

Emergency Appeal for Journalism and Media Support

At a time when the role of journalists and the media is more vital than ever in the context of the global crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the undersigned organisations honour those who work tirelessly to help keep the public informed and call for robust support for independent journalism.

Millions of people around the world are looking for reliable, fact-based, and gender-sensitive journalism that can help them navigate the biggest shared challenge of our lifetime. The need for trustworthy information has never been greater and more urgent than during this pandemic. Access to timely, high-quality information is imperative during a global health crisis; it is one of the key pillars required to slow the spread of this virus, mitigate its impacts, and underpin collective societal responses. Journalism is also the best antidote to fight the misinformation that is fuelling the pandemic.

But at this crucial moment, independent media are facing an unprecedented existential challenge. With the perfect storm of disinformation and misinformation, repression of critical voices in many countries, and disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the situation facing journalism and news media is dire. Revenues for these institutions are collapsing, and funding is decreasing just when we need it most.

In response to these challenges we, press freedom, media development, and journalism support communities, are making an urgent appeal to all those in a position to support journalism organisations and independent media, especially those who provide professional and essential information and reporting during the COVID-19 crisis.

1. **We call on governments to:**

- 1.1. **Respect fundamental human rights:** Fully respect, safeguard, and enable the rights to press freedom and freedom of expression, rule of law, access to information, privacy, and digital rights, and only restrict them as international standards permit.¹ Do not engage in practices that undermine such freedoms – notably surveilling and monitoring journalists and their sources. People need independent information that they can trust, and responses to this crisis will be more effective and command greater public support if it is subject to independent scrutiny, openness, and transparency.²
- 1.2. **Ensure access to information:** Allow journalists covering this pandemic to exercise their freedom to seek, receive, and communicate information without being harassed, intimidated, or attacked.³ Consider, where appropriate, designating journalists and media workers as key or essential workers.⁴ The responsible authorities should also avail journalists with accurate information on this global pandemic and state responses to it, to further facilitate citizens' right to access information. This includes holding open press conferences ensuring that all media outlets have access to public officials and other information sources.
- 1.3. **Release imprisoned journalists:** It is critical that any state that continues to criminalise journalism, release all imprisoned journalists,⁵ including those detained or sentenced under the guise of

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/sg-inf-2020-11-respecting-democracy-rule-of-law-and-human-rights-in-th/16809e1f40>, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_covid_brief_en.pdf, and https://freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2020/04/A_HRC_44_49_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf

² <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/news/statement-on-the-covid-19-response-from-civil-society-members-of-ogp-steering-committee/>

³ <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/exposed-the-crisis-facing-journalism-in-the-face-of-covid-19.html>

⁴ See A/HRC/44/49, paragraph 37: https://freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2020/04/A_HRC_44_49_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf

⁵ <https://cpj.org/campaigns/free-the-press/>

prohibiting defamation or countering terrorism, and does not pursue such cases during the pandemic given the additional risk posed by detention.⁶

On the sustainability of public-interest journalism:

- 1.4. Provide financial support: Work with journalism, media, and civil society organisations to assess the damage that COVID-19 is inflicting on providing vital information to the public and the sustainability of journalism and news media organisations. Devise appropriate mechanisms to urgently provide financial support to media that produce public-interest journalism, enabling them to hire or keep reporters, editors, and producers who cover COVID-19 and related issues, and reach underserved audiences. Support for local journalism, health, and investigative reporting is especially important. Ensure that this support is just and transparent, undertaken without favouritism, compromising editorial independence, or distorting the market. Examples include VAT exemptions, tax relief,⁷ simplified public procurement processes, reliable social security schemes for freelance journalists and media workers,⁸ issuing non-profit tax status to public-interest journalism and media organisations, and other forms of support that can ease the financial pressure on journalism organisations and independent media.⁹
- 1.5. Allocate public advertising fairly: Continue to publish and broadcast public health awareness campaigns and public service announcements through advertising. But, like all uses of public funds, be transparent, and avoid conflicts of interest – such as favouring your allies and supporters.

2. We call on journalism and media development donors and funders to:

- 2.1. Increase funding and flexibility: Increase and distribute funding to journalism organisations and independent media, or to organisations best placed to financially support independent media, especially in resource-poor settings (although similar issues affect media everywhere). Consider increasing support to existing grantees and intermediary organisations, and to those with the capacity and systems to rapidly scale up sub-granting to journalism and news media outlets. In addition to scaling up media support funding through their existing instruments, donors should look to establish an emergency fund to help public-interest media survive during this time of crisis as well as lay the foundations for future crisis response. Donors should coordinate and pool emergency resources to maximise efficiency, agility, and prioritisation. Also, ensure that representatives of journalism and media sector, journalism support and media development organisations are included in any aid coordination systems set up by donors.
- 2.2. Ensure respect for editorial independence: Donors focusing on humanitarian and public health programmes should consider allocating support to local media that can engage with communities in need, and can provide appropriate formats and languages for informing and engaging communities. Be aware that programmatic funding can inadvertently shape editorial agendas.

⁶ https://freedex.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2015/files/2020/04/A_HRC_44_49_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf

⁷ <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/04/08/efj-calls-on-eu-and-governments-to-fight-the-covid-19-crisis-in-the-media-sector/>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/3aOzpzB>

⁹ For guidance on how to support an environment conducive to quality, ethical journalism, governments should refer to the governance standards outlined in the Journalism Trust Initiative (<https://jti-rsf.org/en/>), and take inspiration from recommendations made in the Council of Europe's draft recommendation on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age (<https://rm.coe.int/msi-joq-2018-rev7-e-draft-recommendation-on-quality-journalism-finalis/168098ab76>) and its declaration on financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age (https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=090000168092dd4d), as well as similar initiatives.

Respect and understand the value of editorial independence and take into consideration long-term needs and sustainability of the media you support.

2.3. Include media support in COVID-19 response: Reinforce your recognition of the importance of media and journalism for quality information for all citizens by firmly positioning support for the sector within the overall COVID-19 related funding. However, be sure to learn the lessons from previous crises and avoid the pitfalls of only conceiving and providing media support in the context of crisis health communication.

2.4. Address structural long-term needs: Plan for allocation of substantial resources to journalism and media support when designing your programmes and budgets for the coming years. The crisis is immediate but also follows a longer-term crisis. Please look to increase and distribute core and flexible long-term funding, and capacity building assistance, to journalism organisations and independent media, or to organisations best placed to financially support independent media.¹⁰ This includes increasing support to existing grantees and intermediary organisations, and extending support to those with the capacity and systems to scale up sub-granting to media outlets, such as pooled or emergency funds,¹¹ and the newly proposed International Fund for Public Interest Media.¹²

3. We call on journalism and media organisations to:

3.1. Ensure media workers can conduct their work safely: Employees and freelancers must have protective equipment, training and clear safety guidelines. COVID-19 highlights the responsibility news organizations have towards all journalists and media workers, but also their duty towards the individuals we report on. Safety comes first.

3.2. Protect jobs and adapt working environments: Work with unions and others to find ways to avoid laying off staff due to losses in revenue. Take advantage of furlough schemes¹³ where they exist and other support wherever possible to avoid job losses. Adapt newsrooms to enable working from home when possible, particularly as and when governments put in place stay-at-home or physical distancing protocols. Provisions should take into consideration the gendered implications of these new working environments. Women are largely the main caregivers in their own homes, and the most likely to be responsible for nursing children and elders who are ill, home from school, or in isolation. Acknowledge that working from home, covering high-risk stories, or being exposed to infection can be both isolating and alienating. As such, work to ensure that employees and freelancers have access to appropriate mental health or psychosocial support.

3.3. Serve your public: Keep asking how you can find new ways to be relevant and useful to the public as well as to the overall response. Provide practical guidance alongside the news, and highlight solutions to challenges as well as problems. Be on the frontline in fighting disinformation and misinformation. Organise collective action and pool resources if that is the most effective way of responding and persevering. This is a time for collaboration, not competition.

3.4. Recognise diversity: Serve all sections of your community by recognising that, while COVID-19 affects everyone, it is particularly devastating for marginalised communities and is exaggerating

¹⁰ <https://gfmd.info/gfmd-submits-joint-statement-on-donor-assistance-to-media-development/>

¹¹ <https://internews.org/updates/internews-launches-rapid-response-fund-support-local-journalism-worldwide>, <https://civitates-eu.org/independent-public-interest-journalism>, and <https://gfmd.info/emergency-funding-to-support-media-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/briefings/feasibility-study-ifpim>

¹³ Furlough schemes have been used during the crisis to grant temporary leave of employees due to dramatic falls in revenues and the wider economic forecast. Some furlough schemes are government-backed, meaning that the state covers all or some of the employees' wages.

socio-economic inequalities (often related to ethnicity and gender) that predate the pandemic. We should be led by the evidence and challenge misleading narratives that the crisis is affecting society in equal ways.¹⁴ Ensure that your journalism includes perspectives and voices from women and marginalised groups and that you hire journalists from a variety of different backgrounds and specialisations that can report accurately about how the disease and economic fallout is disproportionately impacting people of colour, working-class, immigrant, and other marginalised communities. Create a database of women health experts and economic experts to avoid the gender bias of sourcing in the media.

4. **We call on technology, telecommunication companies, and Internet intermediaries to:**

- 4.1. **Respect fundamental and digital rights:** Guarantee and safeguard fundamental digital freedoms, including privacy, data protection, and cybersecurity, and do not engage in practices that undermine such freedoms – notably surveilling and monitoring journalists and their sources. Do everything you can to enable free, safe, and secure digital spaces for journalists, journalism organisations, and independent media.
- 4.2. **Remodel algorithms and moderation practices:** Ensure your algorithms and moderators recognise credible information sources, including independent, trustworthy media and journalism organisations. Prevent automated takedowns of journalistic content related to COVID-19, particularly by algorithmic processes. Such takedowns erode the public's ability to access information, and harm journalism and media organisations who must then dedicate precious resources to resolving content-related disputes that could instead be directed towards reporting. Strengthen transparency and notice procedures as well as expedite appeal and remedy procedures.
- 4.3. **Manage Blacklist Technology Responsibly:** Work with advertisers to stop the use of blacklist technology to block ads from appearing next to credible journalism and news media stories that mention the COVID-19 pandemic and other critical health and social issues.
- 4.4. **Support journalism:** Where appropriate, initiate or increase funding of independent, public-interest journalism, fact-checking, and other measures to counter disinformation and misinformation, as well as expedite grants to prioritise news and information outlets working to address the global health crisis.
- 4.5. **Reverse commercial incentives that discriminate against journalism:** Create mechanisms to verify credible actors online, and reverse existing incentives to allow media to monetise public-interest journalism and high-quality content. Consider fundamental policy changes such as investing more in identifying and demonetising malicious actors, and preventing malicious actors from utilising digital and programmatic ads to finance the spread of disinformation and misinformation.¹⁵
- 4.6. **Deliver Internet accessibility to all:** Prioritise maintaining Internet accessibility and connectivity, and promote the right to access information. As such, we urge telecommunication providers to lower the cost of Internet connectivity – especially in emerging and developing markets and low-income communities – to allow users to access news and information regardless of their economic status, as well as enable journalists to be able to work from home.

¹⁴ <https://www.media-diversity.org/covid-19-race-class-and-the-great-equalizer-myth/>

¹⁵ For guidance on how to support an environment conducive to quality, ethical journalism see: <https://jti-rsf.org/en/>, <https://rm.coe.int/msi-joq-2018-rev7-e-draft-recommendation-on-quality-journalism-finalis/168098ab76>, and https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=090000168092dd4d), as well as similar initiatives.

5. **We call on advertisers to:**

- 5.1. **Responsibly Manage Blacklist Technology:** Work with media companies and ad agencies to find solutions to blacklisting of COVID-19 or other news reporting related content, and stop using blacklist technology to block ads from appearing next to credible journalism and news media stories that mention the COVID-19 pandemic and other critical health and social issues online. This is in-line with our similar call to technology platforms and telecommunications companies (see 4.3 above).
- 5.2. **Change how you measure and value engagement:** Build your long-term brand reputation by turning away from programmatic, click/view-based and/or cookie-driven targeted advertising. Journalism offers value to the brands beyond just the traffic and offers a safe environment for brand exposure and both commercial and societal impact.
- 5.3. **Advertise through trusted media:** Make it a policy to include as many quality journalism outlets, particularly at the local level, as possible in your digital advertising spend. Work with United for News,¹⁶ the Journalism Trust Initiative,¹⁷ or local journalism associations in each market to add reputable, local news outlets to your advertising inclusion lists.¹⁸ Ramp up existing direct advertising relationships with quality media, and review your programmatic “blocklists” to develop a more subtle approach to your brand safety concerns ensuring that you do not block news altogether. This is a time to support the media above and beyond commercial interests and imperatives.

And finally, to people everywhere who read, watch, listen to trusted news services – large and small, local and international, print, digital, or broadcast:

We ask you to contribute, as much as you can, to the subscriber and membership-based journalism and news outlets you read, watch, or listen to regularly or to any non-profit news organisations on whom you also rely to be informed during this global health crisis. Newsgathering is difficult and costly in normal times, and it is even more difficult and expensive now. We know this is a difficult time to request this kind of support. The pandemic has left tens of millions of people without incomes at a time of acute need for safe shelter, sustenance, and – for many – medical treatment. Paying for news may seem an unaffordable luxury right now, but we need these journalists and news services more than ever – and they need us.

SIGNED BY (Alphabetically):

1. ACOS Alliance
2. Africa Media Development Foundation (AMDF)
3. African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms Coalition (AfDec)
4. African Editors Forum
5. African Media Initiative
6. African Rights Watch
7. AfroLeadership
8. Albanian Media Institute (AMI)

¹⁶ <https://www.unitedfornews.org/>

¹⁷ <https://jti-rsf.org/en/>

¹⁸ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-is-devastating-local-news-heres-how-advertisers-can-help>

9. Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
10. ARTICLE 19
11. Asociatia Eurolife Romania
12. Association des Journalistes de Guinée (AJG)
13. Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires (AMARC)
14. Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM)
15. Association of Independent Press (API) – Moldova
16. Association of the Environment and Ecological Tourism Journalists of the Republic of Moldova (AJMTEM)
17. ASUTIC Senegal
18. BaleBengong, Indonesia
19. Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)
20. Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)
21. Bev Gavenda
22. Bivol, Bulgaria
23. Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE)
24. Broadcasting, Electronic, Media, & Allied Workers Union (BEMAWU)
25. Camerapix
26. Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN), Bosnia and Herzegovina
27. Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM), Ukraine
28. Centre for Human Rights (University of Pretoria)
29. Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD)
30. Centre for Peace and Conflict Management in Africa
31. Centro Latinoamericano de Investigación Periodística (CLIP)
32. CFI – Agence Française de Développement Médias
33. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)
34. Columbia Global Freedom of Expression
35. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
36. Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE)
37. Community Media Network (CMN), Jordan
38. Cooper Platform, Nigeria
39. CREOpoint AI, U/EU
40. Cyprus Online Media Association
41. Danes je Nov Dan, Inštitut za Druga Vprašanja
42. Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation
43. Development Communications (DevComs) Network, Nigeria
44. DW Akademie
45. Equal Access International
46. Eté Checagem
47. Ethical Journalism Network (EJN)
48. European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
49. European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
50. European Journalism Centre (EJC)
51. Fathm
52. Fojo Media Institute, Linnaeus University
53. Fondation Hirondelle
54. Free Press Action
55. Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
56. Freedom House
57. Frontline Freelance Register (FFR)
58. Fundación Gabo (Gabriel García Márquez Foundation)
59. Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP)
60. Fundamedios

61. Fundamedios U.S.
62. Ghana Journalists Association
63. Gisa Group (Khartoum, Sudan)
64. Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) *and on behalf of its 200 members*
65. Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)
66. Global Voices
67. Globe International Center, Mongolia
68. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
69. Hapakenya
70. Hetq – Investigative Journalists of Armenia
71. Humanity United
72. IDEM Institute for Media, Democracy, and Cultural Exchange
73. Independent Association of Georgian Journalists
74. Independent Journalism Center, Moldova
75. Independent Media Trade Union of Ukraine (IMTUU)
76. Institut Panos Grands Lacs (IPGL)
77. Institute of Mass Information (IMI), Ukraine
78. Inter Africa Network for Women, Media, Gender, and Development (FAMEDEV)
79. International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT)
80. International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)
81. International Media Development Advisors (IMDA)
82. International Media Support (IMS)
83. International Press Institute (IPI)
84. International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)
85. Internet Sans Frontieres
86. Internews
87. Internews Ukraine
88. Investigative Reporting Lab
89. Investigativne Centrum Jána Kuciaka
90. Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association (IJRDA)
91. Jamii Forums, Tanzania
92. JAMnews, the Caucasus region
93. Kijiji Yeetu, Kenya
94. La Benevolencija Great Lakes
95. La Voz de Guanacaste
96. LabMedia
97. MADA – the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms
98. Maharat Foundation
99. MANS, Montenegro
100. Marie Colvin Journalists' Network
101. Media Action Nepal
102. Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ)
103. Media and Information Bureau (MIB), Sierra Leone
104. Media Association for Peace (MAP), Lebanon
105. Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF)
106. Media Diversity Institute (MDI)
107. Media Foundation 360
108. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
109. Media Innovation Studio
110. Media Institute for Southern Africa – Zimbabwe (MISA Zimbabwe)
111. Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD)
112. Media Monitoring Africa

113. Media Rights Agenda (MRA)
114. Mediacentar Sarajevo
115. MediaWise Trust
116. Myrealeurope.press
117. n-ost – Border Crossing Journalism
118. Namibia Media Trust (NMT)
119. National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine
120. National Union of Journalists of Ukraine
121. New Narratives
122. News Agency "Journalists Against Corruption" (Ukraine)
123. Newsgain
124. NGO Human Rights Platform
125. Norsk Redaktørforening | Association of Norwegian Editors
126. OnlineSOS
127. Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)
128. Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)
129. Ossigeno per l'Informazione
130. OŠTRO – Center for Investigative Journalism in the Adriatic Region
131. Pacific Freedom Forum (PFF)
132. Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)
133. Panos Institute Southern Africa (PSAf)
134. Panos Institute West Africa
135. Panos South Asia
136. Pariwartan Sanchar Samuha
137. PEN America
138. PEN International
139. Press Club Brussels Europe
140. Presseclub Concordia, Austria
141. Public Media Alliance (PMA)
142. Radio Orange 94.0
143. Radio Tuungane de Minembwe (RTM)
144. Regional Press Development Institute, Ukraine
145. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
146. Réseau Marocain des Journalistes d'Investigation
147. Rethink Africa Foundation
148. RISE Project Romania
149. RNW Media
150. Rory Peck Trust
151. RosKomSvoboda
152. Rural Media Network Pakistan (RMNP)
153. Samir Kassir Foundation – SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom
154. SembraMedia
155. Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA)
156. Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA)
157. SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition South Africa
158. Sourcefabric z.u.
159. Souspilnist Foundation
160. South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)
161. South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM)
162. Stanley Center for Peace and Security
163. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
164. Tanzania Media Practitioners Association (TAMPA)

165. Thomson Foundation
166. Toloka NGO/Studio Toloka
167. Transitions Online
168. United for News
169. VIKES – the Finnish Foundation for Media and Development
170. Villes et Communes
171. World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)
172. World Watch Monitor