

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

2024 A Press for the Planet
JOURNALISM IN THE FACE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

4 MAY

TIME – **16:00 – 17:00 (Santiago)**

ROOM – C1

GABRIELA MISTRAL CENTRE



"Media Resilience: Navigating Information Rights and Journalist Safety in Latin American Environmental Reporting"

BACKGROUND:

In Latin America, journalists covering topics related to environment and climate change face a myriad of challenges that threaten their safety, freedom, and ability to report objectively. According to the International Press Institute (IPI) 2024 report: [Climate and Environmental Journalism Under Fire](#), from physical violence to arrests, legal harassment, online attacks, restrictions on freedom of movement, and challenges accessing information: journalists who cover climate and environmental stories are targeted by powerful private and state actors who are willing to go to great lengths to protect their interests linked to environmentally harmful activities.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Latin America continues to be one of the most dangerous regions for journalists, with high levels of violence, censorship, and impunity. In its [2023 World Press Freedom Index](#), RSF stated that "the use of disinformation and propaganda, often associated with online verbal violence against journalists and the media, is being normalized and becoming an integral part of political leaders' strategy in seeking greater control over the public narrative."

RSF's index also mentioned that in countries with relatively stable political landscapes, there has been a decline in the situation regarding press freedom. Disinformation and propaganda tactics, often accompanied by online harassment towards journalists and media outlets, are increasingly accepted and utilized as key components of political leaders' efforts to manipulate and control public discourse. Historically well-placed countries within the Index, such as Costa Rica, Uruguay and Argentina, have also seen an increase in online harassment, particularly of women journalists.

In Central America, according to a [study](#) among 340 journalists from the region (2022-2023) conducted by the Central American Network of Journalists, and supported by the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Central America and the Caribbean (ROCA), 93% of the journalists consulted affirmed that it is a very common practice for states actors (and even private organizations) to either restrict or block access to official information.

Obstacles to access to information and data both from public institutions and private companies forces journalists either to rely on risky practices to collect information, or to base investigations on data that are not officially confirmed .

Weak legal protections and widespread impunity also exacerbate the risks faced by journalists covering environmental issues in Latin America. The situation is particularly dire in areas where environmental

concerns intersect with indigenous rights and land disputes. Different investigations and reports coincide that journalists reporting on these issues often find themselves at risk of violence from powerful economic interests seeking to exploit natural resources. The result is a volatile and dangerous environment where journalists risk their lives to shed light on issues of vital importance to both local communities and the global public.

Despite these challenges, journalists in Latin America continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and commitment to their profession. Many brave individuals and organizations are working tirelessly to defend press freedom, promote media pluralism, and support the safety and independence of journalists. International solidarity and collaboration among journalists, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders play a crucial role in amplifying marginalized voices, exposing environmental abuses, and holding powerful actors accountable.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this panel is to explore and discuss the complex interplay between the right to information and the safety of journalists, particularly those investigating environmental issues in Latin America. The panel aims to emphasize the urgency of protecting media independence, freedom, and pluralism in the face of increasing threats faced by journalists. The discussion will highlight the role of journalists as guardians of public interest and stress the detrimental impact on democratic foundations when their independence is compromised.

DESCRIPTION:

The panel will focus on the intricate interplay between the right to information and the safety of journalists investigating environmental issues in Latin America. Emphasizing the urgency of defending media independence, freedom, and pluralism, the panel will address the escalating threats faced by journalists in the region. It underscores the vital role of journalists as guardians of public interest, highlighting that attacks on their independence undermine democratic foundations.

The panel aims to explore the current landscape of attacks on journalists and media independence, shedding light on implications for media pluralism and democracy. Drawing inspiration from the Windhoek+30 Declaration, it asserts the enduring relevance of its principles, particularly emphasizing information as a common good necessary for societal well-being, especially in addressing environmental issues.

The discussion will delve into the need to reevaluate regional protection systems for journalists covering environmental issues, specifically confronting threats posed by groups with economic interests that jeopardize the right to a healthy environment. Panelists will share personal testimonials, humanizing the challenges faced by journalists, adding a poignant dimension to the conversation. They will also reflect on shared experiences, considering their role in advocating for media freedom.

Overall, the panel not only aims to dissect the delicate balance between the right to information and journalist safety but also serves as a platform for firsthand testimonials, reinforcing the timeless importance of information as a common good and the collective responsibility to protect journalists' vital role in shaping an informed and democratic society.

METHODOLOGY:

The panel will be conducted as a part of the 31st edition of World Press Freedom Day in Santiago, Chile (Gabriela Mistral Centre) with virtual access to allow the participation from diverse locations. The moderator will introduce the topic and guide the discussion, posing questions to each panelist to elicit their insights and perspectives. Panelists will have an opportunity to share personal experiences, research findings, and recommendations for addressing challenges facing journalists covering environmental issues in Latin America. At the end of the panel, the moderator will wrap-up the session with conclusion and closing remarks.

This panel is developed with the support of:

