

The Coalition For
Women In Journalism



Press Freedom Status For Women Journalists

38 Threats, Attacks, And Harms Done To Women Journalists In June

June 2023

Photo: A woman holds a picture of Victoria Amelina, as pallbearers carry the writer's coffin at the end of her funeral ceremony in Mykhaylo Gold Domes in Kyiv on July 4, 2023. Credit: Sergei Supinsky/AFP via Getty Images

Objective of report

Every day, worldwide, women journalists face severe threats to their safety. These threats exist online and offline, from misinformation and discrediting campaigns rooted in misogyny and sexism to more serious problems such as harassment from the state. The problems women journalists contend with are not broadly recognized. Newsrooms are often tight-lipped about them; governments take little action to counter violations against women journalists.

CFWIJ's monthly reports are drawn from our daily and feature research that offers a landscape view of what press freedom looks like from a gender angle. Each morning CFWIJ team register new violations against them, marshaling ever more evidence of the severity of the threats they face and the urgent need to raise awareness about these issues. Many of these cases are documented internally by The Coalition, to maintain anonymity and ensure the safety of targeted journalists. Our work shows the incredible courage and conviction women journalists work with in spite of the hurdles they face. Our job is to ensure their circumstances are made visible so accurate resources can be directed for their safety and growth.

This report was developed with the support of Craig Newmark Philanthropies.

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Summary: Highlights

- **Tragic deaths of two women in conflict zones, Ukraine and Sudan.**
- **Country Spotlight:**
- **Belarus - 1 arrest, 5 women media workers detained - media crackdown continues**
- **Kosovo - 4 physical assaults, 1 damage to vehicle, 2 journalists intimidated**
- **Increase in detentions and physical assaults since May 2023**
- **Georgia SLAPP report**

In Memoriam: Victoria Amelina and Samaher Abdelshafee

June saw the tragic and unnecessary deaths of Victoria Amelina and Samaher Abdelshafee. The brave women, 2500 miles from each other, were killed by shelling.

Amelina, a renowned writer turned war crimes investigator, was documenting the horrific stories from survivors in recently liberated Ukrainian areas when missiles hit Kramatorsk. Amelina died of her injuries a day after the attack.

Abdelshafee, a fearless reporter for Radio Zalingei, was one of the 150 journalists forced to flee their homes within Sudan during the second half of June, while more than 70 sought refuge in neighboring countries. She was instantly killed when the refugee camp she and her family had fled to was shelled.

The Coalition For Women In Journalism is heartbroken by the pointless murders of the two incredible women journalists. We mourn the untimely death of Victoria Amelina and Samaher Abdelshafee, offering deep condolences to the grieving families who have lost their loved ones.

These were the first two murders of women journalists in 2023, as documented by CFWIJ.



Ukraine:

Ukrainian writer **Victoria Amelina** tragically dies in Russian missile strike on Kramatorsk on June 27. Despite receiving immediate medical attention, Amelina's severe injuries proved fatal, leading to her death. The acclaimed novelist fought to uncover Russian war crimes after it invaded Ukraine, documenting the testimonies of witnesses and survivors in areas liberated from Russian occupation.

Sudan:

On June 30, Radio Zalingei journalist **Samaher Abdelshafee** was killed in a shelling attack on a displacement camp in central Darfur, where she and her family had sought refuge. The situation for journalists in Sudan is dire, with many attacks and assaults reported forcing many to flee their homes within Sudan and seek refuge in neighboring countries due to the ongoing conflict.

“Over 150 journalists were forced to flee their homes within Sudan during the second half of June, while more than 70 sought refuge in neighboring countries”

— The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate



2 women
journalists killed in
conflict zones

Democratic Republic of Congo:

On June 28, **Marie-Louise Malou Mbela**, a journalist working for state-owned RTNC was beaten and arrested by soldiers from the Armed Forces of the DRC. The incident occurred while she was reporting on a land dispute in the capital city of Kinshasa. After intervention from the United Nations, the journalist was released without charges.

Iran:

Cartoonist **Atena Farghadani** was taken into custody on Wednesday, June 7th, at Evin Prison in response to a summons she received to appear at the prison's courthouse. The arrest followed Farghadani's posting of a satirical political cartoon on her Instagram account earlier that day.

Belarus:

On June 6, **Tatsiana Pytsko** was arrested and charged with participating in an extremist formation. Her husband Viachaslau Lazarau was previously detained on charges of facilitating extremist activities. The Belarussian Investigative Committee claims to have found video material on Lazarau's devices, including footage of Pytsko, which they believe proves her involvement in extremist activities. Pytsko is currently in custody and could face six years in prison if convicted.

Security forces have been implicated in numerous human rights abuses, yet they largely enjoy complete impunity. This situation underscores the challenging and perilous environment in which journalists operate, where their safety and freedom of expression are constantly under threat.



3 women
journalists arrested

Belarus:

On June 9, 2023, Belarusian authorities continued their crackdown on journalists, detaining nine employees of the local media outlet Ranak TV in Svetlogorsk. Five women journalists were detained **Maryna Bychkovskaya, Alena Kisialiova, Krystsina Kazialkova, Hanna Zhurskaya, and Elizaveta Shavielenka**. The journalists were charged with administrative offenses related to broadcasting "extremist" content. The charges are believed to be linked to Ranak's coverage of an explosion at a pulp and paper mill, which the authorities wanted to keep under wraps.

Russia:

On June 5, journalist **Yuliya Petrova** was fined 150,000 rubles (approximately €1,700) by the Timiryazevsky District Court in Moscow. The fine came after Petrova's detention the day before while she was covering a protest in the city. The RusNews journalist announced her intention to appeal the conviction.

Azerbaijan:

On June 22, journalists **Nargiz Absalamova** and **Nigar Mubariz** were physically assaulted and detained by police while covering environmental protests in Soyudlu, Azerbaijan. The journalists were reporting on a protest against a local goldmine when police officers assaulted them and confiscated their phones. The police had implemented access restrictions to Soyudlu, limiting entry to residents and pro-government media outlets. The journalists were accused of collaborating with Armenians before being released.

"Why is my freedom of movement restricted? Why is my arm squeezed? Why am I pushed? Why should such things happen to an independent journalist?"

— Nargiz Absalamova



8 women journalists
detained

Ecuador:

On June 22, 2023, journalist **Lisette Ormanza** was targeted in an attempted assassination disguised as a road accident in Ecuador. Ormanza had previously reported on a fatal bus crash, which drew backlash from the bus company involved. She received death threats on social media before the attack on her car. Ormanza has since resigned and is considering leaving Ecuador for her family's safety.

“I was just trying to give a voice to people who do not have it and for the authorities to listen. I don't know what's wrong with that”

— Lisette Ormanza

France:

On June 29, two women journalists were assaulted by protestors when covering violent demonstrations after the police killing of a teenager. In Besançon, **Emma Audrey** and her colleague were filming when they were attacked from behind by a masked group armed with crossbars. They escaped with the help of onlookers and received medical attention for their injuries. In Tours, a woman journalist from TV Tours-Val de Loire was assaulted while filming a tourist bus that was set on fire. The journalist was encircled by 15 individuals who verbally abused, threatened, and physically attacked her. Her camera was also taken and destroyed.

On June 27, an unnamed woman journalist was attacked and strangled by a riot police officer in Marseille. Upon seeing her press card, the officer became aggressive and escalated the attack when she tried to call for help. The journalist's editor heard her pleas while the officer hurled misogynistic insults and demanded she end the call. She suffered injuries, including a contused trachea and bruises, she has been placed on medical leave.



11 women journalists
physically assaulted

Italy:

On June 25, RAI journalist **Flavia Lorenzoni** and her team faced aggression while reporting on a murder in Tivoli, Italy. Family members or acquaintances of the deceased approached the team and pulled and yanked Lorenzoni in a hostile manner. The journalist and the crew were unharmed.

United Kingdom:

Trans Safety Network reporter **Jess O'Thomson** was injured by far-right protestors during anti-drag demonstrations in Lewisham, London, on June 24, 2023. She was crushed against a pub wall, resulting in significant swelling, bruising, and pain, including a bruise in the shape of a footprint. The assault occurred during challenging times for trans people in the UK. Recent years have seen a concerning increase in anti-trans rhetoric in British media and politics, leading to a regression of trans rights and a rise in anti-trans views among the public.

“I have never been as frightened as I was reporting on Saturday morning”
— Jess O'Thomson

Ukraine:

On June 27, Kramatorsk in the Donetsk region was hit by two missile strikes from Russian invasion forces. British photographer **Anastasia Taylor-Lind** was injured in the attack. France 24 correspondent **Catalina Gómez**, who was dining with Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina, escaped unharmed, but Amelina tragically lost her life due to severe injuries.

“I felt hot air and the sound of breaking glass and debris flying, clattering, and tinkering. It went on and on and on”
— Anastasia Taylor-Lind

11 women journalists
physically assaulted



Kosovo:

Four women journalists were assaulted and injured in Leposavic, a Serb-majority town in Kosovo, while reporting on protests against the outcome of local elections on June 16. A masked mob chased a group of journalists, attacking them with stones and stun grenades.

RTK's **Venera Xhoxhaj** filmed the scene as she and colleagues ran for safety. Dorentina **Thaqi** suffered head injuries after being struck by stones and was targeted with stun grenades. **Qendreesa Sinani** from Klan TV Kosova was hit by stones, injuring her right leg. The IndeksOnline team was physically assaulted by aggressive protestors, leading to bodily harm. This incident is part of a series of attacks on journalists and media workers in the northern region of Kosovo.

“Over three weeks, the Coalition For Women In Journalism has documented physical assaults, intimidation, and vehicle vandalization against 14 women journalists in Josovo. Actively monitoring the disturbing situation, we are noticing a significant escalation in the attacks against the press.”



11 women journalists
physically assaulted



6 women journalists
threatened and
intimidated

Kosovo:

On June 13, several journalists in North Mitrovica faced obstacles while trying to do their work during demonstrations against the arrest of Milun 'Lune' Milenkovic by the Kosovo police. Protestors prevented Zorica Krstic Vorgucic, a journalist for Radio KiM, from filming and using her phone. **Tatjana Lazarevic**, the editor of the Kossev portal, was intimidated multiple times and faced attempts to stop her from filming. After posting a picture of a masked protestor threatening her, Lazarevic became the target of an online campaign blaming her for the arrests and causing insecurity.

“Journalists in northern districts are in exceptionally destitute conditions, and their security isn't guaranteed by KFOR, nor by EULEX police”
— Association of Journalists Kosovo

United States:

In Miami, Florida, June 14, **Sophie Alexander**, an international affairs producer for Sky News was booed, grabbed by the arm, and insulted by Trump supporters when she asked the former president a question. CFWIJ has documented a disturbing trend of increased harassment and intimidation towards journalists, particularly women, which can be attributed to Trump's disparaging rhetoric against the media.

“I tried to step down from the chair I was standing on and a man grabbed my arm before another told him not to touch me. As I was leaving the cafe another yelled ‘stupid b*’ in my face”***
— Sophie Alexander

Iran:

On June 15, investigative reporter **Nazila Maroofian** revealed she faced continuous threats and expulsion from editorial offices after her release from prison. Maroofian was sentenced in January 2023 to two years in prison (suspended for five years), a fine, and a ban on leaving Iran. Since her release, she has shared the harassment she has endured, including derogatory comments from an officer.

"After prison, two things happened to me. Continuous threats by my interrogator and being expelled and not allowed to work in editorial offices"

— Nazila Maroofian


Serbia:

Hooligan gangs, once again, target **Brankica Stankovic**, editor of Insajder, with hate and intimidation. On June 6, the renowned journalist faced abusive and threatening chants from hooligans during a basketball game in Belgrade. Stankovic had previously been placed under police protection 14 years ago due to similar threats.

Peru:

On June 27, La Resistencia supporters gathered outside Rosa María Palacios' home, hurling abuse and protesting her work as a columnist. Palacios recorded the incident and expressed frustration at the lack of police intervention. The Ultra-Right wing group La Resistencia has repeatedly harassed journalists, activists, and politicians.

"Despite numerous calls to the police regarding La Resistencia, no arrests have been made, and no charges have been filed. As a result, the harassment continues unabated, leaving journalists and human rights defenders vulnerable and fearful for their safety."



6 women journalists
threatened and
intimidated

United States:

On June 1, New Hampshire Public Radio journalist **Lauren Chooljian** was ordered to hand over unpublished notes and transcripts in a libel case brought against her by Eric Spoffard, the former CEO of Granite Recovery Centers. Chooljian's investigations exposed sexual abuse allegations against Spoffard. Since publishing, her home has been repeatedly vandalized.

"The ruling is considered 'unusual and alarming' by legal experts, who caution that such orders could hinder journalists' efforts to uncover any wrongdoing by prominent individuals."

India:

Asianet News reporter **Akhila Nandakumar** is under investigation for conspiracy to defame after reporting on suspicious exam results of a student leader from India's Communist Party. On June 9, Kerala police opened a case against Nandakumar and four others. The executive editor of Asianet News believes the case was registered without verifying the allegations and suggests it is an attempt to target the news channel.

*"It's anti-democratic and an infringement on media freedom"
— Kerala Union of Working Journalists*

Georgia:

Abusive lawsuits targeting critical media are on the rise in Georgia, threatening freedom of expression. The country, previously seen as a beacon of anti-corruption efforts, is now facing the capture of key state institutions by those in power. CFWIJ raises concerns over the use of the legal system to harass and intimidate the press. Georgia's compromised courts and the prevalence of defamation cases against media outlets hinder the ability of journalists to hold the government accountable and provide accurate information to the public.



At least 2 women
journalists legally
harassed



A woman journalist's
vehicle attacked



Kosovo:

On June 15, protestors in Northern Kosovo vandalized the car of RTK journalist **Arbresha Berisha** and her colleagues while they were covering demonstrations. Unknown individuals threw a brick, causing damage to the car window and tires. The journalists were not present during the incident, and no injuries were reported.

“24 media teams have been attacked, harassed, assaulted and prevented while performing their duties”

— Association of Journalists Kosovo

United States:

Sabrina Siddiqui, a White House correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, faced online attacks and harassment after questioning Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on human rights concerns during his visit to the United States. Siddiqui asked Modi how he plans to improve minority rights and freedom of speech, leading to accusations and conspiracy theories against her on social media. The Wall Street Journal defended Siddiqui and condemned the harassment.

“It’s unacceptable, and we absolutely condemn any harassment of journalists anywhere under any circumstances”

— John Kirby, USA National Security Council spokesman

India:

Telugu journalist **Thulasi Chandu** faces relentless online abuse and death threats, raising serious concerns about her safety. Her steadfast dedication to impactful journalism has made her a prominent target of right-wing organizations for over three years. The severity of these threats has reached a disturbing level, leading her to believe that her life is in immediate jeopardy.

“One day I will fall, be killed. Let it be, but by then, at least allow me to record my agony and isolated voice”

— Thulasi Chandu



2 women journalists
subjected to online
harassment

A woman journalist deported

Lebanon:

On June 7, Kuwaiti TV host **Fajer Al-Saeed** was denied entry into Lebanon, deported, and informed that she is permanently barred from the country. Al-Saeed believes her entry ban is politically motivated due to her past criticism of Hezbollah. Al-Saeed is well-known in Lebanon and was traveling there to shoot an episode for a program.

“I want to ask those who prevented me from entering Lebanon: Can they prevent my voice from reaching the Lebanese people?”
— Fajer Al-Saeed

A woman journalist fired

United States:

On June 29, **Madeline Odle**, a producer at a Michigan TV station, was fired for criticizing a memo that ordered reporters to ease up on LGBTQI-focused stories during Pride. The memo, sent by Assistant News Director Amy Fox, received backlash from staff members who argued it compromised journalistic integrity. Odle is now facing unexpected career changes as she is unable to work in another newsroom due to a non-compete clause.

The Coalition For Women In Journalism is astonished at Nexstar’s decision to fire Madeline Odle and Luke Stier. The company’s review of the memo found it to be against its policies and concluded that those who wrote it should be terminated. Considering these findings, firing the two producers for allegedly bringing news of this misconduct to light is excessive.



A woman journalist
deported, while
another one fired

A woman journalist's accreditation revoked

Belarus:

On June 30, the Belarusian border services delivered a document to **Justyna Prus**, a PAP correspondent, informing her that she has been prohibited from entering the country for a duration of five years despite possessing valid accreditation from Minsk. Unfortunately, no specific reasons or options for appeal were provided regarding this ban. The notification simply referred to the legal requirements for the presence of foreign individuals in Belarus.

2 women journalists acquitted

Hong Kong:

On June 5, documentary journalist **Bao Choy** won her appeal against a conviction for accessing vehicle registration records. The Court of Final Appeal ruled that Choy had been subjected to a "substantial and grave injustice." Her victory is seen as a significant moment for press freedom, as her conviction marked the first time a journalist had been found guilty of accessing public vehicle registration information.

"I haven't felt happy about something in a long time. Maybe a lot of people feel the same way. So let us all enjoy this moment of happiness"

— Bao Choy

Türkiye:

On June 8, Sendika.org correspondent **Derya Saadet** was acquitted of a terrorism-related charge filed against her for a retweet. Part of a case against 37 people, Saadet — who was charged on Nov 26, 2022 — was acquitted in the second hearing due to the "absence of criminal facts."

A woman journalist's
accreditation revoked,
while 2 women
journalists acquitted



South Africa:

On June 7, Pietermaritzburg's High Court in South Africa ruled that former president Jacob Zuma's attempt to privately prosecute journalist **Karyn Maughan** was an abuse of power and a violation of media freedom. Zuma had launched a campaign to discredit Maughan, who had reported on information already in the public domain. The court's decision is seen as a victory for press freedom and a deterrent for those in power who target journalists.

“Former president Jacob Zuma and his supporters believed they could silence me with a meritless private prosecution and vicious online harassment, but they have unwittingly strengthened the very media freedom they sought to destroy”

— Karyn Maughan



Landmark court
win for one woman
journalist



**CFWIJ is working hard to change these
circumstances everyday.**
Join us in this mission



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