

## **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

impunity damages whole societies by covering up serious human rights abuses, corruption, and crime

On Tuesday, November 2, 2021, seventeen (17) Libyan NGOs, including Human Rights Solidarity, published a joint statement in which they called on the Government of National Unity to implement the recommendations of the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on “the Safety of Journalists”, and recommended the establishment of an independent constitutional body that works on the independence and freedom of the media and organizes its work in accordance with professional standards.

The organizations urged journalists and media professionals to adhere to the highest values of their profession and to combat hate speech and incitement to violence and called on them to exercise their role in rooting out racism and xenophobia.

Human Rights Solidarity Organization calls on the Government of National Unity to immediately release photojournalist Saddam Hussein as-Saket, who was kidnapped in front of the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Tripoli. Ending the sit-in of hundreds of refugees in front of the UNHCR headquarters is by addressing the causes that made them homeless<sup>1</sup>, not by trying to conceal the truth through the kidnapping of a photojournalist.

**Human Rights Solidarity  
Tripoli – Libya**

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<sup>1</sup> Refugee sit-in in front of UNHCR headquarters is one of the repercussions of the campaign of arbitrary arrests carried out by the security forces of the Government of National Unity on October 1, 2021. Human Rights Solidarity Organization: “[Dereliction of Duty by the Libyan Authorities and the UNHCR gravely exacerbates the situation of refugees in Tripoli](#)”, October 24, 2021.

**November 2, 2021**

Text of the Joint Statement:

## **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**

"Eleven [11] days since the enforced disappearance of photojournalist Hussein as-Saket in Tripoli"

The world observes today, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists<sup>1</sup>, adopted by the UN General Assembly in its resolution<sup>2</sup> of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013, to address the phenomenon of a culture of impunity<sup>3</sup> for crimes against journalists, which the UNGA considered it to “constitute one of the main challenges to strengthening the protection of journalists”.

In its resolution, the UN General Assembly noted that journalists and media professionals in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians and shall be respected and protected under international humanitarian law and relevant conventions and treaties obligating the protection of civilians.

In the past fifteen years (2006-2020), more than 1,200 journalists have been killed for reporting the news and bringing information to the public. In nine out of ten cases the killers go unpunished<sup>4</sup>. Impunity leads to more killings and is often a symptom of worsening conflict and the breakdown of law and judicial systems. UNESCO expressed its concern that “impunity damages whole societies by covering up serious human rights abuses, corruption, and crime.”

In Libya, journalists and media workers have been suffering for decades from the lack of an enabling environment to work independently and with no interference by the authorities. Prior to February 2011, the journalism was constrained by laws that prevented any free activity outside the ruling regime.

After February 2011, Article 14 of the Interim Constitutional Declaration guaranteed freedom of expression and press freedom and repealed laws restricting press freedom. During the early years of the February Revolution, Libya witnessed a remarkable development in press freedom and freedom of expression. However, due to the exacerbation of the political crisis and the deterioration of the security situation, new red lines emerged, and freedoms regressed.

Journalists in Libya are subjected to many violations. The Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press<sup>5</sup> documented “from May 1, 2019, to April 30, 2020) 70 attacks against journalists and bloggers, and the Libyan Organization for Independent Media<sup>6</sup> documented “from May 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021) 29 attacks. The attacks were of varying severity, 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 over the past couple of years, 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.

The most recent attack on journalists, Saturday, October 23, 2021, an armed group kidnapped photojournalist Saddam Hussein as-Saket, 31 years old, while he was covering a protest rally by migrants in front of the UNHCR building in the Al-Sarraj area of Tripoli. The armed group, who were driving an unmarked car with tinted glass, took Saddam Al-Saket to an undisclosed location<sup>7</sup>.

We, the organizations signatory to this statement, call on the Libyan Authorities to implement the recommendations of the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on “the Safety of Journalists”<sup>8</sup>.

The report described many good practices to promote the protection of journalists. We also recommend the establishment of an independent constitutional body<sup>9</sup> that works on the independence and freedom of the media and organizes its work in accordance with professional standards

We also support the UN's recommendations on the role of free media in rooting out racism and xenophobia and urges journalists to uphold the highest values of their profession and combat hate speech.

### المنظمات الموقعة على البيان:

1. حقوقيون بلا قيود، بنغازي،
2. منظمة وحدة وطن، مصراتة،
3. جمعية الشراع لمكافحة الإيدز والمخدرات،
4. منظمة شباب ماترس، ماترس،
5. منظمة رواد الفكر ماترس، ماترس،
6. المنظمة العربية الدولية لحقوق المرأة، طرابلس،
7. منظمة 17 فبراير للبيئة وحقوق الإنسان، مصراتة،
8. جمعية تبيينوا لحقوق الانسان، نالوت،
9. منظمة صوت المهاجر لحقوق الانسان، الزاوية،
10. منظمة التغيير للتنمية، الزاوية،
11. منظمة شباب التوارق للحوار والمناظرة، سبها،
12. منظمة التضامن لحقوق الانسان، طرابلس،
13. مؤسسة الصحافة الحرة، صبراتة،
14. جمعية الخير للأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة، صبراتة،
15. جمعية بصمة أمل لأطفال التوحد، صبراتة،
16. منظمة شموع لا تنطفي لذوي الإعاقة، صبراتة،
17. مؤسسة بلادي لحقوق الانسان، صبراتة.

**Tripoli – Libya**  
**November 2, 2021**

<sup>1</sup> United Nations: "[International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists 2 November](#)".

<sup>2</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 163/68: "[The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity](#)", 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

<sup>3</sup> When attacks on journalists remain unpunished, a very negative message is sent that reporting the "embarrassing truth" or "unwanted opinions" will get ordinary people in trouble. Furthermore, society loses confidence in its own judiciary system which is meant to protect everyone from attacks on their rights. Perpetrators of crimes against journalists are thus emboldened when they realize they can attack their targets without ever facing justice.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO: "[UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#)", October 27, 2020. "[A brochure for the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#)".

<sup>5</sup> the Libyan Center for Freedom of the Press (LCFP): "[Libyan media is Hostage to the Military Raging Clashes](#)", annual report (2019/2020).

<sup>6</sup> Libyan Organization for Independent Media: "[Violations against freedoms of opinion and expression in Libya from May 2020 to May 2021](#)" May 6, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Libyan Crimes Watch: "[The abduction of photojournalist Saddam Hussein as-Saket in front of the UNHCR building in Tripoli](#)", October 26, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Council: "[The safety of journalists](#)", Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013.

<sup>9</sup> The draft constitution, which was prepared and approved by the Constituent Assembly Drafting the Constitution on July 29, 2017, stipulates in Article (163) the establishment of a Supreme Council for Media and the Press as an independent constitutional body. See Chapter Seven "Independent Constitutional Bodies", Articles No. (154), (155), (156) and (163) of the "[Draft Constitution](#)".