

January 24, 2024

Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
/ Vice-President of the Commission
European External Action Service
9A Rond Point Schuman
1046 Brussels
Belgium

Sent via email

Re: Protecting journalists and press freedom in the Israel-Gaza war

Dear High Representative Borrell,

[At least 83 journalists and media workers](#) have been killed in Israel, Gaza, and Lebanon amid hostilities between Israeli forces and Palestinian and Lebanese armed groups since October 7, when Hamas-led fighters carried out horrific attacks and hostage-taking in Israel. The killing of so many journalists in so brief a period of time is unprecedented. It has obvious and profound implications for the ability of the public, including the citizens of the European Union, to be informed about a conflict with local, regional, and global implications. We are writing to entreat you to act immediately and decisively to promote the conditions for safe and unrestricted reporting on the hostilities.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), more journalists have been killed in the [first 10 weeks of the hostilities](#) than have ever been killed in a single country over an entire year.

[Four Israeli journalists were killed in Hamas' assault on October 7, and at least 76 Palestinian and three Lebanese journalists have been killed since](#), almost all of them by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), according to CPJ.

There is [growing evidence](#) that, in some cases, the IDF may have deliberately targeted these journalists. Credible [reports](#) by [human rights](#) and [media organizations](#) indicate that the IDF strikes in southern Lebanon on October 13 that killed [Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah](#) and injured six other journalists from Reuters, Al Jazeera, and Agence France-Presse were unlawful and apparently deliberate.¹ The IDF has also [acknowledged](#) deliberately targeting a car in which journalists were traveling on January 7, killing two journalists and seriously injuring a third. In at

¹ The IDF also deliberately targeted journalists before October 7, as in the case of American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, whose killing is the subject of an ongoing Justice Department investigation. See [CPJ report finds no accountability for journalists killed by the Israeli military over the past two decades](#), Committee to Protect Journalists (May 9, 2023).

least two other cases, journalists [reported](#) receiving threats from Israeli officials and IDF officers before their family members were killed in Gaza. Of course, the targeted or indiscriminate killing of journalists, if committed deliberately or recklessly, is a war crime, and the International Criminal Court has [said](#) that it will investigate reports of war crimes committed against journalists in Gaza.

Journalists reporting on the war contend with challenges beyond the ever-present risk of death. These challenges include the refusal of Israel and Egypt to allow international journalists access to Gaza except under Israeli military escort (and even then, with [restrictions](#) on [reporting](#)),² [internet shutdowns](#) that prevent news and testimonies from Gaza from reaching the outside world, [arbitrary detention](#), and [harassment and intimidation](#). In addition, the Israeli government [is requiring](#) media outlets in Israel to submit almost any detailed reporting on the war to its "Censorship" office for review, while banning reporting on significant topics of public interest related to the war in Gaza. It has also acted against its domestic press, for example, by [threatening to retaliate](#) against the country's oldest newspaper, Haaretz, for its coverage of the war, and threatening to shut down local bureau offices of foreign news agencies.

The European Union [describes](#) its relationship with Israel as "one of the most wide-ranging and deepest relationships that the EU enjoys with any third country in the world." As such, the European Union will be judged on how this relationship can ensure that all parties to the conflict abide by international law, including the protection of journalists who are civilians and must be able to freely and safely report on every aspect of the conflict. We would therefore urge you to:

- Publicly call on all parties to the armed conflict to respect the right of journalists to report on the hostilities, ensure journalists' safety, allow all journalists seeking to evacuate from Gaza to do so, abjure the indiscriminate and deliberate killing of journalists, promptly and thoroughly investigate all attacks on journalists, and hold accountable individuals found to be responsible for them.
- Demand that Israel and Egypt provide international journalists with independent access to Gaza, and that Israel cease [communication blackouts](#) and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of journalists admitted to Gaza as well as those already working there.
- Demand that Israel allow the passage of personal protective equipment and materials used for newsgathering, such as helmets, flak jackets, phone chargers, eSIM cards, and laptops, to reporters in Gaza and the West Bank.
- Support swift, transparent, and independent investigations into the killing of all journalists and ending the longstanding [pattern of impunity](#) in the killings of journalists by the IDF.

² To our knowledge, CNN's Clarissa Ward is the only international journalist to have successfully evaded the ban on journalists entering Gaza independent of the IDF since the conflict began. See Clara Aberneithie, [CNN's Clarissa Ward enters Gaza in defiance of ban](#), Press Gazette (Dec. 14, 2023).

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

SIGNED:

Access Now

ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression (ARTICLE 19)

Association of European Journalists (AEJ)

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

DEMAS – Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

Index on Censorship

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Press Institute (IPI)

Media Diversity Institute (MDI)

OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

PEN International

Public Media Alliance (PMA)

Rory Peck Trust (RPT)

South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation