

U.N. seeks protection of journalists

By Australia Network News

On World Press Freedom Day, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says press freedom “does not happen automatically,” but requires the creation of a safe environment for dialogue, where journalists can do their jobs without fear of reprisal.

“Every day, freedom of expression faces new threats. Because they help ensure transparency and accountability in public affairs, journalists are frequent targets of violence,” Ban said in a joint statement with Irina Bokova, director-general of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



The camera of an injured photographer is covered with blood in 2003.
Photo/AFP/Getty Images

They say action must encompass both traditional media as well as digital mediums.

“Bloggers, citizen reporters and social media producers, as well as their sources, face increasing threats to their safety,” they said.

According to UNESCO, more than 600 journalists have been killed in the past ten years, many while reporting in non-conflict situations.

Impunity is also widespread as nine out of 10 cases of killings of journalists go unpunished.

In addition to physical dangers, journalists are being targeted with psychological and emotional violence through cyber-attacks, data breaches, intimidation, undue surveillance and invasions of privacy.

World Press Freedom Day is observed each year on May 3.

Pacific media leaders have used World Press Freedom Day to call for greater media self-regulation in the region.

Solomon Islands has hosted an event to mark the day, attended by a core group of media managers from around the region who are working towards a standards process.

A key part of this concept is a regional Pacific media ombudsman, who would implement policies to make newsrooms more accountable and help media outlets handle complaints better.

Jason Brown, coordinator at the Pacific Freedom Forum, has been helping to draft the ombudsman plan.

He has told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat that media organizations' limited resources often mean there is no one to monitor regional media or oversee a complaints process.

"We're meant to be the Fourth Estate, but our funding levels are more like the 40th Estate," he said.

"So mistakes do happen, and the idea of the ombudsman is that if concerns can not be resolved locally – either through the media organization itself or any existing mechanisms in country.

“Then there’s a regional body that complainants, or indeed the media itself, can kick an issue upwards and get input from around the region and from the ombudsman’s office.”