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| Ref: PRS 2021/05/1029 | 03.05.2021 |

**World Press Freedom Day**

“Ensuring freedom for the media around the world is a priority. Independent, free and pluralistic media are central to good governance in democracies that are young and old.”

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed[[1]](#endnote-1) the third of May to celebrate World Press Freedom Day in 1993, following the recommendation by the UNESCO’s General Conference in 1991, in the Windhoek Namibia Declaration[[2]](#endnote-2) "*on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press*" ​​in the face of years of violence by governments and authorities on the continent. The United Nations and UNESCO have chosen " *Information as a Public Good*" to be the theme of this year's World Press Freedom Day celebration, to serve “as a call to affirm the importance of cherishing information as a public good, and exploring what can be done in the production, distribution, and reception of content to strengthen journalism, and to advance transparency and empowerment while leaving no one behind. The theme is of urgent relevance to all countries across the world. It recognizes the changing communications system that is impacting on our health, our human rights, democracies, and sustainable development”[[3]](#endnote-3).

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have negative effects on the practice of journalism, especially in crisis areas and repressive countries, which “*have strengthened and reinforced repressive tendencies around the world*”, freedom of the press has declined in the world, albeit in different forms and degrees, according to “World Press Freedom Index 2021” published by Reporters Without Borders Organization[[4]](#endnote-4). Reporters Without Borders recorded a stark deterioration in the index related to this aspect. In the context of the health crisis, it has become difficult for journalists to access both the location of the events and the sources of information. The study also shows it is becoming increasingly difficult for journalists to investigate and report on sensitive topics, especially in Asia and the Middle East, although some cases were recorded in Europe as well.

This year, Libya ranked 165 in the Reporters Without Borders Index, which assesses the media situation in 180 countries[[5]](#endnote-5), and the Coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the threats that affect journalists in the Arab world[[6]](#endnote-6), and the right to access information stemming from free, independent, multiple, and reliable sources. Information regarding Corona virus infections is kept secret in eastern Libya, where information about the numbers of infections[[7]](#endnote-7) and all related data and information are controlled by a military committee, headed by Abdel Razzaq al-Nadhouri, Chief of Staff of Haftar's forces, which accused anyone who published or criticized the handling of the pandemic by of the self-proclaimed government there of committing treason and threatened with arrest[[8]](#endnote-8).

RSF’s report described the situation of the media and journalism in Libya as becoming a party to the armed conflict, and that the Libyan media is paying a heavy price due to the political and security instability that Libya has been experiencing for years[[9]](#endnote-9). In this context, journalists, and media outlets “*are now embroiled in an unprecedented crisis, with several media outlets being press-ganged into serving the various warring factions. As well as turning the media into propaganda outlets, the conflict’s political and military actors have become news censors*”[[10]](#endnote-10).

Journalists in Libya are subjected to many violations. According to a report by the Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press[[11]](#endnote-11) “from May 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020) 70 attacks of varying severity were documented, some amounted to threats and attempted murder, in addition to a host of other serious violations such as enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, beatings, abuse, arbitrary dismissal, restrictions, attacks and escalation against the media, leading to prosecution and legal actions”. Though, the number of violations dropped during this period, compared to previous years, however, many journalists were forced to either leave the profession or leave Libya in search of a safer place, because of threats to their lives and freedoms.

On this day, Human Rights Solidarity stresses the importance of reminding the Libyan media, public and private, of the dangers of incitement of violence as Libya is embroiled on a multi front conflict. Many are participating in incitement, as if for them there are no longer standards for the profession, nor authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable. Human Rights Solidarity recommends that there should be a charter of honour and a Code of Conduct to regulate the work of the nascent media in Libya.

Libya today, more than ever, is in dire need of media professionals and journalists who maintain their independence and side only with the homeland, a siding that cannot under any circumstances justify hate speech, contempt, or incitement to violence.

**Human Rights Solidarity**

**Tripoli - Libya**

1. United Nations: “[World Press Freedom Day, 3 May](https://www.un.org/en/observances/press-freedom-day)”. The date May 3rd was chosen, which is the date of the Windhoek Declaration. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. UNESCO: “[Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark%3A/48223/pf0000093186)”. The Declaration came at the end of the international conference at Windhoek, Namibia, from 29 April to 3 May 1991, UN and UNESCO participated in the conference. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. United Nations: “[World Press Freedom Day](https://www.un.org/en/observances/press-freedom-day/background)”, May 3, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Reports Without Borders: “[2021 World Press Freedom Index: Journalism, the vaccine against disinformation, blocked in more than 130 countries](https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries)” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. DW: “[Press Freedom Report: Tunisia is first in the Arab world, and Saudi Arabia and Syria are at the bottom of the list](https://www.dw.com/ar/%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%A9/a-57264309)”, April 20, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Alaraby: “[Arab Media: Whoever has not been infected with the virus ... is taken care of by the regimes](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%81%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85%D8%A9)”, April 16, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Medical sources from inside the Benghazi Medical Center reported intense security presence from the Criminal Investigation Department in the hospital to prevent the leakage of information about death certificates, and filming by medical personnel of any suspected COVID-19 cases. Arabic Post: "[Arrests and threats to everyone who talks about the pandemic ... How Haftar's forces control the Corona crisis in their areas of control](https://arabicpost.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/2020/04/16/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7/)", April 16, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Arabic Post: "[Arrests and threats to everyone who talks about the pandemic ... How Haftar's forces control the Corona crisis in their areas of control](https://arabicpost.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/2020/04/16/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7/)", April 16, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Reports Without Borders: “[Press-ganged into serving belligerents](https://rsf.org/en/libya)”. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Many of the interviews conducted by researchers at the Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press with journalists and media workers in cities such as Benghazi, Tobruk and Al-Bayda indicate the state of great resentment and discontent, as a result of the systematic and tyrannical repression they suffer from the practices of tribal and religious militias affiliated with the leadership of General Haftar's forces, as well as the internal security apparatus of the self-proclaimed government. M.A., an independent journalist who works for an international news agencies, said "*The Internal Security forces require all journalists to fill out a form to disclose and detailed personal information, and to compel you not to conduct any interviews, or make reports, or take photos of anything except with their knowledge. They specify certain topics for you to cover and only from their perspective*”. She added “*The influence of the Internal Security Agency is immense, they can ban any activities by non-governmental organizations, take statements [interrogate] of the participants, not to mention the arrest of many colleagues, photojournalists or field correspondents, and sometimes beating them in front of everyone in several forums, and even forcing you to add them on your personal social media accounts (Facebook) to monitor your writings and opinions*”. The Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press (LCFP): “[Libyan media is Hostage to the Military Raging Clashes](https://lcfp.org.ly/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LCPF-REPORT3.pdf)”, annual report (2019/2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press (LCFP): “[Libyan media is Hostage to the Military Raging Clashes](https://lcfp.org.ly/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LCPF-REPORT3.pdf)”, annual report (2019/2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)