

Journalism under fire amid rise of 'fake news' and social media-driven echo chambers – UNESCO report

6 November 2017 – The media industry, which remains the primary source of news and information in the digital age, faces both vast opportunities and steep challenges, the United Nations cultural agency said on Monday in its flagship analysis of new trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists.

“Covering the period 2012 to 2017, this study not only maps [emerging global trends](#) – it makes an unequivocal call to action to counter new and persistent challenges,” stated Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) in the foreword of the report, titled the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development.

“This provides a unique reference point for Member States, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups, academia, journalists and media professionals, and all those who wish to understand the fundamentals of press freedom in a changing world,” she added.

The report highlights such positive developments as civil society mobilizing to push for greater access to information, media houses cooperating with fact-checking services to push back against a torrent of disinformation, and more and more Governments adopting freedom of information laws.

In the digital age, the report says, women journalists are able to develop an online presence liberated from newsroom hierarchies, and citizen journalists and activists have access to modes of mass communication that were previously unthinkable.

The report, however, warned that “across the world, journalism is under fire,” citing the rise of ‘fake news’ stories that shroud the truth and muddy information, as well as social media algorithms that are contributing to the creation of virtual ‘echo chambers’ and exacerbating political polarization. Governments have shut down the internet, notably before elections. Journalists are under wide-ranging attack, facing rising violence.

“The stakes are even higher for citizens across the world, women and men, who rely on professional journalism to navigate the development and transformation of their societies,” Ms. Bokova said.

The key findings were presented by Guy Berger, Director of UNESCO’s Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development at an event, held alongside the Communication and Information Commission of UNESCO’s General Conference in Paris.

Protect environment from wars and conflicts, UN urges on International Day

6 November 2017 – Commemorating the international day for lessening the impact of armed conflicts and wars on the environment, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres underscored the need to recognize that environment is also a victim of fighting.

“Whether caused by fighting or a breakdown in Government control, the damage to the environment has devastating consequences for people’s health and well-being [...] it is not a new problem, but is one that can last for decades,” said Mr. Guterres in a [message](#) on the [International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict](#).

“Areas of Europe are still affected by heavy-metal contamination from munitions used during the First World War.”

In his message, the Secretary-General also highlighted the importance of a healthy environment for people to rebuild their lives once fighting stops, noting that the shared management of natural resources can also provide avenues to maintain or improve relations.

Given the importance of the environment and natural resources for sustainable development, the UN chief called for steps to reduce the collateral damage from conflicts and protect them.

“The UN is committed to protecting the environment as an essential pillar of peace, security and sustainable development,” he stressed.

According to the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), conflicts over natural resources are among the greatest challenges confronting today’s world, with serious threats to human security.

Furthermore, at least 40 per cent of all internal armed conflicts over the past 65 years have had an important natural resource dimension. Since 1989, more than 35 major armed conflicts have been financed by revenues from conflict resources, and there are fears that in the coming years, extreme climate stresses could double the risk of violent conflict.

However, despite these risks, there are also “significant opportunities” linking the environment and peacebuilding, added UNEP.

“Let us not forget the power of environmental cooperation to drive peace and prosperity,” said UNEP Executive Director Erik Solheim.

Also today, joining forces with the Environmental Law Institute, the Earth Institute at Columbia University, Duke University, and the University of California at Irvine, UNEP opened the enrolment at the online course, *Environmental Security and Sustaining Peace*, which aims to build a community of 10,000 practitioners that can make natural resources a reason for global cooperation.

The course covers a range of natural resources, from extractives to land and water, as well as a range of tools and approaches from conflict and gender sensitivity to assessments, meditation and spatial planning.

[Corruption hits most vulnerable; obliterates faith in good governance, UN chief tells forum in Vienna](#)

6 November 2017 – Corruption can strike anywhere and deny people’s hope of a better future, United Nations António Guterres, Secretary-General told the world’s largest anti-corruption forum which opened Monday in Vienna, while urging global leaders to set positive examples and restore faith in good governance.

“I have seen how corruption hits the poor, the weak and the most vulnerable of all,” the Secretary-General said in remarks delivered by Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), at opening of the Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties ([CoSP7](#)) to the UN [Convention against Corruption](#) (UNCAC), running through the end of the week in Vienna, Austria.

“It can deny people access to health services, schools and economic opportunities,” [said](#) the UN chief, stressing that “corruption obliterates people’s faith in good governance.”

As such, Mr. Guterres called on leaders of all kinds – government, corporate, religious and cultural –to “lead by example and prove themselves trustworthy, to restore people’s faith.”

Delivering his own opening address, Mr. Fedotov said the biennial Conference is dedicated to combatting corruption and “strengthening the fight against crimes enabled by corruption and to protect lives.”

He underscored the UNCAC, the UN treaty of 183 States Parties, as a “remarkable universal, legally binding instrument to fight corruption, promote accountability and support progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).”

UNODC will launch an updated State of UNCAC Implementation Report, both demonstrating the progress made by the review mechanism, and presenting remaining challenges and existing good practices in anti-corruption.

“As guardian of the Convention and Secretariat to this Conference, UNODC continues to provide practical support here at headquarters and on the ground through our field presence,” said Mr. Fedotov.

Moreover, UNODC is working with other international agencies to tackle corruption in wildlife crime, sports, and violent extremism. “This session will take important decisions on the Implementation Review Mechanism, as well as consider resolutions addressing a number of critical areas of anti-corruption work,” said Mr. Fedotov.

Over 1,600 participants are attending COSP7, with about 45 side events and exhibitions will be held on the margins of the conference to promote discussion on anti-corruption activities.

The Convention, adopted in 2003, covers five main areas: prevention, criminalization and law enforcement measures, international cooperation, asset recovery, and technical assistance and information exchange.

[Asia-Pacific regional consultations on UN strategy for safe migration open in Bangkok](#)

6 November 2017 – With ever-increasing numbers of people on the move, travelling away from their homelands in search of better opportunities, a United Nations regional meeting opened today in Bangkok, Thailand, exploring options to make migration safer and better protect their rights.

Convoked as one of the five regional preparatory meetings for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the meeting in Bangkok will focus on all dimensions of international migration.

“Migration has been a positive force for millions of people: migrants themselves, those they leave behind and for the new communities who host them. Yet perceptions of migrants as a burden or even as a threat, have risen, in some countries, from the fringes to the mainstream,” said Louise Arbour, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for international migration, in her [keynote address](#) at the meeting.

“The result is both rising intolerance and an environment in which vocal anti-migration sentiments fester,” she added.

Noting, in particular, the area of labour migration – the predominant form of migration in the Asia-Pacific region – Ms. Arbour highlighted that with sound, gender-responsive and rights-based policies, such migration can deliver significant benefits and opportunities for migrant workers, countries and host communities as well as for countries of origin, as well as contribute to economic growth, create jobs and promote innovation.

According to estimates, the Asia-Pacific region hosts about 62 million migrants from around the world, and is the region of origin for over 102 million international migrations, with most of the migrants engaged in labour migration, taking up low-skilled work in developing countries.

Last year, the remittance sent back by Asian and Pacific migrant workers totalled almost \$269 billion and accounted for a significant portion of the gross domestic product in some countries. However, many migrants face discrimination and rights abuses due to their race, gender, ethnicity or culture.

“As non-citizens of their countries of residence, and non-residents of their countries of citizenship, migrants are often bypassed in both home and host countries,” [said](#) Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), which hosted the meeting.

“In a world on the move, addressing these challenges directly is all the more critical,” she added, underscoring the potential for migrants in filling labour force gaps due to factors such as ageing populations, as well as to reap the benefits of opportunities presented by ever more connected and integrated regions and strengthen people-to-people connectivity.

[Security Council considers boost in UN peacekeepers numbers in Central African Republic](#)

6 November 2017 – The Security Council is deciding whether to increase the number of United Nations peacekeepers in the Central African Republic (CAR), one of the recommendations put forward by [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres for strengthening the operation, which was discussed at today’s meeting in New York.

Briefing the Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CAR, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, said the proposal to increase the strength of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission ([MINUSCA](#)) by 900 troops is part of “a comprehensive strategy to address the deteriorating situation,” while working closely with the Government and creating space for

the political process.

“We will seek to improve the protection of civilians with a stronger emphasis on early warning and prevention, and we will put greater efforts to ensure humanitarian access to populations in need,” [said](#) Mr. Onanga-Anyanga.

The senior UN official, which also the head of MINUSCA, told the Council that intra-communal fighting has forced nearly 600,000 people from their homes within CAR and another half-million outside of its border.

“Many more have disappeared, in oblivion and silence, without burial. Their fate and the volatility of the security situation further darkened an already disastrous humanitarian environment,” he added, calling CAR “the most dangerous country for humanitarian action.”

The recommendation to increase the troop strength is listed in the [latest Secretary-General’s report](#), and would include 300 troops to reinforce the military in the east and the centre of the country, and an additional 600 troops as part of the Force Commander’s reserve in those regions.

The goal, according to the report, is that the additional strength would help to create conditions to allow the political process to unfold by reducing the gains from armed groups, while also creating favourable conditions for the deployment of State administration and goods, such as humanitarian needs.

Speaking after closed door consultations on the proposals, Sebastiano Cardi, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN and president of the Council for November, said the Council seems to have a “fairly good consensus” on what the Secretary-General is proposing.

He told the media that the Council is discussion not only troop numbers, but also wants “to make sure that these troops are able to perform successfully. We have to make sure the troops will have the capacity to conduct.”

A decision is expected before 15 November, when MINUSCA’s mandate expires.