

Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones or Dangerous Areas

The safety of journalists working on dangerous assignments is not always guaranteed, even if international law provides adequate protection on paper, because warring parties these days are showing less and less respect for that law. News-gatherers cannot get assurances from belligerents that they will be fully protected.

Because of the risks they run to keep the public informed, media workers, journalists and their assistants (whether permanent staff or freelance) working in war zones or dangerous areas are entitled to basic protection, compensation and guarantees from their employers, though protection must never be taken to mean supervision by local military and governmental authorities. Media management also have their own responsibility to make every effort to prevent and reduce the risks involved.

The following eight principles shall apply:

Principle 1 - Commitment

The media, public authorities and journalists themselves shall systematically seek ways to assess and reduce the risks in war zones or dangerous areas by consulting each other and exchanging all useful information. Risks to be taken by staff or freelance journalists, their assistants, local employees and support personnel require adequate preparation, information, insurance and equipment.

Principle 2 - Free will

Covering wars involves an acceptance by media workers of the risks attached and also a personal commitment which means they go on a strictly voluntary basis. Because of the risks, they should have the right to refuse such assignments without explanation and without there being any finding of unprofessional conduct. In the field, the assignment can be terminated at the request of the reporter or the editors after each side has consulted the other and taken into account their mutual responsibilities. Editors should beware of exerting any kind of pressure on special correspondents to take additional risks.

Principle 3 - Experience

War reporting requires special skills and experience, so editors should choose staff or freelancers who are mature and used to crisis situations. Journalists covering a war for the first time should not be sent there alone, but be accompanied by a more experienced reporter. Teamwork in the field should be encouraged. Editors should systematically debrief staff when they return so as to learn from their experiences.

Principle 4 - Preparation

Regular training in how to cope in war zones or dangerous areas will help reduce the risk to journalists. Editors should inform staff and freelancers of any special training offered by nationally or internationally qualified bodies and give them access to it. All journalists called upon to work in a hostile environment should have first-aid training. Every accredited journalism school should familiarise its students with these issues.

Principle 5 - Equipment

Editors should provide special correspondents working in dangerous areas with reliable safety equipment (bullet-proof jackets, helmets and, if possible, armoured vehicles), communication equipment (locator beacons) and survival and first-aid kits.

Principle 6 - Insurance

Journalists and their assistants working in war zones or dangerous areas should have insurance to cover illness, repatriation, disability and loss of life. Media management should take all necessary steps to provide this before sending or employing personnel on dangerous assignments. They should strictly comply with all applicable professional conventions and agreements.

Principle 7 - Psychological counselling

Media management should ensure that journalists and their assistants who so desire have access to psychological counselling after returning from dangerous areas or reporting on shocking events.

Principle 8 - Legal protection

Journalists on dangerous assignments are considered civilians under Article 79 of Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, provided they do not do anything or behave in any way that might compromise this status, such as directly helping a war, bearing arms or spying. Any deliberate attack on a journalist that causes death or serious physical injury is a major breach of this Protocol and deemed a war crime.