

## Journalists should not be targeted for their job

By [Sam Lees](#), Deputy Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Image: Jon S

On the 5th of July 2003, whilst standing on a traffic island, trying to hail a taxi in Baghdad, Richard Wild was shot dead. Several theories were concocted to explain his death. The immediate assumption was that it was simply a case of mistaken identity. Wild had just had a haircut, and as an English speaking, tall and thoroughly white man in Baghdad at the time, it was thought that he may have been targeted for looking like a member of the United States Marine Corps. The other view? He was assassinated for being a journalist, one who happened to be working on the wrong stories.

No official motive was ever recorded by the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), and the truth will probably never be discovered. In the following decade of warfare, the killer may in turn have been killed or forced to flee the country, and, even if they were alive today, it is incredibly doubtful that they would ever willingly come forward.

Wild is not alone amongst journalists to have been targets due to their profession. In 2014 alone, according to the CPJ, 81 journalists and 11 media workers were murdered, with far more imprisoned. Such high tallies of the dead are not unusual; journalism is clearly a more dangerous line of work than many assume.

Journalists are vital in society, as they are often the mouthpieces of the opposition, granting the opportunity for free speech, and offering a platform to those outside of the government. This comes at a price however, as this vital role can very literally bring them into the line of fire. It is very telling that in 2006, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1738, condemning the killing or targeting of journalists in combat situations. That did not stop violence towards them by any stretch of the imagination. Nor had

previous resolutions towards the same end.

Throughout the Syrian Civil War, the Assad government has faced accusations for repeatedly targeting journalists on the front lines. An already risky job, frontline reporting has been made even harder by the deliberate targeting of journalists. And why is it happening? Because these are the same people who document, photograph and report on human rights abuses, the breaking of the Geneva conventions through usage of chemical weaponry or barrel bombs and who bring an otherwise hidden conflict into the gaze of the international community.

The same kind of treatment is seen in Russia, Egypt and a host of other nations. Journalists are targeted because of their activities, normally for bringing into the open secrets that governments or companies would much rather did not get out. These journalists are defending the rights of the citizens, through bringing issues to the attention of the international community, and allowing opposition to the government their chance to be heard. Without the work of journalists, we would not know of such things as the MPs expenses scandal here in the UK, or of countless crimes committed worldwide by both governments and non-governmental groups. Whilst some stories will inherently be harder to work on, or more dangerous for the situations surrounding them, a journalist should not be targeted for their job.



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