



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

**Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and International Development**

Ali Ehsassi, Chair

Subcommittee on International Human Rights

Sameer Zuberi, Chair

**NOVEMBER 2022
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Standing Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website
at the following address: www.ourcommons.ca

**THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS AND
MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on
Foreign Affairs and International Development**

**Ali Ehsassi
Chair**

**Subcommittee on
International Human Rights**

**Sameer Zuberi
Chair**

NOVEMBER 2022

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CHAIR

Ali Ehsassi

VICE-CHAIRS

Garnett Genuis

Stéphane Bergeron

MEMBERS

Rachel Bendayan

Hon. Michael D. Chong

Dave Epp

Hon. Hedy Fry

Randy Hoback

Heather McPherson

Hon. Robert Oliphant

Randeep Sarai

Sameer Zuberi

OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO PARTICIPATED

Dan Albas

Hon. Ed Fast

Anita Vandenbeld

Arnold Viersen

CLERKS OF THE COMMITTEE

Ariane Gagné-Frégeau

Erica Pereira

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Information, Education and Research Services

Allison Goody, Analyst

Billy Joe Siekierski, Analyst

Colin Sawatzky, Analyst

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

CHAIR

Sameer Zuberi

VICE-CHAIRS

Arnold Viersen

Alexis Bruenelle-Duceppe

MEMBERS

Ziad Aboultaif

Ali Ehsassi

Heather McPherson

Maninder Sidhu

Anita Vandenbeld

OTHER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO PARTICIPATED

Alexandre Boulerice

Michael Cooper

Michael Coteau

Ted Falk

Greg Fergus

Iqwinder Gaheer

Garnett Genuis

Hon. Robert Oliphant

Denis Trudel

CLERKS OF THE COMMITTEE

Ariane Gagné-Frégeau

Erica Pereira

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Information, Education and Research Services

Lara Coleman, Analyst

Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analyst

THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPEMENT

has the honour to present its

SEVENTH REPORT

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on Monday, December 13, 2021, and the motion adopted by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on Monday, February 14, 2022, the Subcommittee has studied the Human Rights in Repressive States: The Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Organizations and has agreed to report the following:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY.....	1
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	3
THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Types of Human Rights Violations and Strategies.....	8
Intimidation and Harassment.....	9
Stigmatization and Verbal Abuse	9
Lawfare.....	11
Imprisonment	12
Killings	16
Specific Challenges For Journalists and Other Human Rights Defenders.....	18
COVID-19	18
National Security Legislation.....	19
Technology.....	22
Conflict and War	25
Conclusion	26
Tribute to Human Rights Defenders	27
Anastasia Shevchenko, Human Rights Activist, Russia.....	27
Atena Daemi, Human Rights Activist, Iran.....	27
Baktash Abtin, Iranian Writers’ Association, Iran	28
Carole Cadwalladr, Journalist, United Kingdom.....	28
Chan Pui-man, Yeung Ching-kee, Fung Wai-kong, Lam Man-chung, Journalists, <i>Apple Daily</i> , Hong Kong	28
Cheung Kim-hung, Next Digital, Hong Kong.....	28
Dawit Isaak, Journalist, Eritrea	28

Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Journalist, Philippines	29
Huseyin Celil, Uyghur Rights Activist, Xinjiang, China	29
Idris Hasan, Uyghur Rights Activist, Morocco	29
Jamal Khashoggi, Journalist, Saudi Arabia	29
Jesus “Jess” Malabanan, Journalist, Philippines	30
Jimmy Lai, Next Digital, Hong Kong.....	30
Katira Ahmadi, Journalist, Afghanistan.....	30
Lazhar Zouaïmia, Human Rights Activist, Algeria.....	30
Senator Leila Norma Eulalia Josefa Magistrado de Lima, Politician, Philippines	31
Maria Ressa, Journalist, Philippines	31
Masih Alinejad, Journalist, Iran	31
Mehdi Yahyanejad, App Developer, Iran	31
Narges Mohammadi, Human Rights Activist, Iran.....	32
Nasrin Sotoudeh, Human Rights Lawyer, Iran	32
Raif Badawi, Blogger Activist, Saudi Arabia	32
Reza Eslami, Professor, Human Rights Law, Iran	32
Roland Carreño, Journalist, Venezuela.....	33
Ruhollah Zam, Journalist, Iran.....	33
Ryan Law, <i>Apple Daily</i> , Hong Kong	33
Wang Bingzhang, Human Rights Activist, China	33
Zahra Kazemi, Journalist, Iran	33
APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES	35
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE	37

SUMMARY

Journalists and other human rights defenders (HRDs) are the first line of defence against human rights violations and abuses across the globe. It is because of their tireless, and often unrecognized efforts that individuals, organizations and governments can be held accountable for human rights infringements. Journalists and other HRDs are critical to the full enjoyment of human rights in democratic countries.

The work of journalists and other HRDs, however, can expose them to human rights violations and abuses when the promotion and protection of rights is at odds with the objectives of those in power. The growing rate of the infringement of rights of journalists and other HRDs has been associated with the global rise in authoritarianism and a decline of the rules-based international order.

With this in mind, on 14 February 2022 members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Subcommittee) agreed to:

conduct a study on human rights defenders, in particular journalists and media organizations, under attack, and how Canada can support their efforts, that the study focus on human rights in repressive states and that the findings collected are reported to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.¹

The Subcommittee heard testimony that governments go to great lengths to censor rights defenders. This includes harassment and intimidation, imprisonment and even killings. For women journalists and other women HRDs, rights violations and abuses can be considerably harsher as they face the additional burden of gender-based violence. Governments have used domestic and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and concerns about terrorism and national security to justify their repression. In addition, social media and other online platforms play a key role in fostering the spread of misinformation and disinformation, as well as surveilling, harassing and intimidating dissenters and critics.

Given how essential journalists and other HRDs are for the full enjoyment of human rights, they and their work must be protected from human rights violations and abuses.

1 House of Commons, Subcommittee on International Human Rights (SDIR) of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, [Minutes](#), 14 February 2022.

Governments, whether authoritarian or democratic, must not be allowed to violate human rights with impunity. The Subcommittee strongly believes that Canada has a role to play in this regard. This report sets out 12 recommendations that call on the Government of Canada to implement a number of measures to prevent human rights violations and abuses of journalists and HRDs, to help those being unjustly and unfairly prosecuted and to hold governments to account. The Subcommittee strongly believes that in implementing these recommendations, Canada is capable of elevating the human rights situation of journalists and HRDs across the globe.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada attempt to compel online platforms to collect and make data publicly available about instances of harassment and promoting violence against journalists and other human rights defenders and information regarding how those cases have been addressed. 11

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada grant Raif Badawi Canadian citizenship and reunite him with his family in Canada. 13

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada call on the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Media Freedom Coalition to investigate Dawit Isaak’s case and mount an international pressure campaign calling for his immediate release. 14

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada engage its international partners to impose coordinated Magnitsky sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* (Magnitsky Act) on senior Eritrean officials involved in rights violations against Dawit Isaak and his colleagues. 14

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada form an international coalition of like-minded countries to raise awareness and secure the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders around the globe. The Government of Canada should also mandate its diplomatic personnel to work with families and civil society organizations to coordinate advocacy efforts for the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders. Where possible, the Government of Canada should also direct diplomatic personnel to insist on meeting with imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders to amplify their voices. 16

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada increase efforts to support journalists and other human rights defenders by taking concrete measures against governments that violate their rights. This includes working with like-minded nations to impose coordinated sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* on responsible officials and, in the most serious cases, referring violations to the International Criminal Court. The Government of Canada should use every opportunity in international fora to condemn countries violating the rights of journalists and other human rights defenders—whether or not they are allies..... 18

Recommendation 7

The Government of Canada impose sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* against Hong Kong officials responsible for violating the human rights of Hong Kong journalists and other human rights defenders through the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*..... 20

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with international allies and support international efforts to establish and train independent judiciaries to better handle cases concerning journalists and other human rights defenders. In doing so, the Government of Canada should also advocate for greater transparency of judicial proceedings concerning journalists and other human rights defenders..... 22

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada support media literacy efforts in Canada and across the globe. Additionally, the Government of Canada should increase its international development budget towards supporting media development, part of which should include training for journalists to expose disinformation campaigns and human rights violations. 25

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada ensure that the freedom press centre in Ukraine is well-equipped with bulletproof vests, flak jackets, helmets, tourniquets and first aid kits to help protect journalists working in the conflict..... 26

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada increase the number of spaces available in its dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders at risk, including for journalists and other media professionals..... 26

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada appoint a special envoy for human rights defenders detained abroad who will work to raise awareness and advocate for their freedom..... 27



THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Journalists and other human rights defenders (HRDs) play a critical role in safeguarding human rights both at the domestic and international level. Not only do they bring attention to human rights challenges across the globe, but they also disseminate information on human rights and advocate for better human rights protections for their communities and for those whose voices often go unheard. However, the work of journalists and other HRDs can cause friction with those with power and influence, and when this occurs, they face the risk of human rights violations themselves. For women human rights defenders (WHRDS) and journalists, the risks are even greater. Not only do they face the same challenges as their male counterparts, but they can also be targeted for harassment and intimidation specifically because of their gender and be subjected to various forms of gender-based violence.

With this in mind, members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Subcommittee) agreed on 14 February 2022 to:

conduct a study on human rights defenders, in particular journalists and media organizations, under attack, and how Canada can support their efforts, that the study focus on human rights in repressive states and that the findings collected are reported to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.¹

The Subcommittee held two meetings on this topic, hearing from 11 witnesses from around the globe including journalists, civil society organizations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Subcommittee was told that the rights of journalists and other HRDs are at risk in every region of the world, regardless of political system or level of economic development. Many witnesses associated the rising risks for journalists and other HRDs with the global rise in authoritarianism, which is not only threatening democracies and

1 SDIR, [Minutes](#), 14 February 2022.



human rights in specific areas but is undermining the rules-based international order. Strategies to censor journalists and other HRDs include harassment and intimidation, imprisonment and killings. The Subcommittee heard that some governments have also taken advantage of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and the threat of terrorism and national security to enact repressive laws that are then used to target critics, including journalists and other HRDs.

This report summarizes the Subcommittee’s findings and provides 12 recommendations that call on the Government of Canada to take measures to help prevent and address human rights violations of journalists and HRDs, particularly those being unjustly and unfairly persecuted and to hold governments to account. The report is divided into three sections: Types of Human Rights Violations and Strategies, Specific Challenges for Journalists and Other Human Rights Defenders and Tribute to Human Rights Defenders.

TYPES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Journalists and other HRDs play a critical role within the context of domestic and international efforts to protect and uphold human rights. By making information available, they provide the public with an opportunity to scrutinize, debate and form opinions of governmental operations and public policy. They can also voice the public’s concerns to governments and help build consensus on matters of public interest. This exchange is particularly important in democratic countries, where governments are held accountable through general elections. In fact, the work of journalists and other HRDs is inextricably linked with the proper functioning of democratic safeguards and mechanisms. As Rachael Kay, the Deputy Executive Director of IFEX (formerly the International Freedom of Expression Exchange), stated, “[d]emocracies cannot survive and flourish without free, independent and pluralistic media.”²

The work of journalists and other HRDs, however, is not always supported by those in authority. The Subcommittee heard that as some governments seek to increase their grip on power, they systematically attack the rights of journalists and other HRDs, censoring their work and eroding these “checks and balances on their authority.”³ Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi, Chief, Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, UNESCO informed the Subcommittee that his organization recently published a report entitled, *Journalism is a public good: World Trends in Freedom of*

2 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Rachael Kay, Deputy Executive Director, IFEX).

3 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Farida Deif, Canada Director, Human Rights Watch).

Expression and Media Development, which found that “85% of the global population have witnessed a downsizing in their own press freedom.”⁴

Witnesses told the Subcommittee that governments seeking to increase their authority employ a range of tactics to censor journalists and other HRDs, stifling their rights in the process. These include intimidation and harassment, imprisonment and killings. Some witnesses told the Subcommittee that the situation can be especially precarious for women journalists and other WHRDs who are additionally subjected to various forms of gender-based violence.

Intimidation and Harassment

While intimidation and harassment can take many forms, witnesses generally referred to two common strategies: stigmatization and verbal abuse as well as lawfare (or, as referred to by UNESCO, Strategic Litigation Against Public Speech)—the use of courts to censor journalists and other HRDs.⁵

Stigmatization and Verbal Abuse

The stigmatization of journalists and other HRDs can have a profound impact on their work. It can undermine their credibility and turn the public against them—opening them up to further intimidation and harassment and even violence. One approach is to label journalists and other HRDs as traitors and terrorists and describe their work as “fake news.”⁶ Troublingly, Rachael Kay explained that this strategy has been normalized by some political authorities, even in democratic countries, and is leading to “verbal and physical attacks on the media with total impunity.”⁷

In India, for instance, one witness told the Subcommittee that the country’s Prime Minister has resorted to *ad hominem* attacks against those who publicly criticize his government’s policies.⁸ Last year, for example, he called peaceful protesters “parasites,”

4 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi, Chief, Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization); see UNESCO, [Journalism is a public good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development](#).

5 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).

6 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Mark Clifford, President, The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Maria Ressa, Chief Executive Officer and President, *Rappler*).

7 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Kay).

8 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).



in what one witness described as “emblematic” of his government’s approach “to anyone voicing a dissenting opinion on their policies.”⁹ The Subcommittee was also informed that this type of language has been used against minorities and civil society groups exacerbating division within the country for political gain.¹⁰

The Subcommittee also heard from Mark Clifford, the President of the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, who was among the many people who were “attacked” by two state owned newspapers in Hong Kong, *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao*. He described these attacks as part of a “pattern” of escalation where these media quote “mainland Chinese experts, who will start attacking an individual or an organization, and if that individual or organization doesn’t cease, desist or flee the territory, then the lawfare starts.”¹¹

Witnesses informed the Subcommittee that women journalists and other WHRDs are subjected to a disproportionate level of harassment and stigmatization compared to their male counterparts. As explained by the Canadian Women Leaders’ Digital Defence Initiative:

A growing body of research shows that, all over the world, women in politics and journalists are targets of vicious online attacks and gendered disinformation campaigns framing them as inherently untrustworthy, unintelligent, too emotional, or sexualized, often carried out with malign intent and coordination.¹²

Not only are women exposed to higher levels of stigmatization, but the effects can be amplified and often result in self-censorship.¹³ Maria Ressa, the Chief Executive Officer and President of *Rappler* (an online news media organization based in the Philippines), for example, told the Subcommittee that she was one of the subjects in a UNESCO study that found almost half a million social media attacks against her. Of these, she described how 60% were meant to tear down her credibility and 40% were meant to tear down her spirit.¹⁴

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

12 Lucina Di Meo and Kristina Wilfore, *White Paper: Canadian Women Leaders’ Digital Defence Initiative*, 2021. Submission to SDIR from Maria Ressa.

13 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Kay).

14 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

In light of these challenges, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada attempt to compel online platforms to collect and make data publicly available about instances of harassment and promoting violence against journalists and other human rights defenders and information regarding how those cases have been addressed.

Lawfare

In some countries, governments abuse civil laws and procedures to censor journalists and other HRDs in a strategy some witnesses dubbed “lawfare.”¹⁵ In reference to Venezuela, Farida Deif, the Director of Human Rights Watch Canada, explained that this strategy includes:

the control of the courts, the use of defamation charges, the use of fraud and the heavy fines that come with it, as a sort of larger element of a problem where governments are trying to close any dissenting media outlets and carry out a kind of campaign of stigmatization and repression against the media.¹⁶

The Subcommittee heard that in many cases, the mere threat of imposing these measures can result in self-censorship, undermining the freedom of expression of journalists and other HRDs. Mark Clifford explained that in the context of China, these “legal tactics are the most effective because they tend to focus the mind of the heads of organizations with the threat of prison, the threat of bankruptcy of the organizations.”¹⁷ He added that as a result of these types of attacks, “[w]e’ve seen scores of civil society organizations disband.”¹⁸

In other cases, governments abuse existing legislation against journalists and other HRDs. Matthew Leung, a former reporter for the *Ming Pao Daily* in Hong Kong, told the Subcommittee that media outlets in Hong Kong are being charged for making “seditious comments” under a law that existed prior to 1997 and that was intended to prevent speech that was “seditious against the queen.”¹⁹ He further added that the “problem is

15 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

16 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

17 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

18 Ibid.

19 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Matthew Leung, Former Reporter, *Ming Pao Daily*, Hong Kong, As an Individual).



that if they [the authorities] cannot find the right law, they will find one that suits them, no matter if it is historical or what.”²⁰ Similarly, the Subcommittee was informed that the Government of India “has used politically motivated tax fraud allegations to target anyone who is independently voicing their concerns about the human rights abuses in the country” including activists, journalists, peaceful protesters, and even poets and actors.²¹

The Subcommittee was told that lawfare has also been used to stall or stop the work of media organizations by bogging them down with various civil claims. Maria Ressa, for example, told the Subcommittee that her news organization, *Rappler*, has been relentlessly attacked with various civil charges by the government of President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. In 2016, after *Rappler* exposed the brutal consequences of the government’s war on drugs, the government tried to revoke its licence to operate, which resulted in the loss of 49% of its advertising revenue.²² In the past three months alone *Rappler* has received 22 new complaints, all of them potentially leading to legal cases. A few days before Maria Ressa appeared before the Subcommittee, *Rappler* received eight subpoenas in one day.²³ She explained that one of the lawsuits came from a sitting Cabinet secretary, while “another is a petition at the Supreme Court by the Solicitor General alleging unfounded conspiracy theories.”²⁴

Imprisonment

Witnesses informed the Subcommittee that journalists and other HRDs are frequently charged and imprisoned in an effort to restrict their freedom of expression. For example, Farida Deif told the Subcommittee how “[i]n the United Arab Emirates, scores of activists, academics and lawyers are serving lengthy sentences following unfair trials on vague and broad charges.”²⁵ Similar allegations were made against Saudi Arabia, where Saudi blogger Raif Badawi served a 10-year prison sentence “for insulting Islam online” and now faces an equally long travel ban preventing him from joining his wife and children in Canada.²⁶ The Subcommittee was told that Badawi’s case is “deeply

20 Ibid.

21 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

22 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

26 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Clayton Weimers, Deputy Director, Reporters Without Borders’ Washington D.C. Bureau).

illustrative of the dangers facing journalists in repressive regimes... around the world.”²⁷ Because of his Canadian connection, Clayton Weimers, the Deputy Director of Reporters Without Borders’ Washington D.C. Bureau, suggested that Canada could help in this particular case by granting Raif Badawi Canadian citizenship.

To that end, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada grant Raif Badawi Canadian citizenship and reunite him with his family in Canada.

In other cases, journalists and other HRDs are simply imprisoned without charges or trial. In Nicaragua, the Subcommittee was told that:

what we're seeing...is an enormous concentration of power by President Ortega... You see the government committing really widespread and egregious abuses against critics with complete impunity. We're seeing armed pro-government groups brutally repressing anti-government protestors and killing hundreds. You're seeing arbitrary detentions and the Nicaraguan government really intensifying its crackdown on civil society and the free press.²⁸

Another egregious example is the case of Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak, who has been imprisoned in Eritrea for 20 years. He was arrested after the independent newspaper where he worked “published an open letter criticizing the concentration of power and demanding democratic reform and human rights in Eritrea that was signed by 15 members of President Isaias Afwerki’s government.”²⁹ Since then, he “has had absolutely no access to consulate protection. He’s had absolutely no access to counsel or to family. He hasn’t seen anyone, let alone the light of day” and “has been denied any semblance of justice and human dignity.”³⁰ The Subcommittee is very alarmed by his treatment and by the implications of his detention for journalists and HRDs around the world. As explained by Judith Abitan, the Executive Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights:

Mr. Isaak’s case is not only emblematic of the assault on the safety and security of journalists but also the assault on a rules-based international order. It is a case study of

27 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Weimers).

28 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

29 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Judith Abitan, Executive Director, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights).

30 Ibid.



the global assault on media freedom by authoritarian regimes whose exculpatory immunity continues to intensify and whose perpetrators only continue to be emboldened by the global pandemic of impunity.³¹

The Subcommittee supports the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights that, with respect to Dawit Isaak, the Government of Canada should, as co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition³² engage other members in the case of Mr. Isaak, lead an inquiry at the Human Rights Council with respect to the case of Mr. Isaak and impose coordinated sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* (Magnitsky) against senior Eritrean officials involved in acts of corruption and rights violations against Mr. Isaak and his colleagues.

For this reason, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada call on the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Media Freedom Coalition to investigate Dawit Isaak’s case and mount an international pressure campaign calling for his immediate release.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada engage its international partners to impose coordinated Magnitsky sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* (Magnitsky Act) on senior Eritrean officials involved in rights violations against Dawit Isaak and his colleagues.

The Subcommittee was informed that in some countries, imprisonment is essentially a death sentence, as prison conditions are defined by overcrowding, poor hygiene and inadequate supplies. In those settings, the effects of the pandemic have been amplified, exposing journalists and other HRDs to further forms of human rights violations.³³ Moreover, witnesses stated that prisoners in some countries are often subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. In Iran, “Amnesty International has documented that Iranian authorities have failed to provide accountability for at least 72 deaths in custody since January 2010, despite credible reports that they resulted

31 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Abitan).

32 The Media Freedom Coalition is a cross-regional collaboration with 52 countries that are proactively advocating for media freedom at home and abroad. For more information see: Media Freedom Coalition, [About](#).

33 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Yonah Diamond, Legal Counsel, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights).

from torture, ill treatment or the lethal use of firearms and tear gas by officials.”³⁴ Yonah Diamond, Legal Counsel for the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, told the Subcommittee that Baktash Abtin, a celebrated Iranian poet and filmmaker died in an Iranian prison after authorities refused to send him to the hospital, despite his deteriorating health following a COVID-19 diagnosis.³⁵

Witnesses told the Subcommittee that there are particular risks and challenges regarding the imprisonment of women journalists and other WHRDs. In some countries, such as Iran, those advocating for women’s rights are subjected to disproportionately harsh sentences. Nazanin Boniadi, an Ambassador for Amnesty International United Kingdom, stated that in Iran:

the injustice towards women far outweighs the injustice towards men inside the country, as far as sentencing. For example, a woman who is campaigning against compulsory hijab can receive 18 years in prison, whereas a man who kills his daughter in an “honour killing” can receive just months or a few years. There’s no real justice for women.³⁶

The Subcommittee was told that, Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian WHRD, for example, has “spent the better part of 13 years in prison for her peaceful human rights advocacy. She was in solitary confinement four times. The last time was for 64 days, 40 of which were spent completely incommunicado, with no access to a lawyer, nothing.”³⁷ Moreover, the Subcommittee was also told that imprisoned WHRDs can be subjected to various forms of sexual violence. One witness reported, that prior to her death in Iran’s custody, Zahra Kazemi, a dual Iranian-Canadian citizen and freelance photojournalist, had “sustained brutal torture and rape.”³⁸

In many instances, journalists and other HRDs continue to work under the threat of imprisonment and even during their incarceration. Unfortunately, they often do so at very great cost to themselves and their families. Given their sacrifices, the Subcommittee strongly believes that every effort should be made to ensure their voices continue to be heard. The Subcommittee agrees with Yonah Diamond that the ultimate goal should be their release and that Canada can contribute to this objective by advocating at the international level, vigorously engaging with civil society organizations

34 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Nazanin Boniadi, Actress and Ambassador, Amnesty International United-Kingdom, As an Individual).

35 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

36 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi).

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.



and strategically leveraging its diplomatic channels.³⁹ For this reason, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada form an international coalition of like-minded countries to raise awareness and secure the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders around the globe. The Government of Canada should also mandate its diplomatic personnel to work with families and civil society organizations to coordinate advocacy efforts for the release of imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders. Where possible, the Government of Canada should also direct diplomatic personnel to insist on meeting with imprisoned journalists and other human rights defenders to amplify their voices.

Killings

Violence against journalists and other HRDs goes beyond intimidation and imprisonment. The Subcommittee heard that journalists and other HRDs are being killed at an alarming rate around the globe. According to Reporters Without Borders, “[o]ver a thousand journalists and media personnel have been killed while exercising their profession over the last 15 years.”⁴⁰ In the last four years alone, UNESCO has “monitored 400 killings of journalists,” while the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights told the Subcommittee that in the last year “a global initiative documented at least 358 murders of human rights defenders...”⁴¹ The Subcommittee also heard that the majority of killings are going uninvestigated and unpunished. Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi, for instance, stated that nine out of 10 killings of journalists “remain with no solution in the judicial system, so the impunity rates are very high in terms of the safety of journalists.”⁴²

Witnesses reported that in some instances, journalists and other HRDs are murdered by governmental authorities specifically because of their work. Maria Ressa told the Subcommittee that, as of August 2021 in the Philippines, more than 420 human rights activists had been killed by the Duterte government. Among them were nine trade union leaders and human rights activists, killed in simultaneous morning police raids in an

39 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

40 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Weimers).

41 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

42 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).

event now referred to as “bloody Sunday.”⁴³ In another instance, a former colleague of hers, Jess Malabanan, was “killed by a bullet to his head,” by unknown assailants after he had “worked on the Reuters’ drug wars series that won a Pulitzer Prize.”⁴⁴

In some instances, HRDs are killed indiscriminately during peaceful protests. Iranian security forces for instance, have “used lethal force and birdshot to crush mass protests over water shortages in Khuzestan and Lorestan provinces last year, killing at least 11 people and injuring scores more.”⁴⁵

The Subcommittee heard that impunity was driving the endless cycle of human rights violations against journalists and other HRDs. Witnesses were adamant that as long as governments intimidate, harass, imprison and even kill journalists and other HRDs without fear of punishment, there is no end to these crimes in sight.

The Subcommittee agrees with Judith Abitan of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre that “[a]ccountability is applicable in democratic states, as it is in autocratic regimes.”⁴⁶ Nazanin Boniadi echoed this in saying:

It's not just a moral imperative that we prioritize human rights in our foreign policy; it's to our advantage that we don't allow it to be overshadowed by our geopolitical, economic and other interests.⁴⁷

The Subcommittee also agrees that “Canada must be visible by being connected and committed to international mechanisms, engage in coalitions, fund and acknowledge the benefit of international institutions in upholding press freedom and be present and vocal in support of their efforts.”⁴⁸ As such, the Subcommittee recommends:

43 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

44 Ibid.

45 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi).

46 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Abitan).

47 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi).

48 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Kay).



Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada increase efforts to support journalists and other human rights defenders by taking concrete measures against governments that violate their rights. This includes working with like-minded nations to impose coordinated sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act)* on responsible officials and, in the most serious cases, referring violations to the International Criminal Court. The Government of Canada should use every opportunity in international fora to condemn countries violating the rights of journalists and other human rights defenders—whether or not they are allies.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FOR JOURNALISTS AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Witnesses informed the Subcommittee that some governments exploit circumstances and employ various strategies to justify violating the human rights of journalists and other HRDs. Notably, the Subcommittee heard that some governments have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to crack down on opposition, implemented legislation that hampers the work of journalists and other HRDs under national security pretences, and used technology for both surveillance and propaganda, deliberately spreading misinformation and disinformation. Furthermore, witnesses emphasized that journalists and other HRDs face the risk of serious human rights violations, even death, in situations of conflict.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has, in most countries, prompted the implementation of special emergency powers and measures by governments to address this unique and pressing public health threat. However, for some leaders, the pandemic has presented an opportunity to consolidate their power by enforcing measures that limit opposition, control public messaging and overregulate citizen activity, effectively leading to what one witness described as a “global erosion in the state of media freedom.”⁴⁹ Farida Deif described how, “[a]s infections and deaths surge, some repressive leaders threatened, silenced or even imprisoned anyone, including health care workers, who criticized their failed response.”⁵⁰ Yonah Diamond noted that the pandemic has “exacerbated” repression, contributing to a global surge in authoritarianism and a backsliding of

49 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Rachel Pulfer, Executive Director, Journalists for Human Rights).

50 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

democracies.⁵¹ Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi described the past two years of the pandemic as a “perfect storm towards reducing freedom of expression and press freedom” as pre-pandemic challenges, such as regulatory limits, media viability and disinformation campaigns “unfortunately came together to undermine press freedom.”⁵²

The Subcommittee was told that some governments have used the pandemic as a pretext to consolidate their power and limit freedom of speech.⁵³ In Venezuela, for example, Farida Deif described how the government exploited the state of emergency declared during the pandemic to charge journalists with incitement to hatred and other crimes for publishing or sharing information on social media that questions its COVID-19 policies.⁵⁴ Similarly, Mark Clifford described how COVID-19 social gathering limits in China were being arbitrarily applied to political dissenters and rights defenders. He stated, for example, that three people together in China protesting the invasion of Ukraine would be arrested for violating the social distancing rules that limit gatherings to two people only, while “hundreds of people can line up for a new watch and that’s no problem.”⁵⁵

National Security Legislation

While the pandemic has provided one excuse for many governments to strengthen their influence and stifle freedom of expression, governments also crack down on HRDs and journalists by labelling them as a terrorist threat and prosecuting them using national security legislation. Farida Deif described this as:

a really worrying trend by governments...to misuse counter-terrorism legislation, to prosecute individuals and human rights defenders for their activities. As long as you can frame them as a national security threat, then it allows you to really undermine their work and threaten their work.⁵⁶

Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi stressed that “using criminal law to attack freedom of expression is completely against the international standards and the recommendations

51 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

52 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).

53 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

54 Ibid.

55 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

56 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).



of the Human Rights Council and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”⁵⁷

Perhaps the clearest example of this is the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (the National Security Law, or NSL). The NSL, which was adopted by the Hong Kong legislature in 2020 met with widespread international criticism because of the sweeping power that it accorded the central Chinese and Hong Kong governments, and has resulted in what Mark Clifford described as a “broad-based attack on civil society.”⁵⁸ He emphasized that the law criminalizes “any criticism of the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese state” and has therefore resulted in the closure of the majority of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy newspapers. Matthew Leung noted that the NSL provides for the assets of news outlets to be frozen, which has quashed journalism even more quickly than arrests or office raids.⁵⁹ Mark Clifford relayed to the Subcommittee how, as a result of the NSL, many of his former colleagues from the media industry in Hong Kong are currently being held in jail without trial or convictions, and are among the thousands more who are being held because of their participation in anti-government activities.⁶⁰

As such, the Subcommittee recommends that:

Recommendation 7

The Government of Canada impose sanctions under the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* (Magnitsky Act) against Hong Kong officials responsible for violating the human rights of Hong Kong journalists and other human rights defenders through the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*.

Witnesses informed the Subcommittee that legislation stifling government opposition is often vaguely worded, allowing governments to indiscriminately target the activities of journalists and other HRDs. For instance, Farida Deif explained that Venezuela’s “Law Against Hatred,” which establishes prison sentences of up to 20 years for promoting messages of intolerance and hatred, has been used to prosecute those questioning government policy.⁶¹ Similarly, in the Philippines, journalists and other HRDs who have

57 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).

58 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

59 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Leung).

60 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

61 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

raised concerns about the government's war on drugs have been arrested and detained without a warrant for up to 24 days under the country's *Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020*.⁶² Maria Ressa stated that the law on journalists and other HRDs has had "beyond a chilling effect. It is glacial."⁶³

Some national security legislations have focused on the issue of foreign funding for domestic organizations, using this as a cover to prosecute human rights organizations and media companies that receive foreign support. For example, in 2012, Russia passed a foreign agent law that applies to non-governmental organizations that receive funds from abroad. More recently the government expanded the definition of foreign agent, thereby using the law to shut down the work of a longstanding Russian human rights organization, Memorial.⁶⁴ Further, the Russian "undesirable agents" law targets international organizations and has allowed the government to criminally prosecute Russian HRDs with ties to these organizations. Anastasia Shevchenko, a member of the pro-democracy civil society organization Open Russia, based in the United Kingdom, was the first person to have a criminal case brought against her under this law.⁶⁵ Likewise, in India, the Subcommittee was told of legislation surrounding foreign funding of non-governmental organizations that has been used by the government to close civil society organizations and to target the media.⁶⁶

One witness told the Subcommittee that repression of journalists and other HRDs can also come in the form of terrorist designations. The Subcommittee was told by one witness that in Israel, the government has designated Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist entities allowing it to seize their assets, make arrests of staff and affiliates, close their offices and effectively shut them down entirely.⁶⁷ Committee members are of different views on this.

The effects of invoking national security concerns to justify the criminalization of the work of journalists and other HRDs can be profound. It not only silences those subjected to the law, but inevitably results in self-censorship and can discourage greater participation in public affairs. Mark Clifford describes the precarious position that

62 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

63 Ibid.

64 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

65 Ibid.

66 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

67 Ibid.



journalists, targeted with this kind of legislation find themselves in, stating that “[n]aturally, in avoiding trouble, people tend to be more and more cautious.”⁶⁸

For this reason, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with international allies and support international efforts to establish and train independent judiciaries to better handle cases concerning journalists and other human rights defenders. In doing so, the Government of Canada should also advocate for greater transparency of judicial proceedings concerning journalists and other human rights defenders.

Technology

A growing issue affecting journalists and other HRDs is the way in which different technologies have been weaponized to curtail various rights including freedom of expression and privacy. The Subcommittee was told, for example, that the United Arab Emirates “continues to develop a surveillance capability, misusing spyware to gain access to the private and encrypted communications of journalists, activists and world leaders.”⁶⁹ Farida Deif explained that a prominent technology in this space is Pegasus, which is a software surveillance technology developed by Israel-based company NSO Group. It has been used by governments to “hack devices of journalists, opposition figures and activists in 45 countries, including a staff member at... Human Rights Watch. This company has been allowed to operate with impunity in the face of overwhelming evidence of abuse.”⁷⁰

Social media platforms also provide a venue through which journalists and other HRDs can experience harassment. Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi reported that digital violence against journalists, especially women journalists, is a growing trend. Ressa explained that digital violence is often protected as “freedom of speech,” but “is being used to stifle and pound women and vulnerable sectors to silence.”⁷¹ The Subcommittee was troubled to hear that this was a global problem and that “Canada, like the U.S., now has a serious problem with the way women in politics and journalism are being

68 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

69 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

70 Ibid.

71 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

targeted.”⁷² Witnesses reported that digital violence can be deployed in “sophisticated attacks” such as “bots or doxing,”⁷³ the latter of which involves the publication of private or identifiable information of an individual on the internet.⁷⁴

While some witnesses acknowledged that technology can be a tool to support journalists and other HRDs, particularly as they work to document, investigate and disseminate information about human rights violations and abuses, some also called for greater regulation of these technologies.⁷⁵ Farida Deif, for example, underscored the “urgent need to regulate the global trade in surveillance technology” to prevent commercial spyware programs from being deployed by repressive states to violate human rights, while Maria Ressa stated that more transparency around social media algorithms are necessary.⁷⁶

Social media platforms are intricately linked with the growing problem of misinformation, disinformation and fake news that discredit and complicate the work of journalists in delivering fact-based news. Maria Ressa invoked Shoshana Zuboff’s model of “surveillance capitalism” to describe how social media platforms are geared to manipulate our thoughts for corporate gain. She explained that:

[O]ur atomized personal experiences are collected by machine learning, organized by artificial intelligence extracting our lives for outsized corporate gain. Highly profitable micro-targeting operations are engineered to structurally undermine human will, a behaviour modification system in which we are Pavlov’s dogs experimented on in real time with disastrous consequences...

These engagement-based metrics of American tech companies mean that the incentive structure of the algorithms, which is really just their opinion in code, implemented at a scale we could never have imagined is insidiously shaping our future by encouraging the worst of human behaviour... Studies have shown that lies laced with anger and hate spread faster and further than facts.⁷⁷

Alarming, the Subcommittee heard that this model is being exploited by some countries for geopolitical reasons, overtaking credible news sources in shaping narratives. Maria Ressa described how, “[p]art of our problem now is that these have

72 Ibid.

73 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).

74 Ibid.

75 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

76 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).

77 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).



been exploited by geopolitical power. These networks now form a global nervous system of what I call ‘toxic sludge,’ and that’s fuelled by nations like China and Russia.”⁷⁸ She pointed to China and Russia as particular drivers of these networks, while also emphasizing the fact that, in some instances, these channels flowed through Canadian-based websites.⁷⁹

Maria Ressa also emphasized that the messages perpetuated by the algorithms of these technologies are often not reliant on facts, leading us down a dangerous path. As she stated “without facts you can’t have truth. Without truth you can’t have trust. Without these we have no shared reality, no rule of law, no democracy.”⁸⁰ Clayton Weimers of Reporters Without Borders corroborated her statement, saying that “fake news” is given considerable weight in the algorithms of digital platforms like Google and Facebook.⁸¹ This severely limits the ability of journalists to reach audiences and for citizens to access fact-based news.

Compounding the issue of disinformation is that media literacy skills in the general population are lagging and too weak to confront the problem. Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi mentioned to the Subcommittee that one of UNESCO’s priorities is empowering citizens of all ages to deal with online misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and conspiracy theories.⁸² Similarly, Rachel Pulfer emphasized the need to train journalists and media professionals to “safely call out and debunk” disinformation campaigns and expose them to the public.⁸³ As such, she called on the Government of Canada to set aside “up to 1% of its international development support” to help independent journalism stating that this was necessary “to fund the kind of holistic, sector-wide networking and capacity-building work that ensures those enduring conflicts have access to reliable information about what is happening through the conflict and beyond; in particular, information on human rights.”⁸⁴ Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends:

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Weimers).
82 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi).
83 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Pulfer).
84 Ibid.

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada support media literacy efforts in Canada and across the globe. Additionally, the Government of Canada should increase its international development budget towards supporting media development, part of which should include training for journalists to expose disinformation campaigns and human rights violations.

Conflict and War

Journalists and other HRDs play a critical role during times of conflict, providing “access to reliable information about what is happening through the conflict and beyond; in particular, information on human rights.”⁸⁵ However, journalists and other HRDs face unique risks in these situations. Clayton Weimers stated that journalists in Syria and Ukraine “have been shot at, harassed and detained” as well as deliberately targeted resulting in many deaths.⁸⁶ He also reported that the risks are even greater for citizen journalists operating in conflict zones, as they “lack many of the resources that their colleagues at large media organizations might enjoy” such as protective gear, first aid kits and press accreditation.⁸⁷ Weimers highlighted the positive impacts that the Reporters Without Borders-established Press Freedom Centre in Lviv, Ukraine is having in providing a space for journalists to escape from the conflict and access the necessary protective equipment.

Journalists working in the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia have also faced direct oppression from authorities for their reporting. Farida Deif told the Subcommittee of how Ethiopian government officials accused one news outlet of supporting the rebel Tigray People’s Liberation Front and temporarily suspended its operations. Individual journalists also face intimidation, expulsion and arrest for reporting on the situation there.⁸⁸

Journalists and other HRDs are also among those who flee conflict and often face certain risks because of their work. The Subcommittee was informed that in Afghanistan, for example, hundreds of women journalists and other WHRDs have either had to flee or remain trapped in the country, following the Taliban takeover in 2021. Their high-profile work reporting or advocating for human rights puts them in danger of being recognized,

85 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Pulfer).

86 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Weimers).

87 Ibid.

88 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Deif).



targeted and persecuted by those in power.⁸⁹ Rachel Pulfer emphasized the need for refugee status and protection for journalists who are targeted by “strongmen populists” that “decide to crassly demonize their journalist critics in ways that inspire supporters to target them with violence.”⁹⁰ As the Subcommittee shares these concerns, it recommends:

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada ensure that the freedom press centre in Ukraine is well-equipped with bulletproof vests, flak jackets, helmets, tourniquets and first aid kits to help protect journalists working in the conflict.

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada increase the number of spaces available in its dedicated refugee stream for human rights defenders at risk, including for journalists and other media professionals.

CONCLUSION

As many leaders around the globe seek to consolidate their power by limiting opposition, authoritarianism is on the rise leading to a backsliding of democracy. Chief among the casualties are journalists and other HRDs who are on the frontlines of defence. Without their dissemination of fact-based information, leaders cannot and will not be held to account. Compounding this problem is the way in which these governments are using technologies to monitor critics, disseminate false information and harass and intimidate journalists and other HRDs. The effects of these actions are particularly profound for women journalists and WHRDs, who are subjected to various forms of gender-based violence as a result. The Subcommittee is concerned by these reports and strongly believes that Canada must take a greater leadership role in protecting and advocating for the rights of journalists and other HRDs. Through the recommendations that it has put forward here, the Subcommittee believes that everyone will benefit from an increased respect for and promotion of the work of journalists and other HRDs globally in defending democracy and holding governments and others in positions of power to account.

89 SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 March 2022 (Pulfer).

90 Rachel Pulfer, “Emergency visas could help journalists in risky countries”, *The Globe and Mail*, 17 February 2022.

TRIBUTE TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Journalists and other HRDs have an indispensable function within the human rights movement in advocating for and safeguarding human rights domestically and abroad. They seek to hold governments and other powerful entities accountable for their human rights obligations, sometimes at great cost to themselves and their families. During the course of its study, the Subcommittee heard the names of many journalists and HRDs who have experienced harassment, imprisonment and even death on account of their human rights advocacy. This section of the report pays tribute to these individuals.

Many of the journalists and other HRDs named throughout the study who are imprisoned are Canadian citizens. These individuals are of special concern to the Subcommittee, and as such, it recommends:

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada appoint a special envoy for human rights defenders detained abroad who will work to raise awareness and advocate for their freedom.

Anastasia Shevchenko, Human Rights Activist, Russia

Anastasia Shevchenko was a coordinator of the pro-democracy Open Russia movement and was arrested in February 2019 under the “undesirable agents” law. She was sentenced to four years in prison in February 2021.⁹¹

Atena Daemi, Human Rights Activist, Iran

Atena Daemi has campaigned against the death penalty and in support of children’s and women’s rights in Iran. She was arrested in 2014, charged with “gathering and colluding against national security” as well as “spreading propaganda.”⁹² She remained in prison until January 2022.⁹³

91 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 March 2022 (Diamond); Amnesty International, “[Russia: Prisoner of conscience Anastasia Shevchenko convicted, given suspended prison sentence](#),” 18 February 2021.

92 NIAC Action, “[Atena Daemi Releases Video After Release from Prison](#),” 7 February 2022.

93 SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); NIAC Action, “[Atena Daemi Releases Video After Release from Prison](#),” 7 February 2022.



Baktash Abtin, Iranian Writers' Association, Iran

Baktash Abtin, an Iranian poet and documentary filmmaker, was charged in 2019 and imprisoned for “illegal assembly and collusion against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the state.”⁹⁴ He died in prison in 2021 of suspected COVID-19.⁹⁵

Carole Cadwalladr, Journalist, United Kingdom

Carole Cadwalladr is a British investigative journalist who has been targeted by gendered online violence and harassment for her work to expose the Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data privacy breach.⁹⁶

Chan Pui-man, Yeung Ching-kee, Fung Wai-kong, Lam Man-chung, Journalists, *Apple Daily*, Hong Kong

Chan Pui-man, Yeung Ching-kee, Fung Wai-kong and Lam Man-chung all worked for the pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* in Hong Kong. They were arrested in July 2021 and have since been detained without charges under Hong Kong’s National Security Law.⁹⁷

Cheung Kim-hung, Next Digital, Hong Kong

Cheung Kim-hung was arrested in June 2021 for his work as Chief Executive Officer of the media company Next Digital in Hong Kong and charged under the National Security Law. He has been awaiting trial and held without bail since then.⁹⁸

Dawit Isaak, Journalist, Eritrea

Dawit Isaak is a Swedish–Eritrean journalist who worked for an independent newspaper in Eritrea. In 2001, the newspaper published an open letter, signed by 15 members of the government, calling for democratic reforms. The publication of the letter resulted in

94 Journalism Is Not A Crime, “[Baktash Abtin](#),” 18 February 2022.

95 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); Journalism Is Not A Crime, “[Baktash Abtin](#),” 18 February 2022.

96 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “[The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists](#).”

97 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

98 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

several arrests, including that of Dawit Isaak, who has been detained in Eritrea since 2002.⁹⁹

Frenchie Mae Cumpio, Journalist, Philippines

Frenchie Mae Cumpio is a journalist and human rights activist in the Philippines who was arrested in series of raids in 2020 and charged with illegal possession of firearms—a charge which she denies. She has been held in pre-trial detention ever since.¹⁰⁰

Huseyin Celil, Uyghur Rights Activist, Xinjiang, China

Huseyin Celil is a Chinese-Canadian citizen and Uyghur rights activist who fled China in 2001. He was arrested in Uzbekistan in 2006 and sent to China where he was sentenced to life in prison.¹⁰¹

Idris Hasan, Uyghur Rights Activist, Morocco

Idris Hasan fled China to Turkey following police harassment for his Uyghur rights activism, fleeing again to Morocco after repeated arrests and detentions. He is currently detained in Morocco while China demands his extradition.¹⁰²

Jamal Khashoggi, Journalist, Saudi Arabia

Jamal Khashoggi left Saudi Arabia for the United States in 2017, where he wrote a weekly column for the *Washington Post* critical of the Saudi regime. On a visit to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018, he was murdered.¹⁰³

99 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Abitan).

100 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa); Lorraine Ecarma, "[Tacloban journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio still hopeful a year after arrest](#)," *Rappler*, 9 February 2021.

101 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); Amnesty International Canada, "[Huseyin Celil](#)."

102 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Sameer Zuberi, Member of Parliament, Pierrefonds—Dollard, Liberal); Asim Kashgarian, "[Uyghur Man's Long Journey to Freedom May End With Return to China](#)," *Voice of America*, 14 January 2022.

103 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); *BBC News*, "[Jamal Kashoggi: All you need to know about Saudi journalist's death](#)," 24 February 2021.



Jesus “Jess” Malabanan, Journalist, Philippines

Jess Malabanan was a journalist in the Philippines with the *Manila Standard*. He worked on a 2018 Pulitzer Prize winning project critical of the Philippines drug war. He was shot and killed in 2021 by unknown assailants.¹⁰⁴

Jimmy Lai, Next Digital, Hong Kong

Jimmy Lai, a longtime pro-democracy activist in Hong Kong and founder of Next Digital media company, was arrested several times under the National Security Law and has received multiple prison sentences since April 2021. His assets have also been frozen, effectively shutting down his business’s operations.¹⁰⁵

Katira Ahmadi, Journalist, Afghanistan

Katira Ahmadi was a television anchor for Zan TV in Kabul, Afghanistan from 2017 to 2021. When the Taliban came to power in 2021, she fled and has been in hiding ever since.¹⁰⁶

Lazhar Zouaïmia, Human Rights Activist, Algeria

Lazhar Zouaïmia is an Algerian-Canadian who was active in the 2019 pro-democracy Hirak Movement in Algeria. In February 2022, he was arrested in Algeria while boarding a flight home to Montreal and remained in detention until May 2022.¹⁰⁷

104 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa); Jairo Bolledo, “[Journalist Jess Malabanan shot dead in Samar](#),” *Rappler*, 8 December 2021.

105 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

106 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Pulfer); Meghan Werft, “[This All-Women News Station in Afghanistan Is the First of Its Kind](#),” *Global Citizen*, 19 May 2017.

107 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Denis Trudel, Member of Parliament, Longueuil–Saint-Hubert, Bloc Québécois); *CBC News*, “[Montreal detained in Algeria while on his way back to Canada](#),” 27 February 2022.

Senator Leila Norma Eulalia Josefa Magistrado de Lima, Politician, Philippines

Leila Norma Eulalia Josefa Magistrado de Lima has been a Senator in the Philippines since 2016. She was arrested in 2017 shortly after she opened a probe into President Duterte’s war on drugs. She has been detained without charges since then.¹⁰⁸

Maria Ressa, Journalist, Philippines

Maria Ressa is a journalist and founder of *Rappler*—a digital media company in the Philippines. She has won many accolades over the years, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021. Her work has been very critical President Duterte’s administration. She has been fined and arrested numerous times with the latest charges carrying a potential life sentence.¹⁰⁹

Masih Alinejad, Journalist, Iran

Masih Alinejad is a prominent American-Iranian journalist and women’s rights activist based in the United States. Though she is no longer in Iran, the Iranian government has been targeting her for her work, including through the arrest and imprisonment of her brother in Iran.¹¹⁰

Mehdi Yahyanejad, App Developer, Iran

Mehdi Yahyanejad is an Iranian-American tech entrepreneur living in the United States. He founded Balatarin.com, a Persian news sharing website that has been blocked by the Iranian government. He is also co-founder of NetFreedom Pioneers, which is a non-profit organization that provides web-based solutions for communities with limited or restricted internet access.¹¹¹

108 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa); Human Rights Watch, [“Philippines: Candidates Should Pledge to Free Jailed Senator,”](#) 22 February 2022.

109 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Godoi); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Ressa).

110 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); Golnaz Esfandiari, [“U.S.–Iran Kidnap Plot: Why Is Iran Attempting To Silence Masih Alinejad?”](#) *Radio Free Europe*, 15 July 2021.

111 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); Centre for Human Rights in Iran, [“New App Lets Iranians Download Information Via Satellite and Bypass State’s Internet Censorship,”](#) 18 March 2016.



Narges Mohammadi, Human Rights Activist, Iran

Narges Mohammadi is the Deputy Director of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre in Iran and has been imprisoned several times for charges related to her advocacy work. Though she was sentenced to another eight years and 70 lashes in January 2022, she continues to defend human rights from prison.¹¹²

Nasrin Sotoudeh, Human Rights Lawyer, Iran

Nasrin Sotoudeh has represented women as a human rights lawyer in Iran for many years. She was arrested in 2019 and sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes “for her support of women's rights activists.”¹¹³ Though she is currently serving her sentence at home on conditional release, her health is fragile due to the “near-fatal 46-day hunger strike” she mounted while imprisoned.¹¹⁴

Raif Badawi, Blogger Activist, Saudi Arabia

Raif Badawi is a Saudi Arabian blogger activist who was arrested in 2012 and sentenced to 1,000 lashes and 10 years’ imprisonment for insulting Islam online. He completed his sentence in March 2022 but remains subject to a 10-year travel ban, preventing him from reuniting with his wife and children in Canada.¹¹⁵

Reza Eslami, Professor, Human Rights Law, Iran

Reza Eslami is a Canadian-Iranian law professor who was teaching at a university in Tehran in 2021 when he was arrested for “cooperating with an enemy state,” after attending a law training course in the Czech Republic.¹¹⁶ He was sentenced to seven years in prison.¹¹⁷

112 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); Centre for Human Rights in Iran, “[Rights activist Narges Mohammadi sentenced to another eight years in prison](#),” 24 January 2022.

113 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi).

114 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond).

115 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Weimers); *BBC News*, “[Raif Badawi: Saudi blogger freed after decade in prison](#),” 11 March 2022.

116 Radio Free Europe, “[Iranian Professor Jailed After Attending Training Course In Prague](#),” 9 February 2021.

117 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 March 2022 (Diamond); Radio Free Europe, “[Iranian Professor Jailed After Attending Training Course In Prague](#),” 9 February 2021.

Roland Carreño, Journalist, Venezuela

Roland Carreño is a Venezuelan journalist and critic of the Maduro government. He was arrested in 2020 on charges of money laundering and financing terrorism and has been detained since without a trial.¹¹⁸

Ruhollah Zam, Journalist, Iran

Ruhollah Zam was a journalist who ran the anti-government *Amad News* through the Telegram messaging app. He was lured back to Iran in 2019 from exile in France, arrested, tried and forced to confess to stirring up public dissent on television. He was executed in December 2020.¹¹⁹

Ryan Law, *Apple Daily*, Hong Kong

Ryan Law is a journalist who was the editor-in-chief at *Apple Daily*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper. He was arrested in June 2021 and charged with colluding with foreign forces under the National Security Law.¹²⁰ He has been held without bail since then.

Wang Bingzhang, Human Rights Activist, China

Wang Bingzhang was the Chinese-Canadian leader of the China Overseas Democracy Movement. He was abducted from Vietnam and brought to China in 2002 where he was sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement for offenses such as passing military secrets and terrorist plotting.¹²¹

Zahra Kazemi, Journalist, Iran

Zahra Kazemi was an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist who was arrested and detained in 2003 while taking photos of prisoners' families outside of the Evin Prison in Tehran.

118 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 March 2022 (Michael Cooper, Member of Parliament, St. Albert–Edmonton, CPC); Reporters Without Borders, "[Venezuelan journalist completes 12 months in arbitrary detention](#)," 27 October 2021.

119 SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); *BBC News*, "[Ruhollah Zam: Iran executes journalist accused of fanning unrest](#)," 12 December 2020.

120 SDIR, *Evidence*, 28 March 2022 (Clifford).

121 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 March 2022 (Diamond); "[About Dr. Wang Bingzhang](#)," Free Dr. Wang Bingzhang.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

She died in a military hospital a few weeks later from injuries inflicted by interrogators.¹²²

122 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 28 March 2022 (Boniadi); Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, "[Zahra Kazemi](#)."

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Human Rights Watch Farida Deif, Canada Director	2022/03/21	5
Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights Yonah Diamond, Legal Counsel	2022/03/21	5
Reporters Without Borders Clayton Weimers, Deputy Director, Washington DC Bureau	2022/03/21	5
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Guilherme Canela de Souza Godoi, Chief, Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists	2022/03/21	5
As an individual Nazanin Boniadi, Actress and Ambassador, Amnesty International United-Kingdom Matthew Leung, Former Reporter, Ming Pao Daily, Hong Kong	2022/03/28	6
IFEX Rachael Kay, Deputy Executive Director	2022/03/28	6
Journalists for Human Rights Rachel Pulfer, Executive Director	2022/03/28	6
Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights Judith Abitan, Executive Director	2022/03/28	6
Rappler Maria Ressa, Chief Executive Officer and President	2022/03/28	6

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Mark Clifford, President	2022/03/28	6

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Internal Development ([Meeting No. 34](#)) is tabled and a copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights ([Meetings Nos. 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14 and 15](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Ali Ehsassi
Chair

