

Victims vs culprits: The two types of journalists

This Sunday, May 3, will be World Press Freedom Day. As always, it is an opportunity not just for journalists but for all who care about journalism and communications to reflect on where we are, where we have been, and where we are going as a sector.

This year's theme, "Shaping a Future at Peace: Promoting Press Freedom for Human Rights, Development, and Security," is particularly important and opportune because it speaks directly to the events in the world today, particularly the conflict in the Middle East, where journalism has become both a victim and a culprit.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "As of early 2026, over 260 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023, making it the deadliest conflict for the press in decades."

It has not been any better across in Lebanon, where "at least 27 journalists have been killed in Israeli attacks since March 2, along with many others wounded," according to a statement by the Lebanese Press Syndicate Editors issued on April 23. Ms Amal Khalil, a 43-year-old Lebanese journalist for Al-Akhar being the latest. She was killed by an Israeli airstrike in southern Lebanon on April 22.

This year alone, at least 15 journalists and media workers have been killed between January and late March 2026, according to CPJ. Overall, at least 368 journalists were killed in the last three years: 129 in 2025, 124 in 2024, 99 in 2023, and about 17 this year.

These are victim journalists, the collateral damage of wars and conflicts.

The state of Israel that has orchestrated genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, also stands accused of "journalicide" – the deliberate killing of journalists – with at least 273

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Public Editor



journalists killed, primarily in Gaza, with some in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran.

Where are the culprit journalists? There are many of us ensconced in air-conditioned newsrooms, in peaceful capitals of the world – particularly in the West – that continue to report on conflicts in a manner that fuels the violence, justifies wars, and covers up war crimes, shields perpetrators from accountability, whitewashes wanton tragedies, are ambiguous in coverage of conflicts, etc.

We use phrases like "unprovoked invasion/attack", "right to self-defence", selectively depending on who the aggressor and victims are. We mock victims of war and praise their malevolent abusers/attackers.

We are the journalists who have joined the real culprits [politicians] to sanitise evil, wars, lawlessness, etc. The famous adage about "journalism comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable" has been lost. We shield the powerful and condemn the weak. We praise the rogues and denounce their victims.

We journalists in Africa are culprits by association, thanks to "innocent" actions of simply lifting "western" wire stories and serving them to our audiences complete in

their skewed frames. If you have read a story in your local newspaper lifted from any of the Western agencies about the conflict in the Middle East, then you know what I am talking about.

Because mainstream journalism's coverage of conflicts is largely wanting, citizen journalists are filling the gaps on social media, particularly YouTube, where robust presentations of different topical events are bringing perspectives that would otherwise be buried.

So, as we mark this year's World Press Freedom Day, it is important that we collectively and individually reflect on the theme and ask ourselves whether our journalism builds peace or feeds war. Whether we speak for human rights or for abuse of human rights. Whether our journalism fosters development or feeds anarchy. Whether we are for the powerful or for the vulnerable. Et cetera!

Readers have their say

Bainomugisha Godfrey: Thank you for your efforts in providing balanced information. It is truly appreciated. However, I would like to highlight a few areas that could benefit from more attention. There has been limited coverage of schools serving learners with disabilities, such as Bushenyi Primary School in Ruhandagazi, and their need for a platform to share their experiences.

Additionally, more space could be given to young people aspiring to leadership at both district and national levels, so they can express their ideas and perspectives. There also appears to be minimal focus on environmental issues, particularly in terms of in-depth reporting and support for scaling up innovations in this space.

Public Editor: Thank you for your feedback and the issues you have raised therein. I have shared them with the editors for consideration.

Send your feedback/complaints to public-editor@ug.nationmedia.com or call/text on +256 776 500725. WhatsApp +256 752 500725