

21 April 2016 – for immediate release

Protecting Against Attacks on Freedom of Expression

Today, UNESCO and the Centre for Law and Democracy released a Discussion Paper, *Supporting Freedom of Expression: A Practical Guide to Developing Specialised Safety Mechanisms*, which provides direction and support to those who are thinking of putting in place national safety mechanisms. Such mechanisms are proving to be an indispensable means of protecting journalists and others who are attacked for exercising their right to freedom of expression, in what has been termed ‘censorship by killing’, as well as addressing the problem of impunity for such attacks.

“The scale of this problem, which represents an attack on society as a whole, has remained at an unacceptable level in terms both of the number of attacks and the number of countries in which they take place”, said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“Despite their potential, only a few countries have put in place national safety mechanisms and we hope that this Guide will both prompt and support others to do so.”*

“Freedom of the press is essential for the necessary information and transparency that a democratic society needs. But today we see an increase of violence and intimidation against journalists for which I propose that all countries of the world establish a mechanism of information and protection for the safety of journalists”, said Frank La Rue, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Communication and Information.

One of the challenges of putting in place a national safety mechanism is the limited number of examples of existing mechanisms from which lessons can be learned, as well as the mixed success of existing mechanisms. The Guide seeks to provide support in this area by analysing the key issues that need to be considered when setting up a mechanism, grouped into three main categories: the scope of the mechanism; involving key stakeholders; and institutional design. An Annex provides a flowchart of the decisions/assessments that need to be made when establishing a mechanism, designed to be used as a tool to assist with planning such a process.

The issue of national safety mechanisms and the Guide will be discussed at a session at World Press Freedom Day in Helsinki, titled Promoting Journalists’ Safety: Building an Effective Safety Mechanism, to be held in Finlandia Hall from 1400-1700 on 2 May.

The Discussion Paper is available at: www.law-democracy.org/live/protecting-against-attacks-on-freedom-of-expression.

For further information, please contact:

Toby Mendel
Executive Director
Centre for Law and Democracy
Email: toby@law-democracy.org
+1 902 431-3688
www.law-democracy.org
twitter: @law_democracy
#mediasafetymech