

# Advice for media exposed to threats and violence

*A memorandum prepared jointly by the Norwegian Union of Journalist (NJ) and the Norwegian Editors' Guild (NR).*

*Many journalists and editors are experiencing threats because of their work, including in Norway. The person who is subjected to threats or violence must receive good support in his workplace and the editorial staff for whom he is working. It is an editorial responsibility to make sure that the safety is in order that the person in charge of a dangerous mission has a security course, that insurance is in place and that any threats or violence are reported.*

- **Report threats and violence**
- **Threats and violence are not a private matter**
- **Security of housing, travel and workplace must be considered**

This note is the result of an increasing tendency for Norwegian journalists to be exposed to threats from different environments and individuals. It is important to emphasize that threats are very different and must be handled differently. Some media houses have their own plans and procedures for dealing with threats. The advice we provide here is intended as a guide / memorandum for editors who do not have such routines and as a supplement to those who have it - on how they should be prepared, which measures should be considered in each case. However, in our view, some general principles will apply:

- Threats and violence against editorial staff are no private matter. They concern the entire editorial staff and ultimately threaten the editorial institute and media's responsibility in society.
- It is an editorial responsibility to handle threats against editorial staff.
- Listen to the person (s) who are exposed to threats. Editorial staff respond differently to threats, based on their own experience and position, and on the content and origin of the threats.
- As a starting point, Norwegian media should have zero tolerance for threats and violence. Our general advice is that all threats that are experienced as real, shall be reported to the police. The same goes for cases where editorial staff are exposed to violence because of their position. Threats and violence are punishable under sections 263 and 264 of the Norwegian Criminal Code.

## **How to handle threats to editorial staff?**

### **1) Inform the media management about the threat or violence.**

Threats are no private matter. It is important that media management helps to create a climate that makes it natural to tell that one has been threatened or exposed to violence. Make sure that there is a plan for colleague support for those who are being exposed to threats.

### **2) Contact the police**

a) It is important to establish good relations with the police. The police departments have employees with special expertise in assessing threats. Listen to the police' advice. They often have a good basis

for assessing the threat and how real the individual threats are.

b) Ask the police for advice - if necessary - on:

- i) Securing the threatened
- ii) Securing of the newsroom and the media's premises (physical security, access control, etc.)

c) Ask for a personal contact person in the police.

d) Ask the police to consider patrolling by the media house and where the threatened person lives.

e) Ask the police to assess the need for violence alarms

### **3) The individual's experience of the threat**

Remember that threats not considered by the police to represent a real danger can be perceived to be so stressful for the person that the case should anyway be reported, and that measures listed below should be considered by the editorial management and threatened, in consultation with union representatives and / or HR representatives.

### **4) Securing the home of the threatened**

a) The employer should, based on advice from the police, assess whether the person's home should have its own security measures. This may include installing, for example:

1. Alarm connected to an alarm central
2. Security lock in the front door
3. Peep hole in the front door
4. Outdoor lighting with motion sensor

b) Consider the use of security guards to patrol at the residence.

### **5) Security of the daily commute**

a) The employer should, based on advice from the police, consider facilitating safe transportation to and from work.

For example:

- i. Offering parking space in / near the building.
- ii. Offering taxi to / from work
- iii. Offering accompaniment to / from public transportation

b) Consider changing routines when traveling to / from work (different travel times / routes)

c) Consider also changing other daily routines

**6) Other security measures for the threatened (in consultation with the police and the threatened):**

- a) Schedule fixed contact points between management and the threatened.
- b) Make sure that the threatened can be contacted immediately in at least two different ways.
- c) Adjust the work situation, including adjustment to changes in daily routines - cf. 4b).
- d) Establish an additional phone subscription for the threatened.
  - i. Consider whether others in the editorial team should take responsibility for receiving calls / messages on the original phone subscription.
  - ii. Consider whether email to the threatened should be routed to another address.
- e) Assess whether the threatened and, if appropriate, his/her family should be accommodated in a hotel for a period or if it is possible to offer other temporary residence.
- f) Consider whether the threatened should be exempted from work for a period of time, to get some distance from the situation.

**7) Securing of the media house / editorial office**

- a) Threats to members of the media often create fear among others in the media house. The employer shall inform the union representative and the HR representatives.
- b) The employer should inform the employees in consultation with the police.
- c) The employer must consider safety when it comes to:
  - i. Buildings
  - ii. Access to buildings

**8) Health, etc.**

- a) In consultation with the threatened, the employer should inform the company's health service.
- b) In consultation with the threatened and the health service, the employer should cover the threatened expenses to:
  - iii. doctor
  - iv. psychologist
  - v. physiotherapist / chiropractor
  - vi. Training / Self-Defense Course and the like.

## **9) Presentation of the threat and those who threat**

It is the chief editor who decides whether and, if so, how threats to the editorial staff or against editorial staff should be mentioned in their own medium. In addition to general news criteria, it is important to listen to the victim of the threats.

Based on general eligibility criteria, the endangered person should not participate in the editorial coverage of the threat to him-/herself, unless it takes place in commentary form and the public is informed about the circumstances. Another assessment will be to what extent the threat will affect the work by the threatened on the coverage of the persons / environments where the threat comes from. It should be a goal that those who threaten, to the least extent shall be allowed to influence the media's coverage and journalistic priorities, including which journalist should work on what cases.

## **10) Manual - Security Officer**

Consider creating a simple manual for the case that the newsroom or editorial staff are exposed to threats. Even minor media cover from time to time people and territories that are likely to resort to threats to influence editorial decisions and assessments. Consider whether a person responsible for safety should be appointed. Chapter 3 of the Working Environment Act requires the company to carry out systematic work in this field in cooperation with the employees and their representatives.

## **11) Consider complaining if the case is dismissed**

Some media have experienced that reports of threats have been dismissed by the police, on a basis that the editorial staff have problems to understand. We urge the media who believe that reports should not have been dismissed, to consider appealing to the state prosecutor. Please contact NR and NJ in such situations. Through several decisions, the Supreme Court has stated that threats to journalists are serious and should increase penalizing because it affects the function of journalism and media in society. Following pressure from NJ and NR, the Attorney General in a circular to the police and state prosecutors made it clear that these are issues that shall be prioritized, for the same reasons.

If a media house is considering a complaint over a dismissal, please contact NJ or NR. A copy of any complaint should also be sent to the Attorney General.