UNSG REPORT ON THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS – SUBMISSION BY DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION

Questionnaire for the report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists on the issue of impunity

1.   Please identify the gender-specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalists working in your country or abroad. Please elaborate on how these obstacles and violations manifest themselves in practice and how they differ from the obstacles and human rights violations faced by their male counterparts.

Female journalists are susceptible to discrimination and gender-based obstacles both from within their professional spaces and outside it. Female journalists in Pakistan face a double-bind because of their gender: at one level they face the same level of threats and surveillance that journalists face in Pakistan (the fourth most dangerous country for journalist according to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)), and the secondly the gender-specific obstacles stemming from being a female journalist in Pakistan.

Firstly, female journalists are less likely to get more "substantial" beats within newspapers and the electronic news medium. These institutional obstacles result women's work being taken less seriously and being less visible. These stereotypes within the professional effect the growth and visibility of women within media houses and thus makes it less likely for women to rise to senior journalistic positions.

Secondly, women journalists face gendered threats in both offline and online spaces. Digital Rights Foundation has found in its research that surveillance faced by female journalists is directed towards the journalists' gender and manifests itself in the form of sexualised threats. DRF has seen that both state and social surveillance has gendered facets. Women journalists reporting through social media and electronic medium face gender, character-based comments and abuse from their audience. Furthermore, when the state employs intimidation tactics against female journalists, a large facet of the language and mechanics of the surveillance is steeped in gender and is at times more psychological ways. This form of surveillance and harassment leads to psychological distress and fear that leads to self-censorship and chilling effect on their speech.

Thirdly, it has also been observed that journalists who report in the field are constantly subjected to gendered threats and microaggressions that eludes their male counterparts. This makes reporting very difficult, and has the effect of excluding women from reporting in spaces that are male dominated.

Fourthly, female journalists reporting on so-called sensitive topics such as civil-military relationships, blasphemy laws and stories contradicting the state narrative make female journalists more susceptible to state and social surveillance. It is a misconception that state surveillance apparatus handle female journalists with "kid gloves", and the disappearance of Zeenat Shahzadi is an example of how female journalists are not immune from the threat of enforced disappearances.

2.   Please indicate whether you monitor and collect information and disaggregated data (e.g. by sex, gender identity, ethnicity, age, online/offline, focus areas of work) specifically on the gender-specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalists.

Digital Rights Foundation does not collect data and statistics on female journalists, however our work has relied on qualitative methods to collect information that focuses on understanding the experiences of women journalists within Pakistan. This qualitative research led to our report titled "Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan" [http://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Surveillance-of-Female-Journalists-in-Pakistan-1.pdf] where we conducted in depth interviews of 7 female journalists within Pakistan.

3.   What programmes and initiatives have your organization adopted to address the issue of the safety of female journalists, including the underlying causes of the obstacles and human rights violations, and harmful gender stereotypes, experienced by women journalists? How do these measures differ from those adopted to address the issue of safety of journalists more generally, or the safety of male journalists? Please elaborate on the impact of any measures adopted.

Digital Rights Foundation has conducted workshops and training sessions for female journalists in the past. Often times digital security is a neglected aspect of security for journalists and a facet that is often ignored in mainstream discussions. For this reason DRF sees itself as addressing a real gap in terms of safety of journalists.

These sessions have been held in conjunction with press clubs to deliver basic anti-harassment and digital security training to reporters, editors and web-based journalists. A digital security handbook for journalists was also developed as part of this initiative with basic security guidelines and tips for female journalists.

Currently, DRF is working with students of mass communication and media studies departments in universities across Pakistan to deliver digital security training to the students before they go

into the field of journalism. These trainings will supplement their journalistic education and will create a pool of journalists who will be equipped to secure themselves and their communication as professional journalists.

4.   Are the measures--if any--referred to in response to Question 3 above part of a "gender sensitive approach" (see General Assembly resolution 70/162, page 3)? If so, what does this approach consist of?

The training sessions mentioned above are especially designed to cater to the gendered needs of female journalists, with an emphasis on online harassment and abuse. The trainings are based on research into the specific experiences of female journalists within the context of Pakistan. For this reason the training takes into account both state and social surveillance, given that social surveillance is experienced primarily by female journalists. Furthermore, the gendered nature of online harassment and abuse is a crucial component of these trainings.

5.   In the country/countries in which your organization works, are there any specific laws and/or policies or initiatives (e.g. training, awareness-raising) to address harmful gender stereotypes, intersecting forms of discrimination and other human rights violations experienced by women journalists in the course of carrying out their workplace (e.g. in the workplace, in the field, online)? What is the impact of these laws, policies or initiatives?

Within Pakistan, the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 protects female journalists from discrimination and harassment within the workplace. This law, though not directly addressing female journalists, goes a long way in addressing harassment targeted at women within media houses. It also creates a compliant mechanism and forces workplaces to create anti-harassment policies and awareness on issue within the workplace.
The impact of this law is not as clear-cut. Journalists who have the lodged sexual harassment complaints within media houses have faced a backlash at times. Recently, there was a complaint within Pakistan's state-run television (PTV) channel and the channel failed to act on the complaint in the manner prescribed under the act—with the report of probing committee taking more than 30 days to issue its report, violating the time-bound provisions of the Act.[1] The complainant in this particular chose to resign from PTV, alleging that the working environment was too hostile for her following the complaint. However, there have been cases where the law has worked: in October, 2016 the federal ombudsperson against harassment of women at workplace convicted the director news of PTV in a sexual harassment case filed by six women newscasters.[2]

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[1] https://www.dawn.com/news/1311349.
[2] https://www.dawn.com/news/1291344.

6. In the country/countries in which your organization works, are there any specific laws and/or policies or initiatives (e.g. training, awareness-raising) to address violations of international humanitarian laws committed against women journalists?

In terms of international humanitarian law violations, journalists are quite susceptible to conflict driven violence and attacks from terrorists, sectarian groups and armed operations. Many journalists have lost their lives while covering events that have been attacked. Compensation in these cases takes place as per labour and social security laws. There have been several proposals for the protection and welfare of journalists but nothing concrete has been passed.
There are no specific measures in terms of violations of humanitarian laws of female journalists that DRF is currently aware of.

7. What mechanisms and/or networks do you have in place to share information and increase the protection of women journalists, particularly in situations of conflict or political instability?

The trainings that Digital Rights Foundation gave female journalists were not one-off events. There have been refreshers and follow-up trainings to supplement the initial sessions. This sustained engagement has resulted in a strong network of female journalists who can reach out to DRF, in individual cases of digital harassment, and to one another to seek support. Our trainings encouraged the development of a network of peer support for female journalists to tackle the psychological toll of online harassment and surveillance.

Furthermore, Digital Rights Foundation's Cyber Harassment Helpline is open to women, human rights defenders and journalists as a resource that provides digital security support, legal advice and psychological counselling. The Helpline provides a gender-sensitive, confidential and female-led service to journalists who face online harassment or violations of their online and offline privacy. We have handled several cases where female journalists have been facing targeted harassment, hacking attacks and doxing.

8. What gender-specific barriers have women journalists who are victims of human rights violations faced in obtaining an effective remedy?

There are two routes that journalists can take for seek redress for the discrimination and human rights violations that they face. Female journalists can pursue cases of sexual harassment and discrimination based on gender within their media organizations. These cases are appealable to the ombudsman on sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, journalists can also seek support and protection from within their organizations against online abuse and surveillance.

However, through our research, we have learnt that media houses are far from perfect when it comes to addressing rampant sexism within the organization. The respondents in our research that told us that these organizations are not equipped to support women when they file cases of sexual harassment. Furthermore, female journalists posit that line managers and editors tend not to take online abuse and digital surveillance as seriously, especially when it hasn't translated into physical threats. This puts female journalists at a huge disadvantage because they are more likely to receive physiological threats and surveillance.

When it comes to reporting cyber harassment and abuse, the Cyber Crime Wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is quite understaffed and under-resourced to deal with the problem of online violence against women—and journalists as a subset of that—effectively and in its entirety.

Furthermore, the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) are not fully equipped to deal with cases of gendered violence and harassment in a gender-sensitive manner, which is an obstacle for women who want to report abuse.

Additionally, when the surveillance experienced by female journalists is originating from the state itself, there is lack of redressal given the secrecy of the entire exercise and the likelihood of state agencies being held accountable.

9. Please indicate if your organization has developed specific initiatives for the safety of women journalists in light of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 and Goal 16?
Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a feminist organization with the aim of integrating gender and the feminist agenda within its research, advocacy and projects. The underlying aim of DRF is to make online spaces safe and equal places for all. In lieu of that aim, DRF wants to bridge the gender digital divide and to ensure equal participation in online spaces by addressing online harassment and violence. These aims are in line with Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To achieve these aims, DRF has launched its Hamara Internet ("our internet") campaign to address online harassment and provide digital security training to young women in universities and colleges. This campaign aims to help women reclaim online spaces and ensure equal participation in these spaces. DRF also provides digital security trainings to women human rights defenders, women's rights organizations and female journalists. Furthermore, the Cyber Harassment Helpline facilitates women who feel unsafe in these spaces to empower them occupy digital spaces in a safe, secure and harassment-free manner.

Furthermore, DRF aims to make the internet secure for all and to ensure that online spaces are inclusive regardless of gender, sexual identity, class, religion, occupation, ethnicity, race, ability and age. This larger aim is in line with Goal 16 of the SDGs. Through our advocacy work, we work towards the right to free speech and expression in internet spaces regardless of identity. Restrictive cyber laws often make online spaces less open and inclusive. DRF advocated for free speech online and digital freedoms during the drafting of the cyber crime bill and has been working to amplify marginalized voices in digital spaces through awareness campaigns, capacity building and research on issues affecting these communities.