



# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 2011

IFJ GENDER NEWSLETTER ■ SPECIAL ISSUE

## Address from IFJ Gender Council Chair,



When we speak of the slaughter of women and girls, we often use the word 'femicide', when we speak of rape and sexual attacks, we use expressions like 'tool of war', but what we really mean is the destruction of lives, and the threats and violence used to silence and censor.

The term 'femicide' was first used in England in the early 19th century to describe the killing of a woman because she was a woman. Since that time its use has expanded to include any misogynistic murder; including rape/murder, mutilation, death through beating or torture, 'honour' killing, immolation and starvation. Legal definitions of motivations (beyond sadism) include: a hatred of women, a male sense of entitlement, a sense of superiority, and/or an assumption of ownership.

As female journalists, we also face these threats of violence, abuse, rape and sexual attack, threats and intimidation, imprisonment, threats to our families and death. All for doing our job, and often for simply also being female.

In Honduras, a part of the so-called 'triangle of death', a woman is killed with impunity each and every day. In terms of targeting female journalists, we look to Russia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Mexico where women have lost their lives as a result of targeted violence. In Iran, it is the threat of imprisonment, in Libya and Egypt it is the rise of sexual attacks, and in Somalia, shooting. All of these crimes are unsolved, and thus serve to add to a climate of fear and impunity, and in many cases fear of disclosure, as the survivors of sexual attack in particular, are often further victimised.

As journalists we have a responsibility to break through the conspiracy of silence and impunity of these crimes that occur on every continent and pose a serious threat to women in the industry and the freedom of the press. As journalists' organisations, we have the responsibility to better protect and support our women who go out on the front line every day.

On this International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls we ask you to add pressure to resolve the terrible crimes committed against our sisters, mothers and daughters, some of which are highlighted below, and call for an end to all violence directed at women and girls.

End the impunity, end the violence, protect our sisters and release us all from the fear that censors our press and grips our lives.

*Mindy Ran*

## IFJ Denounces Extreme Levels of Violence Faced by Women Journalists Worldwide

In a **letter** addressed to UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon to mark International Day on the Elimination of violence against women and girls, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) points at the extreme levels of violence women journalists face while carrying out their professional duties.

The IFJ denounces aggression, threats, political pressure, violence, rape and abuse that women journalists have to face due either to their gender or simply for doing their job. The situation is made much worse by the prevailing culture of impunity which protects and emboldens the perpetrators of these crimes.

"It is even more sobering when we consider that the majority of these crimes remain unsolved, and attackers or killers do not face justice," say Beth Costa, IFJ General Secretary and Mindy Ran, Chair of the IFJ gender council. "The climate of impunity for crimes against female journalists constitutes a serious threat to the most fundamental of free expression rights. Moreover, there is an on-going concern over the fact that the authorities tend to deny that these women have been killed because of their work as journalist. Instead, they tend to indicate robbery or "personal issues" as motives of the media killings."

According to United Nations data, up to 70 per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime. Between 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 8000 cases of sexual violence have been perpetuated yearly in 2009 and 2010.

The IFJ also says that in some regions it is considered a taboo to report sexual assaults, creating a situation where the survivor is being further victimised and made to feel the guilty party. This attitude makes for an effective use of assault to silence and censor.

Among the countries failing to protect women journalists adequately the IFJ points at Mexico, the Philippines, Somalia, Russia, Nepal and Israel.

### IRAN: ongoing targeting of female journalists

The June 2009 presidential elections in Iran sparked mass-protests and civil unrest on a scale not seen since the revolution that established the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Long-standing patterns of human rights violations, including severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, intensified during the protests, and have continued since.

Iranian and foreign media have been targeted by the authorities. Websites have been closed, newsrooms have been cleared of "reformist" elements, and journalists have been arrested in the dead of night and whisked off to undisclosed locations.

Reports say that women journalists are regularly beaten threatened to be raped and sexually harassed.

## IFJ reports direct link between Nepalese Uma Singh's journalism and her murder

The murder of Nepalese reporter Uma Singh, who campaigned against illegal land seizures and caste and gender discrimination, still resonates with journalists and activists in South Asia and beyond.

Singh, a print and radio reporter in her mid-20s who had campaigned against caste and gender discrimination, was stabbed repeatedly in her home in Janakpur in south-eastern Nepal on January 11, 2009, by about 15 men.

Key issues in Nepal converged in her reporting and her death: land, party politics, and the breakdown of law and order in post-conflict society.

On-the-spot reports at the time said Singh's neighbours heard her cries but failed to help, and that one quoted the killers as saying: "This is for writing so much."

A mission to Janakpur by the International Federation of Journalists several weeks after the murder concluded that there were strong links between Singh's death and her reporting on the expropriation of land during Nepal's decade-long insurgency.

Uma Singh began to document land-grabbing by Maoist cadres and the failure of the Maoist-led government to compel its cadres to return the land to the original owners.

In an article in the Nepali language monthly *Sarokar* in October 2008, published in English translation on the website [www.dainikee.com](http://www.dainikee.com) on January 6, 2009, five days before she was murdered, Uma Singh reported: "The Maoists have not returned the seized land in Siraha district even three months after Maoist chairman and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal directed his party cadres to do so."

She named a powerful person from the Maoist political hierarchy in the Terai, by now alienated from the party because of tactical and strategic differences, and claimed he had mobilised disadvantaged groups to occupy land and used the threat of such seizures to extort money from landowners.

The IFJ report concluded: "The preponderance of evidence suggests a direct link between Uma Singh's journalism and her murder. Though there is no denying that she may have had a personal stake in the issue of land seizures, her journalism was exercised in the larger public interest and it served the cause of all those who had been dispossessed and displaced."

## CHINA: Female Journalist Assaulted Outside Her Office in Beijing

A female journalist, known as Lim, of China Central Television (CCTV) was seriously injured on June 9 2011 by an unknown male outside the broadcaster's office building in Haidian, Chaoyang District, Beijing. Lim sustained knife wounds to her nose and face in the attack. According to a Global Times report on June 13, the suspect, only known by the surname Xu, allegedly asked Lim whether she worked at CCTV before attacking her. Further information from police about the investigation is obscure.

## Seven Women Journalists Killed in the Philippines Since 2005

The Philippines is among the most dangerous countries in the world for media personnel.

On November 23, 2009, in an unprecedented act of violence, 32 journalists were ambushed and massacred as they travelled in Maguindanao province with a convoy of people who intended to file gubernatorial candidacy papers for a local politician. Among them were female journalists Marife Montana (44 years old of Saksi, Balita, dxCP), Eleanor Dalmacio (38 years old of Socsargen News Today) Marites Cablitas (38 years old of RPN dxDX) and Gina Dela Cruz (41 years old of Saksi).

On March 24, 2011, Maria Len Flores Somera, radio anchor with dzME radio station, was shot dead near her home in Malabon, a district of Manila. Somera was on her way to host her daily program Arangkada Kinse when she was ambushed at around 9:45am. Somera, 44, was rushed to the Valenzuela General Hospital and pronounced dead on arrival.

Marlene Garcia-Esperat hosted on Radio Nation and wrote a column called "Madame Witness" for the Midland Review in Tacurong. She reportedly received threats to her life because of her exposés on corruption and other issues. On March 24, 2005, a man walked into her dining room and shot her in the head. She was 45.

Maricel Vigo hosted a program called "Congress Affairs" over dxND. She was also executive director of the non-government organisation Peoples' Kauyahan Foundation, Inc. (PKFI), which dealt with peace-building projects. She was killed along with her journalist husband on June 19, 2006 in Kidapawan, Cotabato.

## Australian Woman Journalist Attacked in Libya

Tracey Shelton, a freelance Australian journalist, was brutally attacked in her hotel room in Benghazi, Libya, on August 11, 2011. Two armed men wearing military fatigues broke into Shelton's room at the Africa Hotel, tied her up, beat her, and attempted to kidnap her. The journalist escaped by jumping to a neighbouring balcony.

The rebel government, the interim National Transitional Council in Benghazi, put Shelton in a hotel under continuous security surveillance and immediately launched an investigation into the attack.

## 2011: Deadly Year for Women Journalists in Mexico

The decapitated body of Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz, journalist at the regional newspaper *Notiver* was found dead on July 26, 2011. The journalist was abducted on July 24 by armed men as she left her house, and her decapitated body was found two days later near the offices of the newspaper *Imagen*.

Marcela Yarce Viveros, founder of the magazine *Contralínea* and Rocío González Trápaga, freelance journalist working for Televisa group were murdered on 1 September. Their naked bodies were found in Iztapalapa with hands and feet bound. *Contralínea* is an investigative magazine which has denounced several cases of corruption. Some of its workers have been the subject of coercion measures and have seen their security being reinforced. Mexican authorities have started investigating the case on the grounds of robbery.

The decapitated body of María Elizabeth Macías Castro was discovered by the Mexican police on 24 September. The 39-year-old journalist, editor in chief of daily *Premiera Hora* disappeared the day before. Headphones and a keyboard were found next to her. A note found next to the journalist's body said she had been killed for writing on social media websites.



(from left) Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz, Marcela Yarce Viveros, Rocío González Trápaga and María Elizabeth Macías Castro were killed for doing their jobs.

## Somalia: Young Female Journalist Shot

Nineteen-year-old Horriyo Abdulkadir, news anchor for Radio Galkayo was hospitalised for gunshot wounds on Thursday September 14, 2011.

Ms. Horriyo was attacked by a gunman armed with a pistol when returning from work to home in Galkayo town, the regional capital of the Mudug region, administered by Puntland semi-autonomous authorities of Somalia. She was severely wounded in the chest and shoulder and is being treated in a hospital in the town. The IFJ provided assistance.

"Somali journalists are working in a difficult environment and female journalists are particularly exposed to danger" says Omar Faruk, President of the Federation of African Journalists and a member of the IFJ executive committee.



## **RUSSIA: Union denounces killing of 25 women journalists since 1994**

According to a joint database of the Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ) and International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) devoted to deceased journalists, 25 women journalists (reporters, photographers, directors, editors-in-chief) have died in Russia since 1994 as a direct result of their professional activities.

- Six women journalists were murdered, five of whom were deliberately targeted (Efimova, Chaikova, Estemirova in the North Caucasus; Yudina in Elista and Politkovskaya in Moscow);
- Four died in crossfire situations in the Chechen conflict area;
- Two were killed in terrorism acts (Marina Gorelova was killed at the cemetery bombing in Moscow)
- Thirteen died in work-related accidents (ie they were travelling to or from a story).
- In a further three cases there are strong grounds for treating the deaths as work-related: the murder of Natalya Skryl, the abduction and disappearance of Elina Ersenoeva in Grozny, and the supposed suicide of Olga Kotovskaya in Kaliningrad.

The union claims that only one murder has been properly investigated and ended with conviction so far.

Other forms of violence and attacks on women in the media are presented in the new database "Conflicts in the media" available in Russian on [www.mediaconflictsinrussia.org](http://www.mediaconflictsinrussia.org). The website covers diverse forms of censorship, beatings, court trials and threats, including rape threats and threats to families. Most of those cases have not been brought to court. Together with the IFJ and other human rights organisations the RUJ is asking to bring impunity to an end.

"Women make up the majority of media workers in Russia and we should end gender violence as well as all forms of violence against journalists", says the RUJ. "Women journalists believe in international solidarity of women journalists all over the globe, and solidarity of journalists in general. All together we will overcome the culture of impunity".

[www.journalists-in-russia.org](http://www.journalists-in-russia.org)

## **IFJ Calls for Probe into Serious Attack on CBS Reporter in Egypt**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) called for an investigation into the attack on Lara Logan, a reporter for the American TV cable network CBS, in Tahrir square, Cairo. CBS has confirmed that Logan was the victim of "a brutal and sustained sexual assault and beating."

"This is a shocking attack which must not go unpunished," said Jim Boumelha, IFJ President. "The Egyptian Prime Minister has promised to investigate attacks on media during the protests and this is one the most serious incidents which need to be looked into."

Media reports say Logan, who works on the CBS "60 minutes" programme, returned to Tahrir square on February 16, 2011 to report on the crowd's reaction to news of former President Mubarak's stepping down. She got separated from her team and security detail before she was attacked by a group of protesters.

The IFJ says this tragic incident was the latest in a series of attacks on media professionals during the crisis in Egypt, where journalists were arrested, suffered beatings and had their equipment damaged. The Federation, which led the campaign to end these attacks and asked the authorities to provide protection to journalists, says the attack on Logan should not have happened and lessons must be learned from it to improve the safety of journalists working in hostile environments.

"Circumstances surrounding Logan's vicious attack are still unclear," added Boumelha. "But it is clear she was a victim of a situation which must serve as a lesson both for journalists and their organisations to better prepare for high risk assignments."

## **Guidelines for Women Working in War Zones**

Women journalists should be encouraged to discuss their particular needs for support and protection with their colleagues – male and female – and ensure that these are met.

- Colleagues and managers should be aware of the unnecessary pressure women can experience to prove that they are capable of doing the job.

- It must be made explicitly clear to everyone that sexual harassment and uninvited sexual advances are unacceptable. Male bosses should be aware of and acknowledge the threat and fear of rape.
- If working as an embedded reporter, don't assume anything in terms of your personal safety. Do all you can to be clear in advance about the conditions you will face. Ask who will meet you, where you will sleep, etc, so you know what to expect.
- If possible, women journalists should be allowed a say in who they would like to work with in a team.
- Women journalists (including freelancers) should also, if possible, have the opportunity to train in self-defence.
- Hostile environment training courses should directly address women's needs, which will in turn help raise awareness among their male colleagues.
- Women need smaller and properly-fitted body armour which they can wear comfortably.
- Colleagues, male as well as female, should take the initiative to ask women they're working with if they need more feminine supplies.
- Before any assignment, female employees and their managers should make sure they know of any local customs specific to women.
- Female and male freelancers deserve the same support as their staff colleagues.
- For men and women alike, it's not a good idea to bottle up emotional distress. Find someone you trust who you can talk with – male or female. Offer to listen, without judgment, to the concerns of colleagues.
- Free and confidential counselling should be available for women, and men, who wish to use it after experiencing conflict or other traumatic events.
- Some woman-to-woman practical advice:
  - ✓ Carry a personal attack alarm.
  - ✓ Wearing a wedding ring can deter unwelcome attention.
  - ✓ If visiting Muslim countries, pack a head-scarf/chador just in case.