

Stop the cycle: Working with police to keep women journalists safe online

Dear Chief Constable Pippa Mills, Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson and Superintendent Joanne McEwan,

Violence against women working in journalism in the UK has increased significantly over the past decade, much of it conducted online. While all journalists may be subject to online abuse, women are far more likely to experience gendered attacks: recent research showed that three-quarters of women working in the UK journalism and media industries had experienced rape or death threats, harassment, stalking, misogyny or sexual approaches online in connection to their work.

We are deeply concerned about the impact of online violence on media freedom and diversity. Research conducted by the UK's largest commercial publisher Reach Plc and Women in Journalism (1) found women were leaving front-line jobs in journalism and minimising their online profiles in order to avoid online violence against them. There is also compelling evidence (2) to show that women of colour, women who openly share their faith, LGBTQ+ women, women with disabilities, and women from working class backgrounds are significantly more likely to experience violence and hate online. The chilling effect of online violence - likely to get worse as we head towards elections - stifles press freedom and creates spaces for disinformation to thrive; it also risks making journalism less diverse at a time it needs more than ever to be representative.

We are also worried about the impact on individuals. Women journalists who experience serious online violence, such as stalking, death or rape threats, or receiving unsolicited pornographic content from anonymous accounts, report long-term impacts on their professional and personal lives, including depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and post-traumatic stress disorder. There is a growing awareness of the link between online and physical violence; fear that online attacks may lead to 'real-life' attacks is palpable among those who experience violence online.

Yet despite the rise in online violence, there are worrying inconsistencies in the way police handle, record and respond to online crimes against women journalists nationwide. Women journalists reporting online crimes to police often feel their case is quickly dismissed, or that their fears are perceived as an overreaction – a fact which adds to their trauma and makes it all the more likely they will leave the profession.

We need to stop this cycle. The cycle of women feeling unsafe in their work. The cycle of women feeling unheard. We need to secure a safer future for women working in journalism in the UK.

So today, on International Women's Day, we come together to ask you - as police representatives charged with working on the safety of journalists - to work with us for

change. We have four simple asks which could make a world of difference to our industry both now and in the future:

- Improve the recording of crimes against journalists. Accurate reporting - including clearly recording when attacks are related to a journalist's work - is essential if we are to understand the scale of the problem, formulate effective responses and hold social media platforms to account.
- Provide national-level guidance for police on online violence against journalists, and training on the gendered nature of online violence, the connections between online and physical violence, and best practice in dealing with such crimes.
- Report back to government. As police representatives on the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, we call on you to regularly report back figures of crimes against journalists to the Committee.
- Improve dialogue between police and industry. Police forces should establish direct and effective channels of communication with journalists and representative bodies to ensure attacks can be quickly reported and effectively dealt with and perpetrators held to account.

Today, we as journalists and media leaders join Reporters Without Borders UK, Women in Journalism and Reach Plc to ask you to do everything you can to break the cycle of abuse that risks sidelining women from journalism. Let's work together to break the cycle and secure a safer future for women working in journalism.

Yours,

Alex Crawford	Foreign Correspondent, Sky News
Alex Stepney	Policy and External Affairs Director, News UK
Alison Gow	Media Consultant
Alison Phillips	Journalist
Andrew Colley	Regional Editor, Newsquest Cumbria
Anna Highfield	Senior News Reporter, Architects' Journal
Anthony Baxter	Deputy Managing Editor, LBC Newsgathering
Antonella Mulè	Chief Strategy and Corporate Development Officer, Reach Plc
Anu Anand	Journalist
Bénédicte Paviot	France 24's UK Correspondent
Carole Cadwalladr	Journalist, The Guardian and The Observer
Caroline Waterston	Editor, Mirror
Catherine Philp	World Affairs Editor, The Times
Cathy Newman	Presenter, Channel 4 News
Chris Evans	Editor, The Telegraph
Christina Lamb	Chief Foreign Correspondent, Sunday Times
Clothilde Redfern	Director, Rory Peck Trust

Colin Hume	Head of Learning & Development, National World
Daisy Wyatt	Associate Editor, The Daily Express
Daniel Gorman	Director, English PEN
David Dick	Editor In Chief (Scotland), Reach Plc
David Higginson	Chief Digital Publisher, Reach Plc
Dawn Alford	Executive Director, Society of Editors
Deborah Bonetti	Director, Foreign Press Association in London
Dhruvi Shah	Freelance journalist
Dominic Ponsford	Editor-in-Chief, Press Gazette
Donna Ferguson	Freelance Journalist
Donna-Louise Bishop	Specialist Reporter, Newsquest
Dr Maja Šimunjak	Senior Lecturer in Journalism
Dylan Jones	Editor-In-Chief, Evening Standard
Edd Moore	Audience and Content Director, South West, Reach plc
Eoin Brannigan	Editor-in-Chief, Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life
Fiona O'Brien	UK Director, Reporters Without Borders
Fleur Launspach	UK Correspondent Dutch national news NOS
Gary Jones	Editor, Daily Express and Sunday Express
Gavin Foster	Editor, Northern Echo
Gavin Thompson	Regional Editor, Newsquest Wales
Gemma Aldridge	Editor, Sunday Mirror and The People
Graeme Brown	Editor, Birmingham Mail and BirminghamLive
Hanna Geissler	Health Editor, Daily Express
Hannah Storm	Media Safety Consultant and Co-Director, Headlines Network
Helen Dalby	Audience and Content Director, Reach
Hilly Janes	Associate Lecturer, Media School, London College of Communication
James Brindle	Chief Executive Officer, The Journalists' Charity
James Eveleigh	Editor, InPublishing
James Harding	Editor and Founder, Tortoise Media
Jenny Kean	Writer and Researcher
Jessica Ní Mhainín	Policy and Campaigns Manager, Index on Censorship
Jodie Ginsberg	CEO, Committee to Protect Journalists
John Crowley	Editor, Financial Times
John Wilson	Editor, Hereford Times, Newsquest
Jonathan Paterson	Managing Director, The News Movement
Joy Yates	Regional Editor, Newsquest Cumbria
Julie Etchingham	Anchor, ITV News at Ten

Karin Goodwin	Co-editor and Journalist, The Ferret
Karyn Fleeting	Delivery Director, Reach Plc
Katharine Viner	Editor in Chief, Guardian News & Media
Katie French	Regional Editor, Newsquest
Leona O'Neill	Journalist
Liam Fisher	Head of talkSPORT
Lindsey Hilsum	International Editor, Channel 4 News
Lisa Bradley	Deputy Head of Journalism, University of Sheffield
Liz Green	Journalist, Broadcaster
Liz Nice	Editor
Marcela Kunova	Editor, Journalism.co.uk
Maria Boyle	Luxury travel writer and PR director
Maria Breslin	Editor, Liverpool Echo
Marianna Spring	Disinformation and Social Media Correspondent, BBC
Martin Little	Audience Transformation Director, Reach Plc
Mary Nightingale	Presenter, ITV Evening News
Michael Adkins	Senior Editor, Newsquest
Michela Wrong	Journalist and Author
Michelle Stanistreet	NUJ General Secretary
Natalie Fahy	Editor, Nottinghamshire Live
Nic Keaney	Managing Editor
Owen Meredith	CEO, News Media Association
Patricia Devlin	Investigative Journalist
Patrick Ward	Print ACE
Paul Caruana Galizia	Reporter, Tortoise Media
Paul Linfood	Publisher, HoldtheFrontPage
Paul Webster	Editor, The Observer
Professor Julie Posetti	Global Director of Research, International Center for Journalists; Professor of Journalism, City, University of London.
Rachel Corp	CEO for ITN and Chair of Women in Journalism
Rana Rahimpour	Freelance Iranian-British Journalist
Rebecca Whittington	Online Safety Editor, Reach Plc
Richard Duggan	Regional Editor North West, Newsquest
Richard Porritt	Regional Editor, Newsquest
Richard Reeves	CEO, AOP (Association of Online Publishers)
Richard Wallace	Head of TV, News UK
Robert Peston	Journalist
Rodney Edwards	Editor, The Impartial Reporter

Ruth Hardy-Mullings	Head of Content
Sangita Myska	Journalist & LBC Radio Presenter
Sarah Collins	Editor at talkSPORT
Sarah Lester	Editor, Manchester Evening News
Sarah Macdonald	Founder/Director Make Waves Ltd
Sharmeen Ziauddin	Editor in Chief, She Speaks We Hear
Sheena McStravick	Editor, Belfast Live
Simon Murfitt	Senior Editor, Newsquest London
Simon Pitts	Chief Executive, STV
Sonya Thomas	Freelance Journalist and Writer
Sophia Smith Galer	Freelance Journalist and Content Creator
Steffan Rhys	Editor, WalesOnline
Tim Lethaby	Regional Editor, Newsquest South West
Tim Levell	Programme Director, Times Radio
Toby Granville	Editorial Development Director, Newsquest
Tony Gallagher	Editor, The Times
Victoria Macdonald	Health and Social Care Editor
Victoria Newton	Editor-in-Chief, The Sun
Wayne Ankers	Editor, YorkshireLive
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown	Journalist, Columnist, Author

Research cited in the letter can be seen here:

1. [Online harms against women working in journalism and media](#), 2023. Report by Dr Rebecca Whittington for Women in Journalism and Reach Plc.
2. [The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists](#), 2023. Edited by Julie Posetti and Nabeelah Shabbir for the International Centre for Journalists and UNESCO.