



The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute and the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom invite you to a side event to the UN Human Rights Council's 63rd Session

Targeted by Law: Women Journalists and the Rise of Lawfare

Time and Date: **11 September 2026, 13:00–14:00**

Venue: **Room XI, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

Around the world, the machinery of law is being turned against those whose work is to hold power to account. Journalists and media workers increasingly face lawfare in its modern forms: abusive civil litigation and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs); criminal prosecution on charges of defamation, “false news”, tax evasion and terrorism; and, with growing speed, designation under the foreign agents legislation now spreading across the world. Each carries a veneer of legality; each is designed to exhaust its target — financially, psychologically, professionally — and to warn all those watching. The Committee to Protect Journalists documented 330 journalists imprisoned in connection with their work at the end of 2025, the fifth consecutive year in which that figure has exceeded 300, many of them held arbitrarily on anti-state charges of terrorism, extremism, or acting as a “foreign agent”.

When the journalist is a woman, the attack takes a distinctive shape. Legal harassment arrives accompanied — and often preceded — by coordinated online violence, now amplified by artificial intelligence and synthetic media, which degrades its target, publicises the proceedings against her, and prepares the ground for prosecution. In a UNESCO-commissioned global survey of 901 journalists across 125 countries, nearly three in four women journalists reported experiencing online violence, with legal harassment increasingly reinforcing, and reinforced by, that abuse. This event places women journalists at its centre because it is there that the pattern is most developed, and its cost most severe.

The prevention of defamation, the protection of national security and transparency in foreign funding can all be legitimate aims. In practice, some laws enacted in their name are too often deployed to suppress reporting in the public interest. The High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom — established at the request of the Media Freedom Coalition States and serving as its independent advisory body, providing legal advice and recommendations to States on the measures needed to protect journalists and a free press — has long warned of the accelerating misuse of law as an instrument of censorship, and is presently examining the spread of foreign agents legislation.

This side event brings together journalists who have faced these instruments with State, UN and civil society voices, to consider how existing accountability mechanisms can be strengthened and put to work in defence of press freedom and the public's right to know.

The IBAHRI serves as Secretariat to the High Level Panel.

Moderator:



Prof. Can Yeginsu,
Deputy Chair of the
High Level Panel

Opening Remarks:



Ambassador Katja Pehrman, Ambassador
for Human Rights of
Finland

Panellists:



H.E. Miroslav Papa,
Ambassador, Permanent
Observer of the Council
of Europe to the UN in
Geneva



Ms. Alsu Kurmasheva,
journalist with RFE/RL
and formerly arbitrarily
detained in Russia



Mr. Michael Camilleri,
Chief, Rule of Law,
Accountability and Civic
Space Branch, OHCHR



Ms. Fiona O'Brien, the
Committee to Protect
Journalists

Closing remarks:



Ambassador Eleanor Sanders, UK Human
Rights Ambassador
and Deputy
Permanent
Representative to the
UN in Geneva