

National Safety Strategy for Iraqi Media

Participants in the Irbil Safety conference 10/11 May 2007

Recognising

that the security and safety of journalists and associated personnel working in media is essential to the creation of a free press and a professional and pluralist system of information and communications,

Believing

that informed, professional and pluralist media serving the whole community is a vital part of any democratic strategy for peace, reconciliation and economic and social development,

Insisting

that all attacks on journalists, kidnappings, targeted killings and other threats to media are intolerable and should cease immediately,

Declare

that it is urgently necessary to develop a National Safety Strategy for Iraqi Media to protect journalists and media staff throughout Iraq.

The participants agree on the following key elements of this national strategy:

1. To establish an independent Iraqi Media Safety Group,
2. To establish a national structure of safety offices to assist journalists and media reduce the risks they face,
3. To raise funds for a national solidarity fund to provide humanitarian assistance to media victims of violence and their families.

Iraqi Media Safety Group

The IMSG will be responsible for developing practical actions to improve security of Iraqi journalists that will be implemented by media organisations, the government and the Iraqi safety offices.

The IMSG national security programme for media and journalists will

:

- Monitor and record all cases of attacks against journalists, and make sure the authorities investigate all cases properly and thoroughly,
- Manage and implement local programme activities through safety offices,

- Establish best practice and minimum security standards for journalists and media staff,
- Facilitate support from the authorities and donor organisations, and
- Organise practical liaison and dialogue between media professionals and authorities on journalists' safety, including contacts with Prime Minister's Office, regional governments, relevant government ministries, the Iraqi National Communication and Media Commission (INCMC), police and security forces, and parliamentary bodies.

The IMSG will be a politically independent group made up of representatives of the Iraqi media community including:

- Major Iraqi media – broadcast, print, private, public, etc.
- National Journalists' Organisations -- IJS and KJS
- Non-Iraqi media with a significant presence in Iraq

International support groups such as the International Federation of Journalists and the International News Safety Institute as well as other media support bodies and journalists' groups will be invited to give advice and support,

The IMSG will invite all media organisations working across the Iraqi information and communications system to support the National Security Strategy for Iraqi Media.

The IMSG will develop a network of media safety offices, starting in Irbil and Baghdad and will supervise the work and operations of these offices to ensure co-ordination of a national strategy for Iraqi media.

The National Safety Strategy for Media will involve:

Encouraging journalists, employers and authorities to join campaigns against impunity and for improved safety of journalists.

Asking each media organisation to identify one or more persons to be responsible for staff security

Assisting media organisations to develop staff safety procedures including

- Access to training
- Access to equipment
- Access to latest security briefings
- Procedures for assessment of death threats and appropriate response
- Guidelines for home security and travel between home and work
- Appropriate internal office security measures.

Media organisations will be encouraged to

- Share and exchange security information and advice with other media groups and journalists through the IMSG.
- Organise public campaigns for secure and independent journalists
- Organise dialogue between different media groups representing different political/community/religious factions that seek to protect the independence /professionalism and security of journalists.
- Provide support to the victims of violence

The IMSG will press the authorities to

- To conduct full investigations in all cases where journalists or media organisations have been attacked
- Provide political and financial support to the National Security Strategy for Iraqi Media
- Establish a special government unit responsible for liaising with the media professionals on all security matters
- Provide security to media houses at high risk and training for security guards
- Inform the media community in a speedy and timely manner of all security threat developments to enable appropriate response by media

The participants call on international agencies and media assistance groups to provide full support to the work of the IMSG.

Financial support must be long term and secured it cannot be dependent on short term donor contracts with corresponding gaps in funding. Donors need to be committed to a long term programme of support.

UN institutions should in particular seek to implement resolution 1738 of the United Nations Security Council on journalists and media staff in conflict zones.

The IFJ should be invited to provide support to journalist unions in Iraq and continue to lead international campaigns on their behalf on Iraqi journalism.

Finally, the meeting agrees that the inauguration of this programme of work, to which all media organisations should be invited, will be no later than July 31st 2007.

*Irbil,
May 11th 2007*

Appendix:

Safety Offices – a practical programme of work

The IMMSG will be supported by an infrastructure of offices and experts on safety issues responsible for implementing the national safety programme. This will, in the first place, be composed of three **safety offices** in Baghdad, Irbil and Basra. The offices will provide the following functions:

- Provision of regular training courses on minimising risks at work, home and between the two.
- Provision of medical / first aid training to all media staff and their security personnel
- Provision of newsroom training to all employers responsible for evaluating and minimising risks for their staff including developing in-house security guidelines
- Establishing a hotline for journalists missing or in trouble
- Establishing a response unit with security officials to kidnappings, and to assessing death threats and adequate responses
- Facilitating official dialogue / co-operation between the IMMSG and the authorities and security forces to assist in the protection of journalists
- Establishment of a system of alerts, by and for journalists, on changing and developing security threats to journalists
- Provision of protective equipment including flak jackets, first aid kits, handbooks
- Develop a trauma training programme to improve the ability of journalists to manage and perform effectively under stress.
- Organising meetings of the IMMSG to exchange and inform members of the safety initiatives taken and to be taken
- Lead safety campaigns and lobbying of the authorities and international institutions for the improvement of safety
- Consider establishment of secure accommodation for Iraqi journalists (see Algeria)