Francesca Borri articulated in a well-circulated piece published this year.<sup>(12)</sup> In a moving account of difficulties she has

11. VPN, or Virtual Private Network, enables users to access a network and transfer data across a public telecommunication infrastructure, like the Internet, as if it were a private network, such as one belonging to a private business. TOR, meanwhile, stands for The Onion Router. It is a free software that allows users to conceal their location when accessing the Internet.

12. Francesca Borri, ‘Woman’s work: The twisted reality of an Italian freelancer in Syria’, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 1 July 2013. Available at [http://www.cjr.org/feature/womans\\_work.php?page=all](http://www.cjr.org/feature/womans_work.php?page=all)



experienced while reporting in Syria, Borri laments the fact that:

*“[E]ditors back in Italy only ask us for the blood, the bang-bang I write about the Islamists and their network of social services, the roots of their power – a piece that is definitely more complex to build than a frontline piece. I strive to explain, not just to move, to touch, and I am answered with: ‘What’s this? Six thousand words and nobody died.’”*

Such an editorial approach can of course give a false impression of the realities on the ground and, hence, contribute towards rising levels of

fear and tension. It can also affect perceptions and policy decisions. Moreover, it has repercussions for other journalists and was cited as one of the reasons why Syrians appear to be increasingly distrusting of journalists than they have been in the past.

With reporting, as with daily dealings with individuals on the ground, journalists are ambassadors of their profession. Malpractice by one individual – whether willingly or through ignorance – can taint the reputation of all journalists, making newsgathering more difficult the longer the conflict lasts.

### **Key recommendations to journalists:**

- *Do not loiter around checkpoints.*
- *Do not spend multiple nights in the same location.*
- *Respect blackout decisions in cases of kidnapping if blackout is requested by the families of abducted journalists.*
- *Do not reveal your travel plans on online forums, including on supposedly secret online groups.*
- *Plan your trip meticulously with trusted contacts.*
- *Agree on a communication plan with your editor and/or a trusted third party.*
- *Encrypt your files, communication channels and devices.*
- *Do not make multiple calls from the same location.*
- *Respect local cultural sensitivities.*

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# Dealing with Employers



Photo credit: **Narciso Contreras**, *Javier Manzano at work in the hospital that served as home and shelter for many journalists, Aleppo – Syria, October 2012*

The disparity between the working conditions of staff journalists, particularly those at larger media outlets, and those of freelancers is often vast. Staff journalists participating in the conference typically had a fixed salary, insurance, security training and an editor-in-chief who was constantly available. Moreover, third parties such as fixers, drivers and translators were generally paid directly by the media outlet. In some cases, the outlet also paid for insurance for the third party, although it should be pointed out that the vast majority of fixers are not provided with the same protections as western journalists and often face much riskier working conditions<sup>13</sup>. However, the working conditions for freelancers are typically much worse. Many have foregone hostile environment training and even insurance, claiming these are too costly. Generally, they rely

heavily on a combination of their own experiences, advice from colleagues and security information available in print or online. If they get into trouble, they do not tend to have the backing of the news outlet to which they sell content, but rather rely on the goodwill of colleagues and contacts to do what they can to help them out of their situation.

## Costs of war reporting

During the discussion, the question of fees was the chief point of contention between journalists. Freelancers lamented the fact that staff journalists were paying fixers relatively well and that this was driving up the prices. Staff journalists, meanwhile, were critical of freelance journalists for accepting low pay for their pieces, claiming this is driving down remuneration for all journalists. This

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13. See, for example, George Packer, 'It's always the fixer who dies', *The New Yorker*, 10 September 2009. Available at <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/georgepacker/2009/09/its-always-the-fixer-who-dies.html>

frustration highlights the need for standardisation of terms with a view to making the working environment easier and more predictable for journalists across the board.

The discussion then focused on estimating costs of reporting from conflict zones like Syria. One staff journalist revealed what appears to be the highly variable costs of reporting from a conflict zone as between \$100-200 a day for a fixer/translator, \$100 for a driver, and \$50 for accommodation. Freelancers, meanwhile, tended to pay fixers and drivers much less, and rely on local people to give them a bed or floor space for the night. Arab culture is famously generous and hospitality is highly valued. Hence, any insistence to pay for bed and board can be insulting to one's host (which is another reason why understanding local sensibilities is so important).

But, what is highly undesirable are reports of journalists underpaying their support team, such as the example cited of a fixer who complained about an Italian freelancer paying him just €40 for a day's work on the frontlines. Then again, journalists like Francesca Borri reported earning just €30 more than that for a piece filed from Syria for Italian news outlets, which explains – but does not excuse – underpaying fixers; this behaviour may also contribute to tarnishing the name of journalists.

This session continued with the consensus that salaries must be improved and after articulating many of the challenges with implementing this, participants agreed that what was required was a collective effort from journalists – possibly through journalists' unions – to standardise pay rates or at least make them more transparent. Several participants, however, expressed doubts about the feasibility of such a process. Some

initiatives have been made in this regard already. The National Union of Journalists in the UK, for instance, has a Freelance Fee Guide<sup>(14)</sup> which provides freelancers with an idea of the salary they should expect to receive for various types of freelance content for different media outlets. There have been some attempts to increase transparency across the board with initiatives like “Who Pays Writers” and “Who Pays Photographers”<sup>(15)</sup>, websites that compare different pay rates internationally, but none have been successful. Participants identified this as a potential area in which organisations defending journalists' rights could help by plugging this information gap and creating a table with different pay rates among media outlets at an international level.

## Insurance

*“Insurance is notoriously expensive. It is probably fair to say that many freelancers are not currently traipsing around the hot spots of the world without insurance, because they want to or because they are ignorant to the need for insurance – most simply cannot afford it”.*

The above statement, written by freelancers Aris Roussinos, Ayman Oghanna and Emma Beals in a paper produced by the Frontline Club<sup>(16)</sup>, perhaps best reflects the sentiment among freelancers at the conference. In general, as it stands now employers will pay insurance for staff members but not freelancers. Freelancers and many staffers felt that this should change and that employers ought to cover insurance, or at least contribute significantly towards it.

It was also felt that journalists could “get smarter about insurance.” Many simply do not pay for it, and some of the ones who do neglect to read the fine print. One particularly egregious example

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14. See <http://www.londonfreelance.org/feesguide/index.php?language=en&country=UK&section=Welcome>

15. See <http://whopays.tumblr.com/> and <http://whopaysphotogs.tumblr.com/>

16. ‘Newsgathering Safety and the Welfare of Freelancers,’ a white paper by the Frontline Club, 6 June 2013. Available at [http://www.frontlineclub.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Safety-Report\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.frontlineclub.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Safety-Report_WEB.pdf)

of an insurance company not covering funeral costs was highlighted during the conference as a warning to others. Olivier Voisin was a French photographer who reported from Syria before getting hit by a shrapnel and brought into Turkey, where he later died from his injuries. Voisin's family had to pay for the funeral expenses.

The provisions of insurance packages vary greatly, however, depending on the nature of the insurance and the conflict. According to a June report by the Frontline Club, "A freelancer recently back from Syria revealed that her basic insurance package for a two-week trip came to £280. Others, however, not satisfied with a basic package, can spend up to £1,000 for the same duration and location. Freelancers, who make multiple trips a year, can easily spend thousands of pounds in insurance." By comparison, it can be anywhere from \$500 a week in Afghanistan to \$600 a month in Libya, according to 2011 figures. The consensus among journalists is that Reporters without Borders offers the most cost-effective packages, with an 'essential plan' costing €2.71 a day for assistance coverage in medical emergencies, with an extra premium of €11 charged for high-risk countries.<sup>(17)</sup> Since RWB has offered this insurance coverage, over 400 people have purchased it. However, alternatives do exist, and the provision to both journalists and employers of lists and prices of comparative insurance policies was seen by many as a very useful contribution that could be made by press freedom organisations<sup>(18)</sup>.

## Challenges for freelancers

The issues of employers merely buying finished copy, not giving freelancers an advance, and abrogating responsibility if they get into trouble while in the field were also major gripes articulated. This is a significant concern, as it leaves the journalist without a safety net and with

no burden shouldered by the employer if things do not go as planned. Sometimes, freelancers feel that they should produce content first and pitch the story to news outlets later, but this is not necessarily advisable. As one of the journalists at the conference, who also commissions work from freelancers for the news outlet she works for, put it: "I worry if [journalists pitching a story] don't ask what the rates are and negotiate terms of employment before going into the field. It calls their professionalism into question."

The session concluded with input from the representatives of the different press freedom organisations attending the conference, briefly outlining some of the ways their organisations can be of assistance to journalists, particularly freelance journalists.

The Committee to Protect Journalists can offer good advice on the do's and don'ts of war reporting. CPJ maintains a small distress fund through which it dispenses emergency grants to journalists. CPJ steps in when journalists are in dire situations as a result of persecution for their work, helps them get medical care and evacuates journalists at risk to temporary havens. The Rory Peck Trust, meanwhile, provides direct financial assistance to freelancers and their families in crisis around the world. RPT also provides bursaries for freelancers to undertake hostile environment training through approved providers, and supports freelancers with practical advice, information and resources on insurance, safety and welfare issues. Although, as the representative stated clearly, the "supply of funds for security training programs really does not meet the demand." Reporters without Borders, for its part, dispenses services similar to CPJ's and loans protective equipment to journalists, provides discounted insurance rates and a free emergency hotline as well as psychological support. It has also co-produced,

17. See <http://en.rsf.org/insurance-for-freelance-17-04-2007,21746.html>

18. On 17 June 2013, the International News Safety Institute published a document comparing the various insurance packages made available for journalists worldwide. The document is available here: <http://www.newssafety.org/images/FINAL%20Insurance%20document%20for%20articleFINAL-HS.pdf>

with the UNESCO, a practical guide for journalists, including those working in conflict zones.<sup>(19)</sup> SKeyes meanwhile, has funding for some Syrians journalists and fixers who have been forced out of Syria due to the conflict, and helps them

relocate to other countries. Foreign journalists can help in this regard by making sure their local collaborators have valid passports so that press freedom organisations assist them in obtaining visas for safer countries in emergency cases.

### **Key recommendations:**

*Key recommendations from this session are included in Appendix 1: Minimum Working Standards for Journalists in Conflict Zones.*

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19. RWB produced in 2007 a 'Handbook for Journalists' going to dangerous locations, in collaboration with UNICEF. It is available here: <http://en.rsfo.org/handbook-for-journalists-17-04-2007,21744.html>



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# Dealing with Governments

## Governments and kidnappings

A minority of journalists attending the conference had direct dealings with their own governments. In most cases, this involved discussions regarding the release of kidnapped colleagues. Participants shared some mixed reviews in this regard about their experiences with security, political and diplomatic authorities in the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, Germany, France and Italy.

Several journalists called on governments to use their technological assets, like Signals Intelligence (or SIGINT)<sup>(20)</sup>, to trace kidnappers or to at least do more on the diplomatic front when it came to negotiating the release of kidnapped journalists. Many participants said that they have little to no faith in their government and believe that they can only rely on colleagues to follow their case, if they are kidnapped.

It is understandable that governments have strict policies when dealing with cases of kidnapping. These policies, including contacts with the kidnappers, involvement of special forces and paying ransoms, are often state secrets. Also, official communication with relatives of kidnapped individuals is governed by different sets of rules from country to country. But, while governments may not be able to share all details they have about a certain case with relatives, the discussion highlighted the need for a more transparent explanation of the communication policies and channels. This is particularly true when small groups of journalists are actively working on the release of their colleagues through contacts based on the ground, which has happened on numerous occasions during the Syrian conflict.

## Visas and entry stamps

The session then moved to more practical aspects of gaining a visa for regime-controlled areas. Journalists agreed that press is very heavily monitored and that writing negatively about the regime will almost certainly hamper one's chances of getting a second visa. Also, it was recommended not to reveal one's intention to cover potentially sensitive topics on the application form. One journalist reported paying a fixer a significant sum to secure a visa, as it did not seem possible to obtain one through regular channels at the time. But, as outlined before, freelancers do not have the same funds available and therefore often have to take great risks by entering illegally if they want to cover the same stories. Another journalist warned that border police is likely to check your computer in Damascus airport prior to your departure, so it is advised to clear or hide sensitive documents.

Many participants in the conference were surprised to learn that Syrian regime officials had denied entry visas to a number of journalists who had previously been granted access on the grounds that they had entered too many times and that they ought to let other journalists in for the sake of fairness. Another commented that the regime is confident that momentum is now in its favour after retaking the city of Al-Qussair and other parts of the county. As a result, it is becoming more lenient with visas, but this cannot be verified.

There was wide consensus that the Jordanian border was deemed very difficult to cross, and, in fact, none of the attendees had crossed the Jordanian border recently. Entering illegally from Jordan was also ill-advised as the border is well controlled,

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20. SIGINT is a method of intelligence gathering which involves the interception of signals. The sort of SIGINT that the journalists said would benefit them in their attempts to secure the release of their kidnapped colleagues includes communications (COMINT) or electronic (ELINT).

and armed Syrian opposition factions in the area apparently insist on Jordanian Intelligence giving journalists prior permission. Additionally, at the time of the conference, Jordanian officials seemed to be very much opposed to allowing journalists to cross the border into Syria.

With regards to Lebanon, journalists were informed of the risks when entering with a Free Syrian Army (or “New Syria”) stamp, as this has in many instances resulted in interrogation at the airport or refused entry. However, Lebanon’s General Security has not demonstrated any consistent behaviour on this matter, in the absence of an officially declared policy.

There was little concrete information available about crossing the Iraqi border into the largely Kurdish north-eastern region of Syria. The last time a journalist at the conference was in the Kurdish area of Syria was November 2012; she found it easy to enter but had to queue for hours to leave, as several border crossings were closed. Experiences such as this highlight the fluid nature of the Syrian conflict. Though, as with other conflict situations, the better the contacts the easier it is to move in and out of Syria as well as within the country.

### **Key recommendations to governments:**

- *Show more transparency about your communication policy with relatives of kidnapped journalists.*
- *Do not ban access to journalists who have non-regime Syrian stamps on their passports.*
- *Provide shelter and assistance to Syrian fixers working with foreign journalists in cases of emergency.*
- *Facilitate the visa process for journalists’ fixers and local collaborators in situations where they are most at risk.*



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# Dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

*“What’s worst is that when you’ve been through all this, you haven’t the capacity to share your experiences with non-journalists. You feel so much around you is futile and frivolous – it’s hard to adapt to ‘real life’. Especially when you’ve recently come back from the war zone.”*

***A participant***

The discussion during this session covered strategies for dealing with stress on the ground as well as recognising and dealing with the effects of both Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and lesser stress related conditions.

With regard to the former, it emerged that participants deployed a variety of coping mechanisms. For example, many would use distractions to help them keep their emotions in check while reporting on particularly brutal or vicious incidents. One video-journalist explained how she forced herself to view her camera as a kind of defence from the reality taking place on the ground. For some, it gave them a kind of peace of mind to know that they had written ‘worst case scenario’ notes to their loved ones. Though, one veteran war correspondent felt that to do that would effectively be sealing his fate and he preferred not to think in such terms.

On a related topic, several participants discussed how they dealt with being both parents and war reporters, and how they justified the decision to go to extremely dangerous areas with dependents remaining at home. It was not an easy discussion and briefly touched on the often-debated issue of whether working in a dangerous profession of one’s choice is irresponsible or selfish, particularly when the journalist has dependents.<sup>(21)</sup>

## PTSD and other conditions

The discussion then moved to the psychological consequences of witnessing traumatic events and how to cope with them. PTSD, it should be noted, was recognised as a severe condition that had first come to light when US soldiers returning from Vietnam in the 1960’s and 70’s were found to experience trauma-related symptoms, many even in later life.

Few participants actually knew how to recognise PTSD as opposed to less severe conditions, such as burnout, anxiety and cumulative stress. Many were surprised to learn that, according to the World Health Organisation, PTSD only affects 15.4% of people who have experienced a particularly disturbing event<sup>(22)</sup> and is more prevalent among women than men.

Several participants described how they cope when they return from a conflict zone. Difficulties in relating to non-journalists, particularly as the latter’s problems often seem trivial when compared to those in war zones, were mentioned frequently. And, while some suggested that ‘hanging around’ with other journalists was the best approach to ease oneself gradually back into a ‘normal’ society, others recommended spending time with non-journalists as a healthier approach, as it forces a distinction between work and free time.

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21. This issue is raised in greater detail in a well-circulated radio broadcast. See Kelly McEvers ‘Diary of a Bad Year: A War Correspondent’s Dilemma’, *NPR*, 29 June 2013. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2013/06/29/196327290/diary-of-a-very-bad-year>.
22. ‘Guidelines for the management of conditions specifically related to stress’, World Health Organisation. Available at: [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85119/1/9789241505406\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85119/1/9789241505406_eng.pdf)
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There was some frustration during the discussion with the lack of very precise identification of the symptoms of PTSD and how best to address it. The condition manifests itself in different ways in different people, and, hence, the identification of particular signs among colleagues is often difficult. Some of the symptoms, such as poor sleeping patterns, irritability, frequent questioning of the purpose of what one is doing, increased alcohol consumption and unsafe sexual behaviour, are common to many stress-related conditions. Moreover, overcoming such conditions is a deeply personal process.

### Dealing with stress and trauma

The basic advice from psychiatrists and therapists for getting over a stressful period was, not surprisingly, plenty of rest, good food, exercise and re-establishing a routine. However, there is a need for people to recognise when such self-treatment is not sufficient – when ‘things are just not right’ – and to seek the help of a therapist specialised in trauma related conditions. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the Columbia Journalism School and the Paris-based organisation “Traces – International Clinicians’ Network”<sup>(23)</sup> were mentioned as excellent places to seek psychological support and treatment for any apparent conflict induced stress.

In dealing with PTSD, it was felt by several contributors that every effort needs to be made to remove the taboo from the topic. A specific issue for journalists is the fear that recognition of PTSD, or indeed of lesser conditions, may well affect their career and make editors less likely to send them back to war zones. Several participants said that, for this reason, if they felt they needed psychological help they would not reveal such information to their employers.

On a positive note, the topic is becoming more public among journalists. Award-winning journalist Janine Di Giovanni writes about her experiences with PTSD movingly in her recent book.<sup>(24)</sup> Di Giovanni recalls how symptoms of PTSD only manifested decades after she first began reporting from the front line. It was triggered by the birth of her child, and this seems to have opened the floodgates of gruesome flashbacks from war zones, while she desperately feared not being able to protect her son from the threats of life. While living in Paris, she felt an irrational urge to hoard foodstuffs, as she had done in war zones, in case a major disaster hit.

A compulsion to carry on practices adopted inside conflict zones when removed from them was also the experience of one of the participants. That individual revealed how he would take in his precious belongings (including his passport and keys) to the shower wherever he went, even when he was home or in hotel rooms. It was a powerful reminder of how trauma can manifest itself in different ways among different people.

When perceiving and dealing with trauma, “you must accept it but not let it define you,” said one of the press freedom organisations’ monitors. He recounted an anecdote from a friend:

*“She was so fixated on gluing her life back together and trying to make sure that things returned to what they were like before the incident. But, this caused her even greater stress as it became apparent that that was impossible. Thankfully she began to change her approach and realised that what had happened to her was now a part of her, and she just has to accept that and move on. Trauma is like a scar. You can’t remove it but you must control how it will affect you.”*

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23. Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: <http://www.dartcenter.org>;  
Traces - International Clinicians’ Network: <https://sites.google.com/site/tracesinternational/home>

24. Janine di Giovanni, *Ghosts by Daylight: A Memoir of War and Love* (Bloomsbury: 2012). An extract from the book is available here: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jun/26/janine-di-giovanni-war-memoir-family>

**Key recommendations to journalists:**

- *Have plenty of rest, good food and exercise after your return from the war zone.*
- *Re-establish a routine in your daily life.*
- *Seek counselling and psychological support.*
- *Do not ignore trauma, but do not let it define you.*

## Conclusion



Photo credit: **Patrick Tombola**, *Two photographers in downtown Aleppo – Syria, October 2012*

The Syrian conflict has provided a harrowing reminder – if one were needed – of just how dangerous reporting from conflict zones can be. As of August 2013, according to figures published by the Committee to Protect Journalists, 56 journalists have been killed in Syria since the conflict began.<sup>(25)</sup> The figure includes some of the finest and most experienced war journalists of our generation, but it also shows a huge increase in the number of freelancers who have lost their lives. Indeed, of the 56 journalists listed, 36% of them were freelancers. This compares with a figure of just 18% in 1992 when such data was first collected by CPJ.

The increase in the proportion of freelancers in statistics is just one of the most obvious examples

of how journalism has changed in recent years. Unfortunately, the other big development has been a shrinking budget among many, if not most, news outlets, with the result that there is now much less funding available to pay for content – let alone for training and equipment.

Nevertheless, a basic level of security has to be established for journalists working in conflict zones. It is reasonable to expect that those individuals who report from dangerous environments will be well prepared, have basic life-saving equipment and first aid training. As Vaughan Smith, founder of the Frontline Club, puts it: “We have the right to expect that if we are injured and can be saved then our colleagues will have the skills to do so.”<sup>(26)</sup>

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25. The number of journalists killed in Syria since March 2011 according to CPJ is available here: <http://cpj.org/killed/mideast/syria/>. According to RWB, 25 journalists and 67 citizen journalists have lost their lives; numbers available here: <http://en.rsrf.org/syria.html>

26. ‘Introduction to the Frontline Club Safety Paper’ by Vaughan Smith. Available at <http://frontlinefreelance.org/node/50>

It is therefore primarily the responsibility of the individual journalist to ensure he or she has such basic training and equipment before going into conflict zones. However, it was strongly the view at the conference that employers also have a responsibility to assist journalists in that respect by providing the equipment and by covering the cost of training staff reporters. It was felt that employers should likewise contribute to the efforts of freelancers to adopt the most important safety behaviour and have adequate equipment. Such a commitment would save lives, prevent a situation where well qualified and experienced people are being driven away from the industry and, at the same time, contribute towards maintaining high journalistic standards.

Other industries have seen groups of employees rally together and, through collective bargaining, effect change and implement basic standards that improve both working conditions and staff security. The news industry has been slow to do the same.

There is no shortage of awareness of the challenges within the industry, and, as set out above, there are impressive initiatives by a multitude of organisations to bring about improvements in the working conditions of journalists. But, these efforts need to be synchronised, and employers need to be brought on board to ensure that minimum working standards are established across the industry. This is the challenge that lies ahead, but it is not insurmountable.

First, practitioners need to agree on a set of minimum standards to be observed by both journalists and

employers. This has been one of the key purposes of the three-day retreat sponsored by the Samir Kassir Foundation. It is then up to journalists themselves to drive this change forward. Collective bargaining does work, and, once a collective spirit materialises among journalists not to accept poor working conditions, it is hoped that pressure can be built on employers to agree to such minimum standards. The campaign will need to show employers that they too will benefit from such an agreement; that it is in their interest to keep journalists safe and to ensure they have the means to do their job effectively. Moreover, media outlets that gain the reputation of being concerned for staff welfare will inevitably attract better journalists. Also, both press freedom organisations and governments have a role to play by providing improved levels of support for journalists and by ensuring that safety standards that apply for other sectors are implemented immediately within news organisations.

There is no doubt that reporting from conflict zones serves the public interest, a fact that is sometimes lost as the focus is put on more commercial, trivial news. War reporters often lay the foundations for how history will be written and events remembered. At the best of times, war correspondents have had a positive impact on policy decisions and provided witness accounts for criminal proceedings; crimes for which the perpetrators would never have been brought to justice otherwise. Such reporting helps cut through opposing, often propagandistic, narratives and present facts as they really are. It is in society's interest to maintain the quality of journalism, and, by extension, it is in society's interest to have minimum working standards for all journalists working in conflict zones.



## APPENDIX 1

# Minimum Working Standards for Journalists in Conflict Zones

### Background

On the weekend of 12-14 July 2013, some 45 journalists gathered in Beit Mery, Lebanon, with representatives from top international press freedom organisations to discuss the challenges faced by reporters in conflict zones, with a particular focus on Syria. Attending the conference were staff journalists from medium to large news organisations and freelance journalists with vastly different amounts of experience and representing a cross section of media – from print to photo journalists, documentary makers and radio reporters. Together, they were tasked with coming up with a document articulating the minimum working standards for every journalist covering conflict, whether staff journalist or freelancer. The document, which is presented below, includes recommendations to employers and to the journalists themselves.

### Recommendations to employers

- Ensure the journalist possesses adequate protective gear and communication equipment, appropriate to the conflict zone and in line with recommendations from press freedom organisations.<sup>(27)</sup>
- Cover communications expenses incurred by the journalist in accordance with pre-established limitations agreed upon by both parties.
- Ensure the journalist has undergone appropriate medical and safety training.
- Ensure the journalist has insurance to a level appropriate to the conflict zone he/she is reporting from, in line with recommendations from press freedom organisations.
- Pre-establish a communications plan with the journalist. Typically, this consists of the journalist checking in with a designated person at a designated time in order to quickly recognise if a journalist is in trouble, missing or kidnapped, and deal accordingly.
- Possess the contact details of the journalist's emergency contact. This person should have the contact details of the journalist's family and access to documents the journalist has authorised the employer to read in case of suspicion or confirmation of kidnapping or death.
- Provide the journalist with a written copy of the terms of employment.
- Provide journalists with access to emergency funds to cover any expected or unexpected costs of working in a war zone.<sup>(28)</sup>
- Refuse to pay sources interviewed by journalists.
- Encourage debriefings between editors and journalists after the reporter has emerged from a conflict zone. During such meetings, editors should be updated on the latest security issues within the country and remind journalists that there are anonymous, non-judgmental counselling services available.<sup>(29)</sup>

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27. These include, but are not limited to, encryption for communication devices, satellite phones, headgear, body protection and first aid.

28. This may include, but is not limited to, backup equipment due to high probability of a lack of electricity and Internet access, fixers, translators and drivers.

29. Some organisations implement mandatory counselling for employees returning from war zones. This should be seriously considered by news organisations.

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## Recommendations to journalists

- Before going to the field, journalists should:
  - Get adequate insurance and suitable vaccinations, in line with recommendations from press freedom organisations.
  - Get proper safety, communications, first aid equipment and post-rape kit.
  - Undergo trainings relevant to the conflict area, in line with recommendations from press freedom organisations.<sup>(30)</sup>
  - Have a communications plan with the employer and/or a trusted third party who is known to the employer.
  - Provide a trusted contact with access to and copies of emergency numbers, passport details, insurance details, press card, will and other necessary details in the event of an injury, kidnapping or death.
  - Know how much he/she will get paid per story.
  - Read his/her contract(s).
  - Take the time to prepare, research and plan the trip adequately.
  - Understand how to secure information in communication devices so that his/her security and that of third parties will not be compromised if the journalist is apprehended or interrogated by a potentially unfriendly party.
- In the field, journalists should:
  - Behave conscientiously and respectfully.<sup>(31)</sup>
  - Respect his/her fixers and agree on details regarding payment (including timing, amount and method) before work is carried out.
  - Not pay for information received from sources.
  - Be conscious not to stay too long in one place and in the conflict zone in general, as it increases risk factors.
  - Be aware that communications can be intercepted and adapt behaviour to minimise risk. This includes, but is not limited to, removing SIM cards when mobile phones are not in use; being careful not to reveal information that might compromise the current or future locations of the journalist and his/her contacts; being ready to move location after using phones, including satellite phones.
- After reporting from a conflict zone, journalists should:
  - Undergo a debriefing with his/her employer.
  - Check up on fixers, if it is safe to do so, and ensure payment for work done.
  - Not be afraid to seek psychological support.

30. This includes, but is not limited to, safety, first aid and communications encryption.

31. This includes, but is not limited to, showing awareness and appreciation for different cultures, reflected through adhering to normal dress codes and attitudes.



## APPENDIX 2

# Recommendations to Press Freedom Organisations

- Prepare updated documents, made available online, that outline a range of different issues of concern to journalists operating in conflict zones. These include, but are not limited to:
  - Types of insurance (including pricing)
  - Types of trainings (including pricing)
  - Information on safety and communications equipment (including price and sales points)
  - Information on psychological support, treatment and advice centres
- Organise regular meetings with media outlets to raise awareness about safety in the field.
- Organise regular and affordable hostile environment, online security and first aid trainings for journalists.
- Set up a collection point close to countries in conflict so that journalists can rent/buy necessary equipment (including bullet-proof jackets, helmets, satellite, trackers, etc.).
- Cooperate with journalists, news outlets and media professionals' unions to compile a list of rates paid by news outlets for freelance content.

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