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Before Ukraine's Fifth Winter of Full-Scale War: A Call to Protect Journalists and Sustain Independent Media

A joint appeal by the International Advisory Council of the Journalists' Solidarity Centers to governments, international institutions, media organisations, journalists' unions and donors

With autumn approaching, Ukrainian journalists are preparing for a fifth winter of full-scale war. Security threats continue to evolve, while the international support sustaining essential safety infrastructure has become increasingly uncertain.

The International Advisory Council of the Journalists' Solidarity Centers — bringing together experts in press freedom, journalists' safety, media resilience and media development and convened by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine — calls on governments, international institutions, media organisations, journalists' unions and donors to treat the safety and sustainability of Ukrainian journalism as an urgent, long-term commitment.

A HIGH-RISK ZONE THAT KEEPS EXPANDING

For journalists, the front line is no longer defined only by proximity to Russian positions. Reconnaissance and first-person-view (FPV) drones can strike vehicles and other civilian targets with little or no warning. Journalists also face the danger of follow-up strikes on locations already hit, putting reporters, rescuers and medics at risk.

Frontline journalists have reported to NUJU and the teams of the Journalists' Solidarity Centers that, in some areas, the high-risk drone zone can now extend up to 30 kilometres from Russian positions. For those working in these areas, personal drone detectors are becoming essential safety equipment alongside lightweight body armour offering fragmentation protection. At its founding meeting, the Council also heard directly from journalists in Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia that such equipment has already saved lives.



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“The drone detector I received from the Journalists’ Solidarity Center saved my life. While delivering newspapers to communities near the Russian border, I had to flee from a drone and an explosion,” a frontline newspaper editor in eastern Ukraine, in testimony shared with the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine

A TOLL THAT OUTLASTS THE HEADLINES

The harm extends far beyond physical danger. Journalists across Ukraine describe accumulating psychological exhaustion after more than four years of full-scale war. Displaced media teams have had to rebuild newsrooms from scratch, while war correspondents continue working after serious injuries and repeated exposure to attacks.

Women journalists face additional and often gender-specific pressures. Alongside the risks shared by all media workers, they may be exposed to sexual and gender-based harassment, threats and online abuse. Displacement and care responsibilities can further deepen exhaustion and make it harder to access assignments, training or opportunities for recovery. Safety assistance must therefore include confidential, gender-sensitive psychological and legal support, effective reporting mechanisms and protective equipment properly fitted for women.

Local and regional media — often the only reliable source of information for communities living under direct threat — face severe economic pressure. Some frontline newsrooms have lost their offices altogether. Families of journalists held in Russian detention carry a further, largely invisible burden.

Psychological support, rest and recovery must be treated as integral parts of journalists’ safety. Burnout affects judgement, reaction time and the ability to continue working in high-risk environments.

A SAFETY NETWORK UNDER GROWING FINANCIAL PRESSURE

Since 2022, the Journalists’ Solidarity Centers established by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine have become a key part of Ukraine’s journalist safety infrastructure. The network provides safe workspaces,



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protective equipment, training, legal and psychological assistance, emergency support and remote consultations through seven Centers, including four serving frontline and border regions.

Short-term project cycles and recent interruptions in international funding have made the network's core budget increasingly difficult to predict, even as Nordic publishers, European journalists' unions and other partners have strengthened their solidarity.

Previous winters have brought intensive Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, and the risk of renewed attacks remains high. Without predictable support, the Centers may struggle to maintain backup power, heating and reliable connectivity precisely when journalists and local newsrooms need these services most.

WHAT WE CALL FOR

→ Fund years, not emergencies.

Provide multi-year, predictable support for proven journalist safety infrastructure, including the Journalists' Solidarity Centers. Essential services should not be placed at risk by recurring funding gaps.

→ Winterise before the strikes begin.

Fund backup power, heating and reliable connectivity for the Centers before winter. This infrastructure must be ready before the first major blackout rather than restored afterwards.

→ Keep pace with the drone threat.

Sustain and expand the supply of drone detectors and lightweight body armour offering fragmentation protection. The equipment available to journalists must evolve as rapidly as the threats they face.

→ **Make journalist safety gender-responsive.** Ensure that women journalists have access to properly fitted body armour and other protective equipment, confidential psychological and legal assistance, digital security support and effective responses to sexual and gender-based harassment and threats, both online and offline.

→ Make recovery a safety priority.

Include psychological support, rest and recovery for war correspondents and frontline newsroom teams in international assistance programmes on the same footing as protective equipment and safety training.

Ukrainian journalists have kept their country and the world informed through more than four years of full-scale war, often at extraordinary personal cost. The international response should match the importance of the work they continue to do.

International Advisory Council of the Journalists' Solidarity Centers

Council members endorsing this appeal:

Randi S. Øgrey — CEO, Norwegian Media Businesses' Association; Chair, Ukrainian Media Fund Nordic

Mogens Schmidt — Senior Adviser on Press Freedom and Media Development; Chair, IRMI Ukraine; former Deputy Assistant Director-General of UNESCO

Ruth Kronenburg — Executive Director, Free Press Unlimited

Tine Johansen — Principal, Brandbjerg Højskole; former President, Danish Union of Journalists

Andrea Roth — Vice-President, Bavarian Journalists' Association; Chair of the Europe Commission of the German Journalists' Association (DJV); member of the EFJ Steering Committee

Anna Del Frio — Vice-President, Association of Journalists of Lombardy; former member of the EFJ Steering Committee

Jennifer Moreau — Vice-President, International Federation of Journalists; Unifor (Canada)

Convened and coordinated by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine:

Sergiy Tomilenko — President, National Union of Journalists of Ukraine

Lina Kushch — First Secretary, National Union of Journalists of Ukraine

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the International Advisory Council

This appeal follows the founding meeting of the International Advisory Council of the Journalists' Solidarity Centers, held on 24 August 2026, Ukraine's Independence Day.

Convened by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, the Council brings together experts in press freedom, journalists' safety, media resilience and media development from Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Norway and the Netherlands. At its founding meeting, members heard directly from journalists working in the frontline regions of Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia and from teams representing the nationwide network of Journalists' Solidarity Centers.

About the Journalists' Solidarity Centers

The nationwide network was established by NUJU in April 2022 with support from the International Federation of Journalists and the European Federation of Journalists. UNESCO Headquarters is a key partner of the network.

The Centers operate continuously in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Sumy, Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk and support journalists and media workers from all regions of Ukraine.

From 2022 through July 2026, the network processed 10,573 requests for assistance, including:

- 2,151 requests for protective equipment made available free of charge for temporary use, including ballistic vests, helmets, drone detectors and individual first-aid kits;
- emergency financial assistance for 879 journalists and media outlets affected by attacks, injury, displacement or other emergencies;
- 953 legal consultations; and
- financial support for 277 regional media outlets.

The Centers assist Ukrainian and foreign journalists, war correspondents, wounded and displaced media workers, freelancers, frontline newsrooms and families of journalists held in Russian detention, regardless of nationality.