



# Freedom of the Press: Challenges in the Digital Age

12 – 26 June 2021

## Online Version

### Abstract

Freedom of the press or its modern equivalent, freedom of the media, has been and still is a central element of liberal thought and an important pillar of liberal societies. Why is this the case, what happens when it is weakened or threatened, and how free are media today?

On the one hand, new technologies provide us with new opportunities and enhance our freedom in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Today a majority of the world's population has access to media unparalleled in history, both as recipients and as producers of content.

With modern technology, however, old problems have not disappeared and new problems have emerged. Technology has all too often also enhanced the capabilities of authoritarian and populist regimes in harassing media professionals and bloggers; in censorship; in the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation; or in surveillance designed to intimidate. We have seen many examples of this during the COVID-19 pandemic. The perfection of techniques to limit the media joins legislation designed to curb freedom of expression by political measures designed to strengthen the hold political elites and their allies have on the media.

### Opportunities and Objectives

The online seminar will provide ample opportunity for an exchange of experiences and ideas with colleagues from around the world, and for interaction with a number of media experts. The aim is to find answers to questions such as the following:

- What can media professionals and others do to ensure that the press and other media fulfil their critical role in holding leaders to account and in providing quality services for their respective audiences?
- What can they do to protect their security and independence?
- How can freedom of the media be preserved, and enhanced where it is lacking?

### The Structure of the Seminar

First we will explore why freedom of the media is such a precious asset central to the proper functioning of a liberal democratic order and the rationale behind the right to freedom of expression: A right that is fundamental to the existence of a free press, a free broadcasting system and a free internet.

Secondly we will survey and evaluate the most important recent technological innovations and the effects they have had on

- the production and dissemination of information
- media professionals (and non-professionals) and the challenges they face.
- controls that such developments should be subjected to, by whom and how
- any intrinsic value in preserving and protecting traditional media
- laws governing the media and whether new technology requires them to be updated?

Thirdly will take a deeper look at the challenges and dangers confronting media professionals (and non-professionals) today with regard to their security, their freedom to investigate and to publish the results. It will address tendencies of “weaponisation” of news by state and private actors with an authoritarian or partisan agenda and include a number of practical exercises on how to expose or counter increasingly sophisticated techniques used by such actors. It explores trust in media professionals and, more generally, trustworthiness of information offered to the public. We will touch upon “echo chambers” and counter-strategies in social media.

Finally, we will combine the results of the previous parts into recommendations on how to strengthen media freedom and on how media professionals can address today’s challenges.

The seminar will take place online with participants expected to take part in joint sessions daily for max. 2-3 hours, and – additionally - to complete identified tasks on their own. Participants will work in regional and/ or topical working groups, and are prepared to give input to the plenary.

## Target Group

The online seminar addresses professionals in positions of responsibility from all media dealing with news and opinion (e.g., journalists, bloggers, and press officers), liberal politicians and experts specialising in media issues, and non-governmental organisation activists with a specific interest in promoting freedom of the media. All candidates should be liberal in outlook and have a basic knowledge of what liberalism is and, in particular, of its values and objectives. This online seminar aims to be an exchange of experts on appropriate ways of dealing with the challenges facing the media - and not as a basic introduction to the topics presented above.

## Facilitators



### Kylie Hatton

Kylie Hatton is Director for Communication & Marketing at the University of Cape Town, the top university in Africa. She has deep experience in all forms of communication, especially online communication platforms. Due to the environments that she has worked in she has particular experience in crisis communication. Prior to joining UCT she worked for the City of Cape Town, one of South Africa’s largest and leading municipalities, as the Manager: Media. Kylie was responsible for the oversight of all of the City’s media engagement and relationships. She served 6 Mayors during her time at the City. She has also worked for the international non-government sector as well as South Africa’s Parliament. She facilitates seminars and workshops on topics such as media and social media, communication, local government, strategic planning and public transport.



### Veni Swai

Veni Swai is a passionate human rights and media advocate, community organizer for civic engagement and entrepreneurial empowerment, and a political parties' strategist. Her recent media engagements include the *Media Freedom Pulse Digital* project, a safe online platform for journalists to exchange their experiences, as well as a documentary on the impact that women as journalists have in the media industry from Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, and Zimbabwe.

Veni holds Bachelor of Education degree and Master of Development Studies from the University of Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania, a *New Aid Architect* certificate from the University of Antwerp, and one on Policy Advocacy and Program Management from MS-TCDC, Arusha, Tanzania. Since 2005 she works as the East African Program Officer for Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

## The Foundation

We, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, promote individual liberty, free and open societies and free markets in Germany and throughout the world. To us freedom is the guiding principle in policy making. We believe that free and open societies are the only societies that allow human beings to decide for themselves what is best, to develop their full potential and to pursue their dreams. This is what we mean when we claim to value human dignity. And it is freedom that produces prosperity. Together with our counterparts – who all share a similar set of values – we support initiatives in Germany and abroad that serve to enhance respect for the rule of law, private property and human rights, that foster tolerance and that strengthen economic freedom rights and democracy.



The programs of the Foundation's International Academy for Leadership (IAF) form an integral part of our international work and offer Liberals from all parts of the world opportunities to engage in dialogue, an exchange of ideas, networking and cooperation. We aim to inspire.

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**Venue:** Online

**Language:** English

**Registration:** 14 May 2021



All successful participants will be awarded an official certificate by the International Academy for Leadership for completing this course and enter into the IAF Alumni network.



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