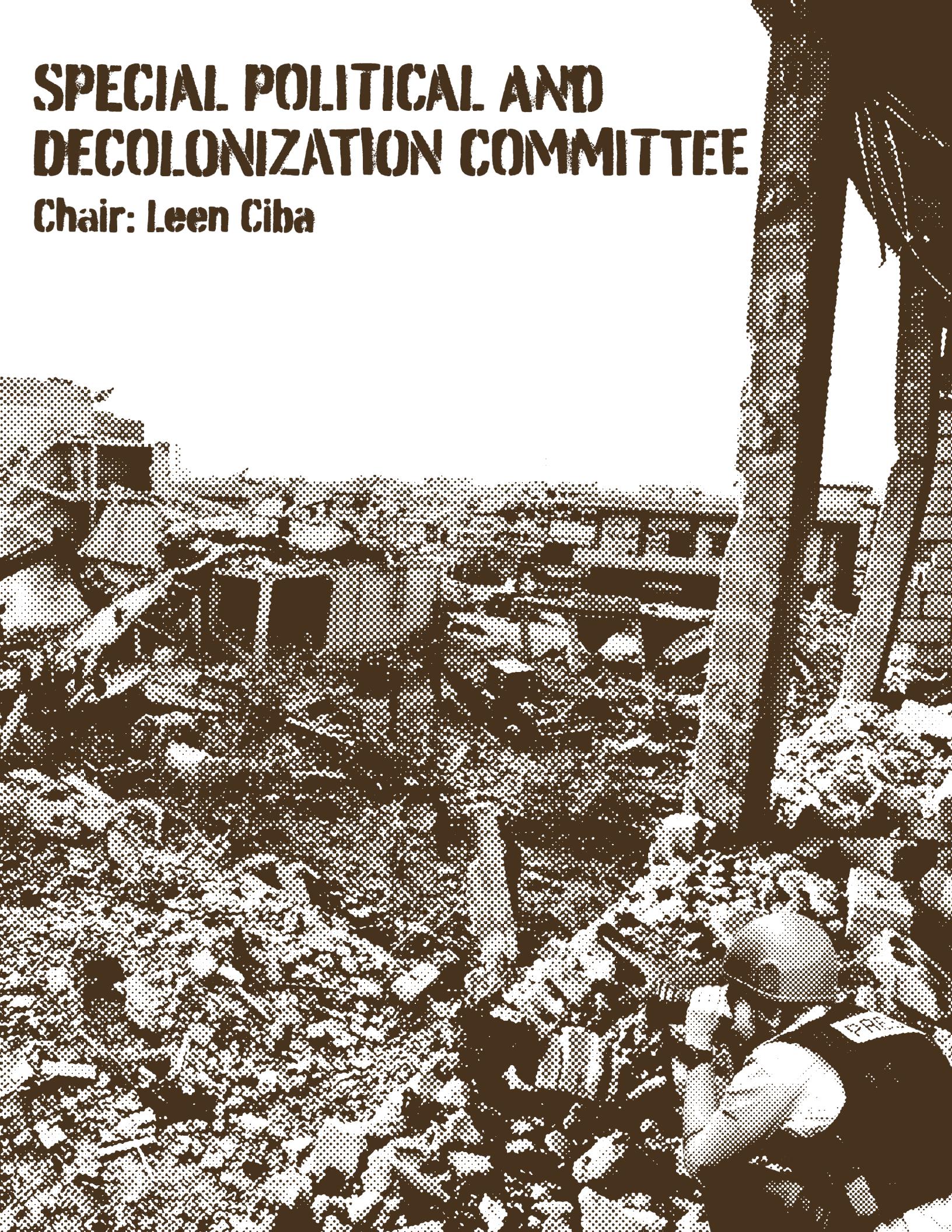


SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

Chair: Leen Ciba



CODE OF CONDUCT

Our goal at CINCYMUNC III is to cultivate an educational environment that aligns with our mission. It is essential for all participants, including delegates, head delegates, faculty, delegation leaders, guests, secretariat, staff, and board members, to maintain professionalism in their speech, actions, and appearance throughout the conference. The following guidelines are provided to establish clear expectations.

If any disrespectful behaviors arise during committee sessions, attendees are encouraged to address the issue directly with each other or involve their faculty advisor or head delegate. Instances of repeated undiplomatic behavior can be brought to the attention of organizers by faculty advisors or head delegates through Information Services. Larger concerns, such as issues related to sexual harassment or discrimination, should be referred to conference organizers. Cases involving sexual violence must be reported to conference organizers at a minimum.

Organizers can be contacted either through volunteer staff in committee or directly through Information Services.

CINCYMUNC III retains the right to exclude violators from further participation and/or impose restrictions on future registration for any participant or school that fails to uphold their responsibility to the conference's expectations.

GENERAL CONDUCT POLICIES

Delegates are required to adhere to all rules, regulations, and policies applicable to the venue hosting CINCYMUNC III throughout the entirety of the conference.

Delegates are expected to maintain a noise level that is not disruptive while inside the conference venue.

Harassment or disruption of other participants is strictly prohibited.

Conference identification (delegate name tags) must be visibly worn at all times during the conference.

The use of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and vapes, is prohibited within the confer

ence venue.

The use or possession of illegal substances, including marijuana products or paraphernalia, is strictly forbidden for all delegates.

Consumption or possession of alcohol in public spaces, including those within the conference venue, is strictly prohibited, regardless of the delegate's age. Alcohol consumption or possession among underage delegates is strictly prohibited in all situations.

Delegates are expected to be punctual and present at all committee sessions. In the event of anticipated lateness or absence, delegates are required to inform their chair and/or crisis manager in advance.

Delegates are expected to demonstrate respect for all ethnic and national cultures, as well as religious affiliations. Additionally, they must adhere to any committee-specific content expectations outlined in their Background Guide.

Delegates will act in accordance with federal laws and regulations at all times and comply with the local laws and regulations of the city where CINCYMUNC III is hosted.

Delegates are obligated to follow the instructions of CINCYMUNC III staff members, venue staff and security, as well as law enforcement personnel, and respect their roles in enforcing the policies outlined in this Code of Conduct.

ZERO-TOLERANCE DISCRIMINATION POLICY

CINCYMUNC III maintains a strict zero tolerance policy towards any form of sexual misconduct, encompassing sexual harassment and assault. Additionally, the conference enforces a zero tolerance policy against harassment or discrimination based on race, color, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, national origin, religion, age, or disability. This policy extends to inappropriate:

Content in notes exchanged or documents produced during committee sessions, Conversations occurring throughout the CINCYMUNC III event, and

Behavior at the designated venue or during any conference-sponsored activities.

Delegates who encounter any discrimination or experience sexual misconduct are encouraged to promptly report the incident to a member of the CINCYMUNC II Secretariat or through an anonymous reporting form, which will be provided during the conference. All reported cases will be immediately investigated by the Executives and may result in disqualification from awards and/or removal from the conference.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Delegates should not use Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok, or any other kind of social media during committee sessions. Outside of committee sessions, delegates should practice appropriate behavior on these sites and apps. Inappropriate posts or bullying via social media related to CINCYMUNC III will not be tolerated.

DRESS CODE POLICY

CINCYMUNC III requests that delegates wear standard Western Business Attire while the committee is in session. Western Business Attire includes appropriate dress shirts and pants worn with jackets and ties, appropriate dress blouses worn with skirts or slacks, and business formal dresses.

CODE OF CONDUCT VIOLATIONS POLICY

Participants should be aware that if they are found in violation of any of the above policies, the Executives may impose these or any other sanctions at their sole and final discretion:

- Notification of the participant's head delegate and/or faculty advisor
- Suspension from the remainder of committee sessions
- Disqualification of the delegate or delegation from individual and/or delegation awards
- Other actions deemed fit by the Executives, including notification of and/or security, law enforcement or other relevant authorities.

INTRODUCTION TO SPECPOL

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. SPECPOL was established to address complex political issues that fall outside the mandate of the First Committee (DISEC), including matters of decolonization, self-determination, and international security.

For this session, SPECPOL will focus on two pressing issues of global concern: the protection of journalists operating in conflict zones and the regulation and oversight of private military and security companies. These topics reflect the committee's ongoing commitment to safeguarding human rights, ensuring the safety of civilians, and promoting accountability in areas where international law and state authority intersect.

SPECPOL's broader agenda continues to encompass questions related to decolonization, the effects of atomic radiation, reviews of peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and the work of UN agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). By addressing both long-standing and emerging political challenges, the committee provides a critical forum for dialogue, negotiation, and the development of international solutions that uphold peace, sovereignty, and the rule of law.

TOPIC A: RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT ZONES

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: RIGHTS OF JOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT ZONES

Journalists operating in conflict zones face extreme risks, including physical violence, kidnapping, harassment, censorship, and even targeted killings. These threats not only endanger reporters but also undermine global access to impartial and accurate information during crises. Violations of journalists' rights can prevent the international community from understanding conflicts and may lead to unaccountable abuses by combatants. Protecting journalists is therefore both a human rights concern and a matter of upholding transparency, accountability, and freedom of information worldwide.

Journalists serve as the eyes and ears of the international community, documenting events that shape global understanding of conflict, governance, and human rights. In conflict zones, where access to reliable information is limited, the work of journalists becomes essential not only for reporting but also for holding parties accountable for violations of international law. Despite this critical role, journalists operating in conflict zones face extreme risks, including targeted attacks, arbitrary detention, harassment, and censorship. These threats jeopardize not only the personal safety of journalists but also the broader principles of press freedom and transparency, which are foundational to democratic societies and international accountability.

The dangers faced by journalists in conflict zones are multifaceted. Physical threats are among the most visible and severe. Reporters covering wars in regions such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Ukraine have been subject to kidnapping, assault, and even assassination. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), over 1,400 journalists have been killed in connection with their work since 1992, many of them in active conflict areas. The targeting of journalists may be deliberate, as warring parties seek to control information, suppress evidence of human rights abuses, or intimidate those who might report unfavorable news. Even when attacks are not direct, journalists often face collateral dangers from bombings, crossfire, and improvised explosive devices while reporting on the ground.

Beyond physical harm, journalists in conflict zones confront legal and political challenges that impede their ability to report freely. Governments or armed groups may impose censorship, restrict movement, or detain reporters under vaguely defined security or anti-terrorism laws. For example, in several contemporary conflicts, reporters have been accused of espionage or collaborating with enemy forces, exposing them to imprisonment or forced disappearance. Such restrictions compromise not only the safety of journalists but also the quality and accuracy of reporting, as fear of reprisal may encourage self-censorship or limit the scope of coverage.

The issue of impunity further exacerbates the risks faced by journalists. Attacks on media personnel are rarely prosecuted, particularly in countries experiencing ongoing conflict or weak rule of law. According to UNESCO, fewer than 10% of killings of journalists result in judicial resolution. This lack of accountability fosters a climate of fear and emboldens perpetrators,

creating a vicious cycle in which journalists are increasingly vulnerable. Impunity not only endangers journalists but also undermines the international community's ability to respond effectively to violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

The targeting of journalists has broader consequences for societies and the international system. In conflict zones, reliable reporting is crucial for humanitarian agencies, international organizations, and governments attempting to respond to crises. When journalists are silenced, misinformation and propaganda often fill the void, complicating diplomatic efforts, humanitarian relief, and conflict resolution. Moreover, attacks on journalists can discourage media coverage entirely, leaving populations and the global community uninformed about atrocities or human rights violations. In this way, the suppression of journalists directly impacts the transparency, accountability, and legitimacy of governance and international intervention.

International legal frameworks provide some protection for journalists, yet enforcement remains inconsistent. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols recognize civilians, including journalists, as protected persons during armed conflict. Resolutions from the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council repeatedly emphasize the need to protect media personnel, such as UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015), which condemns attacks on journalists and urges member states to ensure accountability. Furthermore, UNESCO has established monitoring mechanisms and advocacy programs aimed at enhancing journalist safety. Despite these measures, violations continue, demonstrating the gap between international law and on-the-ground realities.

The proliferation of non-state actors in contemporary conflicts further complicates the protection of journalists. Armed groups, militias, and paramilitary organizations often operate outside conventional military hierarchies, increasing unpredictability and risk. These actors may deliberately target journalists for strategic reasons, such as controlling narratives or deterring external scrutiny. Unlike state actors, non-state groups frequently lack adherence to international legal norms, making enforcement and accountability difficult. This evolution in the nature of conflict requires adaptive strategies and coordinated international responses to ensure journalist safety.

Technological advancements, while expanding the reach of reporting, also create new vulnerabilities. Digital platforms allow journalists to report in real time from remote areas, but they also expose them to cyber threats, surveillance, and online harassment. Governments or armed groups may exploit digital footprints to track, intimidate, or target reporters and their sources. The growing importance of social media in modern conflicts increases both the utility and the risk of journalistic work, highlighting the need for robust protections in both physical and digital realms.

Addressing the problem requires a multifaceted approach. International cooperation, legal enforcement, and practical protective measures are all critical to safeguarding journalists. Member states, regional organizations, and UN bodies, including SPECOPOL, must work together to strengthen legal accountability, promote safety training, and implement rapid response mechanisms for journalists in danger. Civil society organizations and media associations also play a vital role in monitoring violations, advocating for protections, and providing emergency

support. By coordinating these efforts, the international community can better ensure the safety of journalists and the continued flow of accurate, unbiased information from conflict zones.

In conclusion, the protection of journalists in conflict zones is a pressing international issue with significant implications for human rights, accountability, and global security. Attacks on journalists not only endanger individuals but also compromise the ability of the international community to understand and respond to conflicts. Despite existing legal protections and advocacy efforts, enforcement gaps and the rise of non-state actors leave journalists highly vulnerable. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated international action, legal accountability, and practical measures to ensure that journalists can operate safely and continue fulfilling their essential role in promoting transparency, human rights, and peace.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Journalists have long played a central role in documenting the realities of war and conflict, providing information that is crucial for the international community, domestic populations, and humanitarian actors. However, this role has historically placed them in significant danger. From the earliest days of war reporting, journalists have been exposed not only to the hazards of the battlefield but also to deliberate targeting by governments, armed groups, and other actors seeking to control the flow of information. The risks faced by journalists in conflict zones reveal a persistent tension between the recognized importance of press freedom and the realities of political, military, and security interests during times of war.

One of the earliest modern examples of large-scale war reporting was the Vietnam War (1955–1975), where journalists provided frontline coverage that shaped public perceptions around the world. Reporters often worked under extremely dangerous conditions, facing bombings, ambushes, and harassment from both North and South Vietnamese forces. The Vietnam War also highlighted the growing influence of the media on international opinion, with many attributing shifts in U.S. policy and public support for the war to televised reports and photojournalism. This period demonstrated both the essential role of war correspondents and the vulnerability of those who sought to uncover the realities of conflict.

In the decades that followed, journalists continued to face significant dangers in conflict zones. The Gulf War (1990–1991) introduced the practice of “embedding” journalists with military units, which gave reporters access to military operations but also raised concerns about censorship and objectivity. Later conflicts, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan after 2001, revealed even greater risks. Journalists were frequently kidnapped, targeted by improvised explosive devices, or accused of espionage by both state and non-state actors. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, in particular, marked one of the deadliest periods for journalists in modern history. High-profile incidents, such as the deaths of correspondents in Baghdad and Fallujah, underscored the dangers of reporting in highly volatile environments.

The civil war in Syria, beginning in 2011, further emphasized the scale of the problem. Numerous journalists, both foreign correspondents and local reporters, were killed or abducted while covering the conflict. Armed groups such as ISIS deliberately targeted journalists, often using

them as hostages for propaganda or ransom. At the same time, the Syrian government imposed restrictions on foreign reporters and censored domestic media, leaving journalists vulnerable on multiple fronts. This conflict illustrated the growing trend of journalists not just being incidental casualties of war but intentional targets in strategies of psychological warfare, disinformation, and intimidation.

Contemporary conflicts in Ukraine and Yemen reflect the continuing pattern of risk. In Ukraine, journalists have faced shelling, detainment, and accusations of espionage while reporting on the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the war in the Donbas, and the full-scale invasion in 2022. In Yemen, years of civil war have created an environment where local journalists are subject to harassment, arrest, and even assassination by rival factions, while foreign correspondents often cannot access the country at all. These examples demonstrate that despite technological advancements in communication and international awareness of press freedom, the dangers to journalists have not lessened. Instead, they have evolved alongside modern warfare, with new threats such as cyberattacks, online harassment, and surveillance now compounding physical risks.

International recognition of the rights of journalists has grown over time, particularly with the development of humanitarian law. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols formally recognized civilians, including journalists, as protected persons during armed conflicts. Under these agreements, parties to a conflict are prohibited from targeting journalists and are obligated to respect their safety and neutrality. Subsequent resolutions and declarations by the United Nations General Assembly, the Security Council, and UNESCO have further reinforced these protections. The adoption of international days of observance, such as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, reflects the global consensus that journalists require special attention and protection.

Despite these formal protections, enforcement has remained inconsistent. Governments and armed groups often disregard international norms, treating journalists as threats to be neutralized or as bargaining chips in larger political struggles. Non-state actors, in particular, frequently ignore international humanitarian law, operating without accountability. Even in cases where state actors are responsible for violations, legal proceedings are rare and convictions even rarer. The persistence of impunity—where crimes against journalists go unpunished—undermines international protections and perpetuates cycles of violence.

Ultimately, the history of the problem reflects both progress and persistent challenges. Legal recognition of journalists as protected persons marks a significant achievement in international law, yet the continued targeting of reporters in Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, and beyond shows that laws alone are insufficient without enforcement. The evolving nature of modern warfare, the rise of non-state actors, and the spread of disinformation have only heightened the risks journalists face. Understanding this history is essential for the international community, as it highlights not only the importance of protecting journalists but also the urgent need for stronger mechanisms of accountability and practical measures to safeguard their work.

PAST ACTIONS

The international community has taken a number of steps to address the dangers faced by journalists in conflict zones, reflecting the recognition that press freedom and the protection of media workers are integral to human rights and global security. While progress has been made through the adoption of resolutions, awareness campaigns, and regional initiatives, challenges remain in terms of enforcement and accountability.

At the global level, the United Nations has consistently emphasized the importance of protecting journalists. The General Assembly and Security Council have both adopted resolutions condemning attacks on journalists and urging member states to uphold their obligations under international law. Notably, UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015) explicitly reaffirmed that journalists are civilians and must be respected and protected during armed conflict. The resolution also called on all parties to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists and highlighted the need to combat impunity. Earlier resolutions, including Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006), similarly stressed the importance of safeguarding journalists in conflict situations. These actions reflect a growing acknowledgment within the UN system that the safety of journalists is not merely a media issue but one tied directly to peace, security, and the rule of law.

In addition to Security Council measures, the United Nations General Assembly has passed multiple resolutions affirming the right to freedom of expression and condemning the killing, harassment, and arbitrary detention of journalists. These resolutions, while not legally binding, carry strong political weight and serve as a foundation for international advocacy efforts. They have also encouraged member states to adopt domestic measures to improve protections for journalists, such as national laws against impunity and the creation of special prosecutors to investigate crimes against the press.

UNESCO, the specialized UN agency tasked with promoting freedom of expression, has played a particularly prominent role in advancing journalist safety. Since 2008, UNESCO has published the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity, which compiles data on killings of journalists and the judicial follow-up (or lack thereof) in each case. This reporting mechanism not only raises awareness but also places public pressure on governments to pursue justice when journalists are harmed. In 2013, the United Nations also established the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, observed each year on November 2. This day serves as a global platform for advocacy, drawing attention to the risks journalists face and mobilizing governments, NGOs, and media organizations to take action against impunity.

Beyond the UN system, regional organizations have also implemented initiatives to support and protect journalists. The European Union (EU) has developed a range of programs aimed at defending press freedom and protecting journalists in high-risk areas. The EU's Human Rights Action Plan emphasizes the promotion of media freedom as part of its broader foreign policy objectives, and its funding mechanisms provide training, emergency support, and relocation assistance for journalists under threat. The EU has also condemned state repression of journalists

in conflict zones and sanctioned individuals or groups responsible for such violations.

Similarly, the African Union (AU) has taken steps to enhance protections for journalists working in volatile environments across the continent. The AU's African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights recognizes the right to freedom of expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has appointed a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information. This office monitors violations against journalists and provides recommendations to member states on strengthening legal protections and accountability mechanisms. In recent years, the AU has also supported training initiatives designed to prepare journalists for the risks of reporting in conflict areas, including courses on digital security, conflict sensitivity, and physical safety.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups have further complemented these intergovernmental efforts. Organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) provide advocacy, training, and emergency assistance for journalists in conflict zones. These groups regularly document violations, pressure governments to release detained reporters, and lobby international institutions to strengthen accountability mechanisms. Their partnerships with the UN and regional organizations demonstrate how multilateral and civil society efforts can reinforce each other.

While these past actions mark important progress, they have not been sufficient to eliminate threats against journalists or end impunity. UN resolutions often lack enforcement mechanisms, UNESCO's reports rely on voluntary cooperation from states, and regional initiatives are uneven in their implementation. Many governments remain unwilling to prosecute crimes against journalists, particularly when state actors are implicated. As a result, despite the significant attention and resources dedicated to the issue, the global problem of journalist safety in conflict zones persists.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Addressing the threats faced by journalists in conflict zones requires a coordinated, multi-faceted approach involving the United Nations, regional organizations, national governments, and civil society. While international law already recognizes journalists as civilians, the persistence of attacks demonstrates the urgent need for stronger protections, improved accountability, and greater support for journalists in the field. The following possible solutions outline pathways through which the international community can enhance safety, ensure justice, and strengthen the role of the press in conflict reporting.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS

Although the Geneva Conventions and several UN resolutions explicitly identify journalists as civilians, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in regions with weak governance or active armed groups. One solution is to strengthen the international legal framework by introducing binding obligations that hold states accountable for violations against journalists.

For example, a UN treaty or protocol specifically dedicated to the safety of journalists could be proposed within SPECPOL, requiring member states to criminalize attacks on journalists and report on investigations. In addition, greater use of international courts, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), could help ensure accountability for crimes against journalists when domestic systems fail. Clearer mechanisms for monitoring compliance, paired with stronger sanctions for states or groups that deliberately target journalists, would help close the enforcement gap.

PROVIDING PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT, TRAINING, AND EVACUATION PROGRAMS

On a practical level, the safety of journalists depends not only on legal protections but also on access to resources that allow them to mitigate risks in conflict environments. Increased funding from UN bodies, regional organizations, and donor states could provide journalists with essential protective equipment, including body armor, helmets, satellite communication devices, and medical kits. Training programs in digital and physical safety, conflict sensitivity, and emergency response can further equip journalists to operate more securely. Additionally, creating UN- or NGO-administered evacuation and relocation programs would ensure that journalists facing imminent danger can be extracted safely and quickly. Such initiatives would not only save lives but also reinforce the principle that the international community values the essential role of the press.

ESTABLISHING INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE BODIES

Impunity remains one of the most significant obstacles to ensuring journalist safety. Attacks on reporters frequently go unpunished, especially in regions where judicial systems are weak or compromised. To address this, independent international or regional investigative bodies could be established with the authority to investigate crimes against journalists and publish transparent findings. These bodies could function in collaboration with existing UN agencies, such as UNESCO or the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and could refer cases to international courts when necessary. Such institutions would not only deter potential perpetrators but also provide a measure of justice to victims and their families. By creating an environment of accountability, the international community could signal that attacks on journalists will no longer be tolerated with impunity.

PROMOTING ETHICAL REPORTING AND MEDIA LITERACY

Another important aspect of journalist safety lies in perception. In many conflicts, journalists are mistakenly viewed as combatants, spies, or agents of foreign powers, which places them at greater risk of targeting. Promoting ethical standards in reporting, such as transparency, impartiality, and conflict-sensitive journalism, can help establish credibility and reduce hostility toward journalists. At the same time, programs that encourage media literacy among conflict-affected populations can counter disinformation and propaganda, fostering greater understanding of the role of the press. When communities view journalists as impartial conveyors of truth rather than political actors, the likelihood of attacks may decrease. These initiatives also strengthen the overall information environment, reducing the spread of misinformation that can escalate violence.

INTEGRATING SOLUTIONS THROUGH MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

While each of these approaches provides a valuable contribution, their effectiveness depends on coordinated implementation. The United Nations, through SPECPOL and other bodies, can serve as the central platform for developing international frameworks and mobilizing resources. Regional organizations, such as the European Union, the African Union, and the Organization of American States, can adapt these measures to local contexts and ensure cultural and political relevance. National governments bear the ultimate responsibility for protecting journalists within their borders, but they must be supported and pressured by international and civil society actors to uphold these standards.

In summary, ensuring the rights and safety of journalists in conflict zones requires both preventive and responsive strategies. By strengthening international legal frameworks, providing practical resources, establishing independent mechanisms of accountability, and fostering an environment of trust and credibility, the international community can significantly reduce risks to journalists and protect the integrity of conflict reporting. These solutions not only safeguard the lives of reporters but also uphold the principles of transparency, human rights, and peace that are fundamental to the mission of the United Nations.

BLOC POSITIONS

WESTERN BLOC: Typically emphasizes human rights, freedom of the press, and strong international legal protections.

NON-ALIGNED/DEVELOPING NATIONS: May highlight the need for sovereignty considerations and support for domestic journalists.

MIDDLE EASTERN BLOC: Often stresses the importance of protecting journalists while balancing national security concerns.

OTHERS: Various regional groups may focus on practical measures such as training, equipment, or international cooperation

TOPIC B: THE USE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES (PMCS)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: THE USE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES (PMCS)

Private Military Companies (PMCs) are private organizations that provide a wide range of military and security services, including armed combat, military training, logistical support, intelligence gathering, and security for individuals, corporations, or governments. Unlike traditional national armed forces, PMCs are not state actors; they operate as profit-driven entities, entering into contracts with governments, corporations, international organizations, or even non-state actors. In recent decades, the growth of the PMC industry has transformed the landscape of modern conflict.

Proponents of PMCs argue that these organizations provide valuable support in situations where states may lack capacity or political will to deploy sufficient armed forces. For example, governments may hire PMCs to protect diplomatic staff, guard infrastructure, or provide logistical assistance to peacekeeping missions. PMCs can also supply specialized expertise, such as training national militaries or operating advanced equipment. For struggling states with fragile security sectors, PMCs can appear to be a cost-effective and efficient solution.

However, the use of PMCs raises profound ethical, legal, and security concerns. The first major issue is accountability. Unlike state armed forces, which are typically subject to clear chains of command, military law, and civilian oversight, PMCs often operate in a legal gray area. Their employees may not be held accountable under either domestic or international law, particularly when working in weak states with limited judicial systems. This lack of oversight has led to instances of serious human rights abuses, war crimes, and violations of international humanitarian law going unpunished.

A second problem is the blurring of lines between state and private action. When a government contracts a PMC, it can shift responsibility for military operations onto private actors. This complicates the assignment of legal liability if violations occur. Civilians, international organizations, and even other states may struggle to determine whether an action was carried out on behalf of a state or as an independent operation of a PMC. The ambiguity undermines the principle of state responsibility in international law.

Third, PMCs can threaten civilian protection in conflict zones. Civilians are often caught in the middle of PMC operations, especially when contractors are used for armed combat roles. PMCs may prioritize their clients' interests—whether governments, corporations, or political groups—over humanitarian considerations, potentially worsening violence and insecurity. There have been high-profile cases where PMC employees engaged in indiscriminate violence, contributing to instability rather than reducing it.

Another concern is the commercialization of warfare. By outsourcing military functions to for-profit entities, states risk transforming conflict into a business enterprise. PMCs are incentivized to prolong contracts, secure new clients, and expand their operations, rather than working toward

long-term peace and stability. This profit motive runs counter to the objectives of international peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

Additionally, the geopolitical implications of PMCs cannot be ignored. Powerful states may use PMCs to exert influence in foreign conflicts without direct military involvement, thereby avoiding political scrutiny at home. For example, PMCs have been deployed in proxy wars, resource conflicts, and fragile states, allowing powerful actors to pursue strategic objectives while maintaining plausible deniability. The presence of PMCs can therefore alter the balance of power in conflict zones and undermine efforts at diplomacy and peacebuilding.

Finally, PMCs also complicate the work of the United Nations and international peacekeeping missions. Peacekeepers are bound by strict rules of engagement and accountability frameworks, but PMCs often operate alongside them without similar restrictions. This disparity can create confusion in the field, weaken civilian trust in international missions, and potentially endanger UN personnel.

In short, the use of PMCs presents a multifaceted problem. While these companies provide valuable services in certain contexts, their unregulated operations pose serious risks to human rights, international humanitarian law, and the stability of conflict zones. SPECPOL must grapple with the challenge of addressing PMCs in a way that balances the legitimate needs of states for security support with the urgent necessity of protecting civilians and upholding international norms.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

The use of private actors in armed conflict is not a new phenomenon. Mercenaries—individuals who fight in wars for financial gain rather than national allegiance—have existed for centuries. However, the modern PMC industry differs in scale, organization, and integration into global security structures.

PMCs emerged prominently in the mid-20th century. During the Congo Crisis (1960s), mercenary groups were hired by both secessionist movements and governments to fight in the conflict, foreshadowing the growing role of private actors in Africa. The post-Cold War period accelerated the rise of PMCs, as downsized militaries left thousands of trained soldiers unemployed and available for private hire. Many of these individuals found work with companies offering military expertise to fragile states and corporations.

Notable companies soon gained international attention. Executive Outcomes, a South African company, operated in Angola and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, providing direct combat support against rebel groups. Their success in temporarily stabilizing governments demonstrated both the utility and risks of outsourcing combat roles. Later, Blackwater (now Academi) became infamous for its role in Iraq following the 2003 U.S. invasion, where contractors were implicated in civilian casualties and abuses, including the 2007 Nisour Square massacre. More recently, the Wagner Group, a Russian-linked PMC, has operated in Ukraine, Syria, and several African states, raising concerns about state-sponsored use of PMCs as tools of foreign policy.

The involvement of PMCs has sparked debates about international law. While the Geneva Conventions recognize civilians—including contractors—as protected persons, their protections depend on not directly participating in hostilities. When PMCs engage in combat, their legal status becomes ambiguous. The United Nations International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries (1989) sought to outlaw mercenary activities, but its limited ratification and narrow definitions mean it has not effectively regulated modern PMCs.

As conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine have shown, PMCs remain deeply embedded in contemporary warfare. Their growth reflects not only states' desire for flexibility but also the lack of robust international mechanisms to govern their activities.

PAST ACTIONS

The international community has attempted, though often inconsistently, to address the challenges posed by PMCs.

The United Nations has condemned the use of mercenaries and highlighted the dangers of PMCs in multiple resolutions. The General Assembly and Security Council have both called for transparency and accountability in PMC operations. Reports from the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries have consistently raised concerns about the lack of oversight and the threat PMCs pose to human rights and state sovereignty.

Beyond UN resolutions, UNESCO and other agencies have not directly regulated PMCs but have contributed to discussions about the impact of privatized security on human rights. Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has engaged with governments and PMCs to emphasize adherence to international humanitarian law, though enforcement remains limited.

At the national level, some states have implemented domestic legislation to regulate PMCs. For instance, certain countries require licensing, impose reporting requirements, or restrict the deployment of PMCs in active combat zones. However, these laws vary widely and are often difficult to enforce when PMCs operate abroad.

International initiatives like the Montreux Document (2008)—a non-binding agreement developed by Switzerland and the ICRC—have provided guidelines for state responsibilities regarding PMCs. Additionally, the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC) sets voluntary standards for companies. While these initiatives represent progress, their voluntary nature and lack of enforcement mechanisms limit their effectiveness.

Overall, past actions reflect recognition of the problem but have failed to create a binding, comprehensive framework that ensures accountability for PMC misconduct.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The challenges posed by the growing reliance on Private Military Companies (PMCs) in modern conflicts demand a range of solutions that address gaps in regulation, accountability, and oversight. While PMCs can provide logistical support, training, and security in unstable regions, their profit-driven nature and ambiguous legal status often result in violations of international

humanitarian law. Addressing this issue requires a careful balance between recognizing the role PMCs play and preventing abuses that undermine international peace and security. The following solutions propose avenues for strengthening accountability, reducing risks, and ensuring compliance with international norms.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

One of the main obstacles in regulating PMCs is the fragmented and inconsistent international legal framework. Unlike national armed forces, PMCs operate across borders, often exploiting legal loopholes in weak states or unregulated environments. To address this, the international community could push for the adoption of a binding UN treaty that explicitly defines the legal status, obligations, and responsibilities of PMCs. Such a treaty could establish clear prohibitions on combat roles, outline reporting requirements, and mandate accountability for violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. SPECPOL could also explore expanding the scope of existing agreements, such as the Montreux Document, to create a universal framework binding on all UN member states. Oversight mechanisms, such as mandatory registration and licensing systems at the international level, would further ensure transparency and prevent rogue actors from exploiting conflicts for profit.

IMPROVING NATIONAL REGULATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Even in the absence of a new binding international treaty, national governments have a critical role in regulating PMCs. States that contract PMCs should be held responsible for ensuring compliance with international law. This could be achieved through stricter domestic licensing regimes, public reporting of contracts, and regular audits of PMC activities. Countries hosting PMC operations could also be supported with technical and financial assistance to strengthen their legal and regulatory capacities. By holding both the hiring and host states accountable, the international community can create dual layers of responsibility that limit the space for misconduct.

ESTABLISHING INDEPENDENT MONITORING AND INVESTIGATIVE BODIES

Accountability is often hindered by the lack of impartial investigations into PMC misconduct. To address this, the UN or regional organizations could establish independent investigative bodies tasked with monitoring PMC operations in conflict zones. These bodies could collect evidence, publish reports, and refer cases to international courts or tribunals where national systems are unwilling or unable to prosecute. A dedicated UN monitoring mechanism, similar to those used in human rights and arms embargo contexts, could deter violations by increasing the likelihood of exposure and accountability. Greater transparency in reporting PMC activities would also allow civil society and the media to play a stronger oversight role.

ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY IN CONTRACTING AND OPERATIONS

Many of the risks associated with PMCs arise from the secrecy surrounding their contracts and operations. Governments and international organizations could adopt policies requiring full

disclosure of contracts with PMCs, including details about their scope, rules of engagement, and accountability measures. Making this information available to the public and to oversight bodies would reduce the likelihood of abuses and ensure that PMC activities remain consistent with international standards. Transparency can also discourage states from outsourcing sensitive combat functions to PMCs as a way of avoiding public accountability.

PROMOTING ALTERNATIVES AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Another possible solution is reducing reliance on PMCs by investing in local security and peacekeeping capacities. The UN and regional organizations could prioritize training and equipping national armed forces or civilian protection agencies to handle tasks currently outsourced to PMCs. By strengthening the institutional capacity of states, the demand for private security providers would naturally decrease. Furthermore, integrating PMCs into multilateral peacekeeping frameworks under strict oversight could provide a transitional measure, ensuring that private contractors are subject to the same rules and standards as UN peacekeepers.

ENCOURAGING ETHICAL STANDARDS AND INDUSTRY SELF-REGULATION

In addition to formal regulation, voluntary codes of conduct and industry-led initiatives can contribute to improved accountability. Organizations such as the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA) already promote ethical standards among private security providers. SPECPOL could encourage greater participation in these frameworks by making UN contracts contingent on compliance with recognized codes of conduct. Although self-regulation is not a substitute for binding law, it can help create a culture of accountability and transparency within the industry while broader international frameworks are developed.

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION FOR COMPREHENSIVE REGULATION

Ultimately, no single solution will be sufficient to address the challenges posed by PMCs. Effective regulation requires a combination of international treaties, national laws, independent oversight, and industry cooperation. The United Nations, particularly through SPECPOL, is well-positioned to coordinate these efforts and provide a platform for states to negotiate stronger frameworks. Regional organizations, such as the European Union, African Union, and Organization of American States, can complement UN action by developing region-specific oversight systems. Civil society organizations and investigative journalists also play a crucial role in documenting PMC abuses and pressing governments for accountability.

In conclusion, addressing the risks associated with PMCs demands a balance between ensuring state sovereignty, protecting human rights, and preserving international peace and security. By strengthening legal frameworks, increasing transparency, enhancing oversight, and promoting alternatives, the international community can reduce the dangers posed by PMCs while ensuring that essential security needs are met. SPECPOL has the opportunity to spearhead these efforts, setting global standards that protect civilians and uphold international law.

COUNTRY DOSSIER

AFGHANISTAN

ANGOLA

AUSTRALIA

BELARUS

BRAZIL

CANADA

COLOMBIA

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ETHIOPIA

FRANCE

GERMANY

INDIA

IRAQ

JAPAN

KENYA

LIBYA

MADAGASCAR

MALI

MEXICO

MOZAMBIQUE

MYANMAR

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