

## A WAR WITHOUT RED LINES:

Threats and Risks Facing  
Journalists in Lebanon

2024

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With the outbreak of the war on Lebanon on October 8, 2023, Lebanese journalists found themselves facing unprecedented challenges, exacerbated by direct targeting and increasing violations by the Israeli army, which did not hesitate to bomb their locations and places of residence despite clear signs identifying them as journalists.

Journalists have become direct targets of bombing and lethal attacks by the Israeli army, which employs excessive force and internationally banned weapons. At the outset of the war, the army clearly stated that it could not guarantee the safety of journalists, posing a direct threat to the lives of both civilians and journalists in conflict zones. This reflects a blatant disregard for international standards that protect their rights.

This war has not only stripped journalists of their security but has also hindered their ability to access information and convey facts to the local and international audiences. This report aims to highlight the increasing violations faced by journalists and the impact of these assaults on their freedom and their ability to practice their profession under difficult and complex circumstances. In addition to external assaults, journalists also face internal pressures and harassment that threaten press freedom, placing them in a critical position between their professional responsibilities and personal danger.



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In this context, Maharat Foundation documents the experiences of journalists during the war, presenting details of the suffering endured by these individuals who are now paying the price for their commitment to conveying the truth. The report provides an overview of the field and legal obstacles that hinder journalists' roles in promoting transparency and disseminating reliable information, concluding with practical recommendations aimed at enhancing the protection of journalists and ensuring accountability for crimes targeting them.

What the media in Lebanon is experiencing at this critical stage calls for an effective display of solidarity from the international community. This includes the enforcement of international legal mechanisms and a cessation of the policy of impunity, which would empower journalists to effectively convey the truth and hold perpetrators accountable.



## SUMMARY OF VIOLATIONS

### **A - Direct targeting of journalists and endangering their lives:**

Journalists have been subjected to deliberate bombing operations, resulting in the death and injury of many. This targeting contributes to creating an environment of fear and intimidation, hindering their ability to cover news.

### **B - Prevention of Coverage and Mobility:**

Due to direct bombing and targeting of correspondents, journalists were forced to confront strict restrictions on their movement, limiting their ability to access conflict zones or cover events directly. This restriction constitutes a violation of their right to freedom of expression and the public's right to access information about the impact of the conflict on civilians, as well as to be informed about the facts related to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

### **C - Targeting of Journalists' Transportation and Equipment:**

Press signs did not provide protection for media crews, their means of transportation and media equipment. Journalists' means of transportation and broadcasting equipment were targeted, negatively affecting their ability to document events and convey the truth.

### **D - Threats and Harassment:**

In addition to physical danger, journalists face constant threats and harassment coming from within Lebanese society, such as threats against specific journalists and media outlets. This increases the difficulty of their work, hinders their ability to provide objective coverage, and raises fear and self-censorship.

Moreover, the current realities of war and displacement have a direct impact on journalists and their ability to cover and access information at a time when the role of the media is crucial in conveying reliable information to citizens and documenting war crimes.

## 1-WAR AND DISPLACEMENT: NUMEROUS IMPACTS ON JOURNALISTS

### Current Reality: Challenges of Displacement and Loss of Safety

Journalists, like other citizens, endure tremendous pressures caused by the displacement due to the war.



Roula Mikhael,

**Roula Mikhael**, Executive Director of Maharat Foundation, shares insights from around 60 journalists in meetings conducted by Maharat, saying:



**"We heard how some journalists are now working from their cars, how others have been displaced twice, or are living in crowded places with many families. Journalists shared that the war compels them to continue their coverage despite their personal circumstances. We were struck by the number of journalists who shared with us that they are suffering from poor mental health. We have been able so far to support 21 journalists in covering the burdens of displacement, providing alternative housing or essential equipment for their work."**

## 1-WAR AND DISPLACEMENT: NUMEROUS IMPACTS ON JOURNALISTS



Elsy Moufarrej

**Elsy Moufarrej**, Coordinator of the Alternative Press Syndicate, confirms this, stating to Maharat that:

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**"journalists have been directly affected by the displacement crisis. Some have moved multiple times, some have lost loved ones; one of our colleagues lost her father after 25 hours of displacement, which is an indirect impact of the war."**

This displacement crisis has thus marked a turning point in journalists' suffering during the war, and as of now, there are no clear figures on the number of displaced journalists, Moufarrej explains, adding that:

**"50 displaced journalists are registered with the Alternative Press Syndicate, whom we're trying to assist in partnership with the Samir Kassir Foundation. We're supporting them with housing rent so they can live alone, especially as some journalists are residing with 10 to 15 other people, which affects their work. This also highlights the rental crisis, with prices rising exorbitantly."**

## 1-WAR AND DISPLACEMENT: NUMEROUS IMPACTS ON JOURNALISTS



Roula Mikhael,

The Executive Director of Maharat Foundation notes that nearly half of the journalists Maharat met with in the first week of October are displaced. **Mikhael** adds:



**"Through our communication with journalists, we have observed repeated forced displacement, which underscores the vast challenges they face—not only due to displacement, but also in their need to balance their professional duty with worsening living conditions. This reality shows that journalists are bearing doubled burdens, with none of them assured of safety in the absence of genuine protection."**

## REAL STORIES: EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACED JOURNALISTS



Fatima Bassam

**"I left my home in a terrible state after my residential neighborhood was threatened,"**

says **Fatima Bassam**, a journalist with the 'Lubnan Al Kabeer' website, recounting her displacement story. She adds, "I had no other choice, and just hours after leaving, I realized I was homeless, with no place to return. Then I decided to return to my journalistic work, a profession that demands that journalists remain professional and resilient, conveying information and news."

**As journalists, we carry a heavy burden. People might think we're different because we wear the press vest, but we suffer from the same concerns. The essential difference is that our work requires us to continue conveying news."**



## REAL STORIES: EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACED JOURNALISTS



Nabil Mamlouk

Despite the tremendous hardships faced by displaced journalists, some have remained in their areas and towns to cover the war and report the news, amid all the bombardment and destruction. **Nabil Mamlouk**, an independent journalist in Tyre, describes the situation, saying:

**"We in Tyre are besieged from the air as the enemy threatens the city's entrances, and we live with this natural human fear while doing our work."My commitment to fulfilling my journalistic duty is so intense that I want to cry, but I can't. I write my blogs and exhaust myself, as if I'm fleeing from one form of exhaustion to another,"**

Regarding the living conditions, he points out that:

**"what is happening in Tyre is a human commando effort, with individuals taking personal risks to provide for people's basic needs. These people live in fear and cling to the words we provide as journalists, so I feel compelled to suppress my own fear to help them by verifying the information and threats that reach us, then guiding them on how to move to safe places."**

## REAL STORIES: EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACED JOURNALISTS



Valentine Nasser

On the other hand, some journalists have lost loved ones yet continue their coverage amidst the shelling. **Valentine Nasser**, a journalist at the “Silat Wasl” platform, says after her personal family loss:

**"I never imagined I'd be able to get back up, but my belief in my role to convey an accurate image has given me strength."**

She adds:

**Citizens in Tyre consider us a source of support, and we feel this reality when we correct false information and reassure them. But when I return from work, I watch series—not out of love for watching, but to distract my mind from the reality we're covering."**

### Why Does This Matter? The Impact of Displacement and Working Conditions on Information

These difficult conditions experienced by journalists directly and indirectly affect their work and news reporting. There is no doubt that journalists' personal suffering from displacement, lack of equipment and supplies, internet access, and infrastructure issues poses an obstacle to their ability to cover and access information at a time when the media's role is crucial to providing citizens with reliable information and documenting war crimes."

## 2- ISRAELI ATTACKS AND HARASSMENT WITHIN LEBANESE SOCIETY: LIMITING THE EXTENT OF COVERAGE AND RELYING ON ALTERNATIVE METHODS AND SOURCES

### Journalists Killed in Israel's War on Lebanon in Numbers

Journalists face increasingly dangerous challenges due to Israel's repeated attacks on media personnel. The Samir Kassir Foundation documented the scale of Israeli assaults on the press in Lebanon since the war began on October 8, 2023, noting that 25 media personnel, including 13 journalists and 12 photographers, have been targeted. These attacks resulted in 9 deaths and 16 injuries.

Additionally, there was a direct and deliberate targeting of journalists in Hasbaya while they were asleep on October 25, 2024. This assault led to the deaths of Al Mayadeen cameraman Ghassan Najjar, broadcast engineer Mohammad Reda, and Al Manar cameraman Wissam Qassem, with many others injured in a location known to be designated for journalists.

As a result, the media community in Lebanon has lost 12 journalists and media workers to date: Issam Abdallah, Farah Omar, Rabih Maamari, Hadi Al-Sayyed, Kamel Karaki, Hussein Safa, Mohammad Ghadboun, Ali Al-Hadi Yassin, Mohammad Bitar, Wissam Qassem, Ghassan Najjar, and Mohammad Reda.



Roula Mikhael,

**Roula Mikhael**, Executive Director of Maharat, commented on these journalist killings, saying:

**"The Israeli military's targeting of journalists has crossed red lines, and their vests and locations are no longer sufficient for their protection. These repeated crimes pose a direct threat to journalists' lives and demand urgent action from the international community to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of these assaults."**

## THE HASBAYA ATTACK AS WITNESSED BY JOURNALISTS



Vanessa Semaan

**"Who will protect us today? Can our vests and helmets protect us? I don't think so,"**

expressed journalist **Vanessa Semaan** from Alghad TV, who was present at the scene of the Hasbaya attack. She added:

**"What happened is extremely hard to believe; our colleagues were martyred, which brings us back to the Gaza scenario, with the Israeli enemy directly targeting journalists."**



Mohammad Farhat

Shortly after the attack, journalist **Mohammad Farhat** from Al-Jadeed Channel conveyed a live message:

**"The Israeli enemy fears our words, fears the Lebanese voice, and the voice of truth that exposes its crimes, and here we are bidding farewell to one colleague after another because of these crimes."**

## THE HASBAYA ATTACK AS WITNESSED BY JOURNALISTS



Mohammad Farhat

Al Araby TV journalist **Ramez Al Qadi**, who was also in the Hasbaya area, went live this morning to report:

'Israel targeted journalists while they were asleep in their residence at 3:30 a.m. The ceilings collapsed on the heads of colleagues, and today, we painfully mourn three fellow journalists and photographers who became martyrs'.



Edmond Sassine

Journalist **Edmond Sassine** from LBCI noted that:

"the danger has increased recently with the shift in the nature of the war. During the initial phase, coverage was from the frontlines. But after Israel's October 13, 2023, attack on media teams in Alma Al-Shaab, which killed journalist Issam Abdullah, we faced the question: Do we continue the coverage? Of course, we continued but with a revised plan and new locations. Israel continued these attacks, culminating in the Hasbaya attack on October 25, which was a clear political message that led to the departure of journalists, at least from the eastern sector of Southern Lebanon."



## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

13 November 2023

The Israeli army targeted media teams in the border town of Yaroun in the western sector of southern Lebanon with missiles, without casualties. Media teams were asked to leave the area due to fears of escalation. This incident seemed to serve as a political message aimed at **intimidating journalists** and preventing them from reporting, as press vehicles were targeted.

13 October 2023

Israeli targeted journalists near Alma Al-Shaab, killing journalist Issam Abdullah. This was Israel's first direct attack on media teams, raising questions and dilemmas regarding media coverage in the South, specifically between the risks posed to journalists and their professional duties.

24 July 2024

**Photographer Dani Tanios** from MTV, reporter **Nawal Berry**, and the Al Jazeera correspondent in Beirut were attacked. Furthermore, the ongoing **threats** faced by some journalists, particularly those affiliated with specific media outlets, have led to a decrease in media coverage and **hindered their ability to access information.**

21 November 2023

Following attempts to intimidate journalists, Israel **targeted Al Mayadeen's** team in the **Tayr Harfa** area in the western sector, the same geographic location as the previous attack. This assault led to the **deaths of photographer Rabih Maamari and journalist Farah Omar.** Naturally, this attack impacted media coverage, particularly given that Israel observes no boundaries or red lines.

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

23 September 2024

Due to escalating military developments and intensified Israeli shelling in the south, Lebanon experienced a massive displacement wave, causing traffic congestion that lasted more than 24 hours. This event marked a **turning point** for journalists. First, many journalists evacuated, ceasing their coverage. Secondly, many journalists refrained from heading south for coverage due to the escalating Israeli aggression, high risks, and isolation of the south. Third, the media teams that continued covering events were limited to specific areas, distant from the battlefronts and border villages.

27 September 2024

The Israeli army assassinated Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in an airstrike on Hezbollah's central headquarters in the southern suburbs. This event heightened public anger in areas known as the "resistance environment," leading to more intense rhetoric and threats within Lebanese society, further deterring media coverage and preventing media teams from being sent to targeted locations.

3 October 2024

A crew from the Belgian channel "VTM NEWS" was **attacked** while covering an Israeli airstrike in the Bachoura area of Beirut. **War correspondent Robin Ramaekers** suffered facial fractures, and **cameraman Steijn De Smet** was shot in the leg. This incident reflects the **increasing internal tensions** affecting the press, the growing risks, and the **complete disruption of media coverage** and access to information.

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

23 October 2024

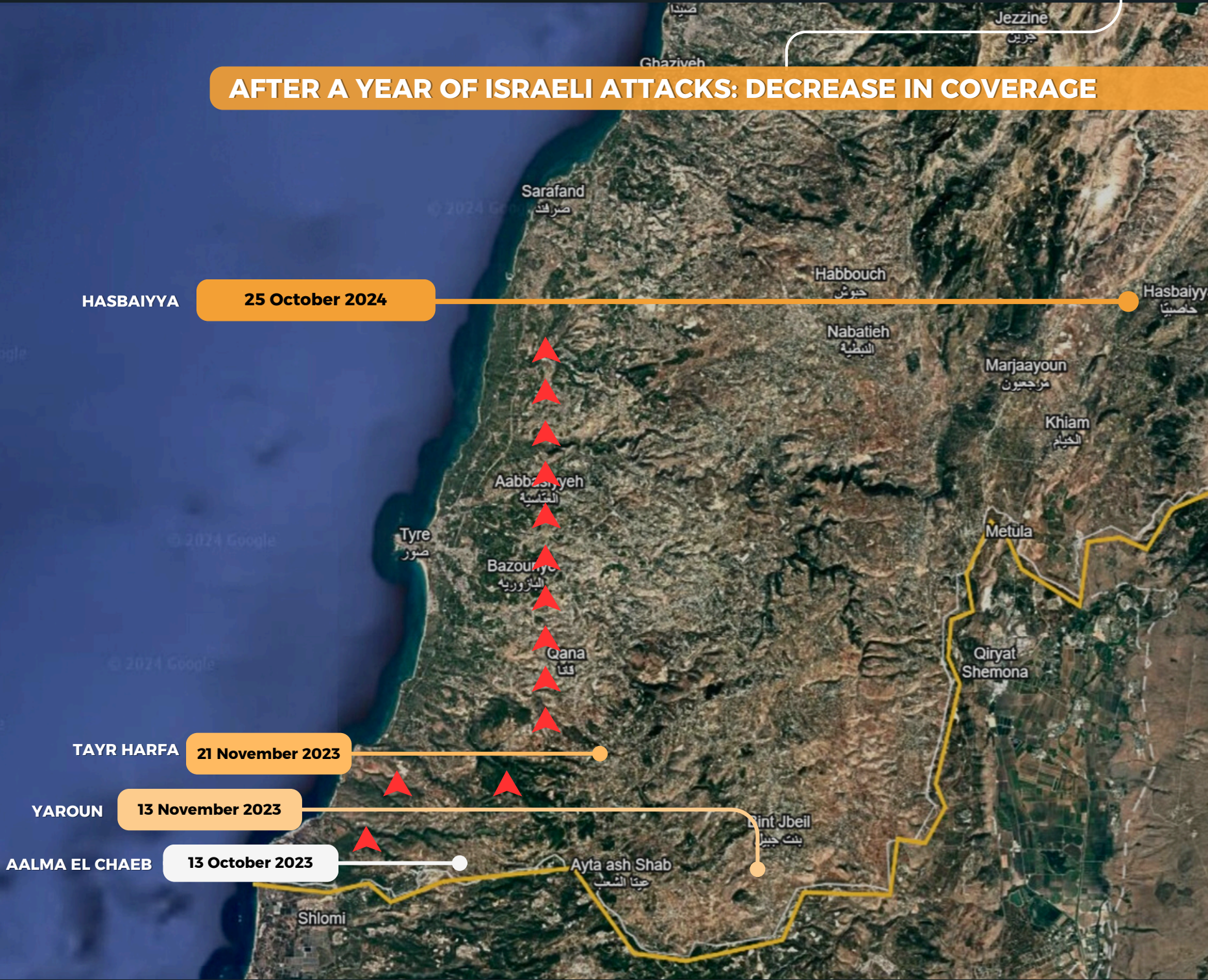
Israel directly targeted **Al Mayadeen's office** in Beirut. The channel held Israel responsible for this attack on a well-known media office of a prominent media outlet. This attack illustrates the persistent targeting of Lebanon's press and media sector.

25 October 2024

Israel targeted a **journalist's residence in the Hasbaya area** in southern Lebanon, where media teams were stationed, considering it a safe area. As a result of the targeting, **Al-Mayadeen TV cameraman Ghassan Najjar, broadcast engineer Mohammad Reda, and Al-Manar TV cameraman Wissam Qassem were killed**, in addition to many others injured in a location known to be designated for journalists' residence and supposedly safe. Consequently,, all media teams in the western sector of southern Lebanon withdrew, halting news coverage entirely and leaving journalists without access to information, which was already limited due to restricted access to areas under shelling and clashes.



# AFTER A YEAR OF ISRAELI ATTACKS: DECREASE IN COVERAGE



## LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE



Ziad Makari

In response to these assaults, the Caretaker Minister of Information Ziad Makari told Maharat Foundation that:

**"the Lebanese government has taken all possible measures regarding the assassination of journalists and the attempted killings of other journalists in Hasbaya. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in coordination with the government, has submitted complaints and letters to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the Protection of Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Geneva, as well as filed a complaint with the UN Security Council and UNESCO."**



PRESS

## COVERAGE CHALLENGES AND ADAPTING TO REALITY



Nakhle Odaime

These Israeli attacks pose significant challenges for journalists trying to access information. MTV journalist **Nakhle Odaime** states:

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**"Covering these events faces serious challenges, the biggest danger being Israeli attacks, as all areas are now exposed. Additionally, there is an internal risk arising from the lack of field reports, public anger, and assaults on journalists, which also reduces the extent of coverage."**

**"Today, journalists' safety is 'left to God.' There is no real protection for journalists, especially in a war without red lines, as shown by the martyrdom of three journalists in what was supposed to be a safe area in Hasbaya."**

PRESS

## COVERAGE CHALLENGES AND ADAPTING TO REALITY



Raneen Idrees

MTV journalist **Raneen Idrees** notes that:

“coverage of border areas is conducted from remote locations due to the security threat posed by the Israeli enemy, which does not distinguish between civilians, journalists, and medical teams. This limits the ability to access information, and there is also ambiguity regarding the entities with which we should coordinate—UNIFIL, the Lebanese army, or Hezbollah.”

Regarding coverage of areas under Lebanese bombardment, Idris points out:

“There are political considerations, so unfortunately not all media outlets can cover it due to the attacks and harassment that journalists face, which affects the extent of coverage. Today, we mainly rely on WhatsApp groups, social media, and individuals still in their areas who document the bombings and airstrikes. We then cross-check sources, wait for confirmation, and publish the news.”

PRESS

## COVERAGE CHALLENGES AND ADAPTING TO REALITY

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Rana Jouni

Among those who remained in their areas is journalist **Rana Jouni**, who points to the difficulty of covering events in Nabatieh under heavy bombardment. She recounts:

**"The scenes are unforgettable, especially the fire belt I covered, where the area was heavily targeted, including the municipality, leading to the martyrdom of the mayor and council members while they were aiding citizens."**

### Why Does This Matter?

#### What is the Impact of Targeting and Restricting Journalists on Media Credibility?

Targeting and restricting journalists limits their movement and ability to conduct field coverage, which affects the public's access to essential information about the war's developments and impacts. It also hinders the documentation of war crimes committed by Israel.

### 3. DIFFICULTY ACCESSING INFORMATION AND SOURCES

#### Field Challenges and Information Access Restrictions



Lara El Hachem

Due to the war, destruction, and threats to journalists within Lebanon, the flow of information has been reduced. LBCI journalist **Lara El Hachem** states:

**"Information is now limited to what the Israeli army claims and what Hezbollah releases, so these restrictions on the flow of information is a major challenge given our inability to access locations and report the news."**

Regarding harassment occurring in bombing zones, El Hachem notes that the harassment generally comes from individuals rather than party members. However, this still affects coverage and is entirely unacceptable, as journalists bear the cost of the media outlet's choices. Since political perspectives cannot always align, media freedom must be respected.

### 3. DIFFICULTY ACCESSING INFORMATION AND SOURCES

In terms of harassment coming from within Lebanese society, numerous incidents have been documented, including the assault on MTV cameraman Dany Tanios and reporter Nawal Berry during their coverage of the airstrike on Dahieh on July 24, 2024. Many media teams were also prevented from reaching the event location by partisan groups.

One of the most prominent assaults was the attack on the Belgian "VTM NEWS" team on October 3, 2024, where war correspondent Robin Ramaekers and cameraman Steijin De Smet were attacked. De Smet was shot in the leg, and Ramaekers sustained facial fractures after being assaulted by young men while covering the Israeli airstrike on the Bashoura area in Beirut.



Mohammad Kleit

AJ+ photographer **Mohammad Kleit** says:

**"While filming stories about people in the western Bekaa under drones and warplanes, the first thing that comes to mind is my family and children. The primary danger for us as photographers today is being targeted by the Israeli enemy, which does not recognize any red lines."**

Kleit, a photographer who has covered many airstrikes on the southern suburbs, adds:

**"The issue lies with the people on the ground who suddenly decide to ban filming and handle permissions arbitrarily, determining who can film and who cannot. For example, someone might stop you from doing your job because the channel you work for uses the word 'killed' instead of 'martyred.' This puts you in a double bind between what the media outlet wants and what people expect."**

## SCARCITY OF SOURCES AND RELIANCE ON ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Today, journalists increasingly rely on alternative information sources due to the lack of field reports, limited sources, and the inability to cover all events. This entails relying on urgent news updates and widely available information, cross-checking all these sources, verifying them, and then publishing.



Roula Mikhael,

**Roula Mikhael**, Executive Director of Maharat Foundation, considers that:

“the reduced access to information places journalists in a real challenge; with field restrictions and harassment, achieving objectivity and accuracy in reporting becomes difficult. This situation reflects an urgent need to empower journalists by protecting their work and enhancing their access to information to ensure the flow of reliable news.”



## SCARCITY OF SOURCES AND RELIANCE ON ALTERNATIVE SOURCES



Edmond Sassine

LBCI journalist **Edmond Sassine** adds that:

“Israel, by Lebanese law, is considered an enemy, and communication with it is prohibited. We classify all its information as claims, given our inability to verify its truth. Consequently, our only source is Hezbollah, in addition to other sources such as health organizations, the Red Cross, Civil Defense, UNIFIL, and the Lebanese Army, which can provide specific information about certain targets or damage assessments from bombings. Naturally, this limited pool of sources makes it challenging to capture the full picture.”



Elsy Moufarrej

**Elsy Moufarrej**, Coordinator of the Alternative Press Syndicate, summarizes the situation by saying that:

“Today we are facing a real danger embodied by an Israeli enemy that does not respect any of the international treaties and laws and there is nothing to deter it. Internally, it is unacceptable for a journalist to become a "vent for anger." This stems from the rhetorical exchange centering around treason and irresponsibility on the part of some media outlets, adopting a specific narrative that places the journalist in the "line of fire" so that any journalist becomes an agent until proven otherwise.”

## SCARCITY OF SOURCES AND RELIANCE ON ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

### Why Does This Matter? What is the Impact of Restricted Access to Information on Information Circulation?

Restricted access to information makes it harder for journalists to obtain multiple sources, complicating the verification of fake news and rumors, especially given their spread on social media and WhatsApp groups. This, in turn, leads to fear, panic, incitement, and hate speech.



## 4- PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS

### Journalists' Reality on the Ground: No Protection and No Safety



Ahmad Taha

Al Mayadeen correspondent **Ahmad Taha**, commenting on the targeting of journalists in Hasbaya, says:

"How can I protect myself from being targeted? What can I do if a missile hits my bedroom, as it did with my colleagues in Hasbaya? I will not stop covering the event, nor will they force me to be afraid, but I want answers and action from the international community so that we do not become mere numbers."



Fatima Bassam

"In every country in the world, a press vest protects you; in Lebanon, it's enough to make you a target,"

says journalist **Fatima Al-Bassam**, describing the situation for journalists, amid targeting and harassment by Israeli forces. She adds that:

"the new generation of journalists is experiencing war for the first time, and there is a lack of knowledge on how to report and what safety standards should be followed."

## 4- PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS



Nabil Mamlouk

On the ground, field journalists face the challenge of physical safety. Journalist **Nabil Mamlouk** says:

“There is absolutely no protective gear. We have appealed many times for safety equipment, but there’s been no response. The lack of protective gear and badges identifying us as journalists exposes us to threats and danger, especially when heading to the scene to cover events.”

The same applies to journalist Valentine Nasr, who confirms the lack of personal protective equipment despite repeated efforts to secure vests and helmets.

## 4- PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS



Ziad Makari

In this context, the Caretaker Information **Minister Ziad Makari** said in an interview with Maharat that:

"the ministry has facilitated the entry of personal protective equipment into Lebanon since the beginning of the war, and in the coming days, two more shipments will arrive. Additionally, some countries have expressed readiness to assist journalists in securing physical protection equipment."

"the ministry is trying to help as much as possible, and in collaboration with UNESCO, we donated five complete sets of personal protective equipment to the Photographers' Syndicate to be rotated among photographers covering dangerous areas."

## 4- PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS



Ali Alloush

In an interview with Maharat, the head of the Photographers' Syndicate, **Ali Alloush**, noted that:

**“the Syndicate has received dozens of requests for personal protective equipment, which reflects the lack of preparedness among media institutions, which, unfortunately, should be equipping their media teams. Additionally, there are 1,200 news sites in Lebanon, increasing the demand for protective vests.”**

**“The Syndicate received five sets of personal protective equipment from the Ministry of Information and UNESCO. Dozens of experienced photographers already have their own equipment, so the received equipment is rotated based on each photographer’s need, as part of our mutual solidarity.”**

The Beirut Press Freedom Center, is an initiative by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), announced the provision of various services to protect journalists, including personal protective equipment, workspace for journalists, psychological support, and more. The center recorded that 77 journalists benefited from protective equipment between the end of July and the end of October. Additionally, the center provided around 60 first-aid kits to journalists and also offers psychological support for journalists.

## INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

The protection of journalists during armed conflicts is an essential part of both international humanitarian law and human rights. Various legal frameworks support journalists' rights and criminalize violations against them. The most significant are:

### A- International Humanitarian Law:

The Geneva Conventions (1949) provide a legal framework for the protection of journalists working in conflict zones, recognizing them as civilians who must not be targeted. Article 79 of the First Additional Protocol (1977) states that "Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians (...)." They also enjoy the same protections granted to civilians in conflict zones; therefore, direct targeting or detention of journalists is prohibited.

### B- Human Rights:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms every individual's right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information.
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) also reinforces individuals' right to freedom of expression and access to information, and any attack on journalists constitutes a violation of these rights.

## INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

### C- National Laws:

- National laws in many countries contain provisions to protect journalists and criminalize attacks against them, whether through a special status or as civilians subject to general laws prohibiting threats, assault, and murder.

### Special status of journalists:

Lebanese law, especially the Penal Code, does not provide journalists with specific protection from assaults, acts of violence, and threats encountered during their professional duties, unlike the protections granted to judges, judicial officers, lawyers, experts, witnesses, and public employees. Journalists deserve a special status due to the nature of their work, which is tied to public interest. This is a point Maharat advocates for in discussions on the Media Law within the subcommittee of the Parliamentary Committee on Administration and Justice.

However, this does not negate the possibility of applying general provisions and articles in the Lebanese Penal Code related to violations of civil rights and obligations, particularly Articles 329 and 330, to protect journalists from physical and psychological violence.



## INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

### D- United Nations Instruments:

Many resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly include commitments and calls for states to take measures to protect journalists, especially in contexts of conflict and unrest. The Security Council has affirmed several resolutions regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, issuing two resolutions specifically about the protection of journalists: Resolution 1738 in 2006 and Resolution 2222 in 2015.

The Security Council has recognized that intentional attacks against civilians, including journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel, constitute war crimes in situations of armed conflict. It has taken into account that the impunity of perpetrators of these crimes poses a significant challenge to their safety and that ensuring accountability for these crimes is essential to preventing future attacks.

The Security Council considers that states party to the Geneva Conventions are obligated to prosecute those who commit war crimes through the intentional targeting of civilians and journalists in armed conflict zones, including Israel, which ratified the Geneva Conventions in 1951. The Council has also urged these states to respect their obligations under international law to protect journalists and refrain from targeting media equipment and installations.

The Security Council has requested United Nations peacekeeping missions and special political missions to ensure that their reports include information on acts of violence specifically directed against journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel in armed conflict situations.

## INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

Furthermore, world leaders have adopted a “Pact for the Future” that includes the Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. The draft resolution of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Pact for the Future" in document A/79/L.2 encompasses the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. This draft resolution contains a specific article (Article 14) in which states commit to protecting all civilians in armed conflicts. This article includes a specific provision for the respect and protection of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel, emphasizing that they shall be considered as civilians in such situations, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

### E- UNESCO Guidelines:

- UNESCO calls on states to enhance the protection of journalists, provide support to them during conflicts, and develop policies to reduce violence against them.



## INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR THE DELIBERATE KILLING OF JOURNALISTS

Deliberate killings of civilians and journalists in armed conflict zones constitute war crimes punishable under international criminal law. **What international mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability and combat impunity for the killings of journalists by the Israeli army on Lebanese territory?**

### A- Prosecution before the International Criminal Court:

An example is the complaint filed by Reporters Without Borders regarding war crimes to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court on October 31, 2023, which includes details about the cases of nine journalists killed since October 7 and two who were injured in the course of their work.

In December 2022, the International Criminal Court in The Hague received a formal request from Al Jazeera to investigate the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and hold those responsible accountable. The request complements the complaint submitted to the ICC by Abu Akleh's family in September, supported by the Palestinian Press Syndicate and the International Federation of Journalists. The International Criminal Court has yet to decide whether to open an official investigation into the incident.

## INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR THE DELIBERATE KILLING OF JOURNALISTS

The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court may also initiate an investigation based on a referral from the Security Council or upon request from a State Party .

### Note:

- States cannot be prosecuted for war crimes under international criminal law; rather, individuals who committed or assisted in committing these crimes are held accountable. Responsibility is individual and relates to the persons involved in war crimes as perpetrators, accomplices, interveners, and instigators. International immunities do not apply before this court.
- These international mechanisms need to be implemented, as they are essential not only for enhancing justice and individual accountability for serious crimes but also for promoting peace, truth, reconciliation, and victims' rights.

## INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR THE DELIBERATE KILLING OF JOURNALISTS

### B- Condemnation through United Nations Security Council Resolutions:

The Security Council, under Resolution 1738 of 2006, recognized that deliberate attacks against media professionals and journalists during armed conflicts constitute a violation of international humanitarian law and are considered war crimes. The Security Council also considers that such acts also pose a threat to international peace and security, reaffirming its readiness to consider these cases when necessary. It emphasized that states must stop allowing perpetrators of these criminal acts to evade accountability.

**There are several entities that can call for the Security Council to convene and examine violations against journalists:**

- A request from a member state of the Security Council (which has 15 member states)
- A resolution from the United Nations General Assembly (the General Assembly can call the Security Council's attention to situations that may threaten international peace and security) as per Article 11, Paragraph 3 of the UN Charter.

## INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS FOR THE DELIBERATE KILLING OF JOURNALISTS

### B- Condemnation through United Nations Security Council Resolutions:

- A request or complaint from any member state of the United Nations regarding any matter that may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security (according to Articles 34 and 35 of the UN Charter).

It is worth noting that the Lebanese state recently filed a complaint with the Security Council, which includes a series of attacks, among them the killing of journalists. However, in its complaint, the state did not request that the Security Council mandate a Fact-Finding Mission or a Commission of inquiry to investigate the recurring deliberate killings of journalists since October 2023. This represents a gap in the complaint, which only called for the condemnation of Israel and requested its withdrawal from Lebanese territories and the implementation of Resolution 1701.

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### C- Establishment of an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission under a Mandate from UN Bodies:

Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-finding Missions mandated by the United Nations are increasingly used to respond to serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, whether they are long-standing or result from sudden events, and to enhance accountability for such violations and combat impunity.

These international investigative bodies may be established by the Security Council, the United Nations General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations may send a Fact-Finding Mission or establish a Commission of Inquiry. He can do so without a mandate from the Security Council or the General Assembly (Article 99 of the UN Charter). The Human Rights Council may also be asked to establish an International Commission of Inquiry to investigate Israeli violations against civilians and journalists, similar to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory established on May 27, 2021. It is noteworthy that the report from this investigative body concluded that Israeli forces used "lethal force without justification" when they shot and killed Abu Akleh, thereby violating "her right to life."

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights can also send a fact-finding mission to Lebanon composed of independent experts to investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the killings of journalists in Lebanon.

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### **D- Permanent Mechanisms for Monitoring States' Compliance with Their Commitments, International Law and the UN Charter:**

Among the most important are the mechanisms of the Human Rights Council to promote and protect human rights worldwide by addressing human rights violations and providing recommendations on them, including responding to emergencies in the field of human rights. These include periodic or emergency sessions and the Universal Periodic Review, as well as fact-finding missions conducted by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council (such as special rapporteurs, independent experts, and working groups).

### **E- Legal Mechanisms Specific to Some Countries:**

Some countries, like Belgium, allow for the prosecution of any foreign official involved in crimes against humanity based on domestic legal texts. The “Anti-Atrocity Law” of 1993, amended in 1999 and again in 2003, incorporates what is known as the principle of “universal jurisdiction.” This law grants Belgian courts the authority to prosecute individuals accused of committing genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, regardless of where the crimes were committed or whether the suspect or victims are Belgian.

They can also be prosecuted under the provisions of Lebanese domestic law, which punishes crimes committed against civilians, including journalists, such as murder, if the person who committed the crime is known, was an accomplice or instigator.



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## WHY IS PROTECTING JOURNALISTS IMPORTANT?

Protecting journalists during armed conflicts is vital to ensure the flow of accurate and reliable information. States must adhere to international and national legal standards to protect journalists and provide accountability for any violations against them. Enhancing the protection of journalists is not just a legal obligation; it is a fundamental step towards promoting human rights and democracy worldwide.

The increasing violations faced by journalists in Lebanon require an urgent response from the international community. Journalists must receive protection in times of conflict, and efforts should be intensified to ensure their freedom of expression and enable them to fulfill their role in conveying accurate and reliable information. Protecting journalists is not merely a legal necessity; it is an essential condition for ensuring transparency and accountability during challenging times.

This situation underscores the urgent need to protect and ensure the safety of journalists while they carry out their work, whether through international mechanisms or national laws in various countries.



Roula Mikhael,

**Roula Mikhael**, Executive Director of Maharat Foundation, adds that:

**"In the absence of adequate protection measures, Lebanese journalists remain at risk while performing their professional duties. The ongoing targeting of journalists demonstrates the urgent need for international action to provide them with the necessary conditions to work safely. The journalism profession is not just a right; its protection is an obligation for all states, which must ensure that journalists covering wars are protected from attacks so they can continue to convey the truth."**



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## CONCLUSIONS

- Journalists in Lebanon pay a heavy price for covering events, facing deliberate targeting and killings by the Israel Defense Forces. They are also subjected to assaults, harassment, and threats due to the opinions they express and the information they circulate.
- This situation highlights the urgent need to protect and ensure the safety of journalists while performing their work, whether through international mechanisms or national laws in various countries.
- Journalists must be protected in times of war, and efforts should be intensified to guarantee their freedom of expression and empower them to fulfill their role in conveying information and ensuring transparency and accountability.
- States must adhere to international and national legal standards for protecting journalists and provide accountability for any violations that occur against them.
- The increasing violations faced by journalists in Lebanon require an urgent response from the international community to deter the Israeli military from intensifying its aggression and to push for accountability for the perpetrators of these crimes.
- The Lebanese government should utilize all available international measures mentioned to document the crimes committed by Israel against civilians and journalists, and to advocate for holding the perpetrators accountable and preventing them from escaping punishment.



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