



UNESCO

Welcome Delegates,

My name is Geraldine Aceves, and I am delighted to be one of your Chairs in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Committee (UNESCO) for the 22nd CancunMUN conference! I am 16 years old and currently a junior at the International American School of Cancun. In my free time, I enjoy watching movies and series, going to the gym and hanging out with my friends. Once I graduate, I haven't really decided what I am going to study, but I would like to do something related to business and law.

This will be my seventh MUN experience. I have been a delegate in CancunMUN twice, once in UNDP and the other in UNHRC. I have also had the opportunity to be a delegate two times in PlayaMUN, one in LaSalleMUN and one time in New York at CMUNCE. I am thrilled to take part in UNESCO, which deals with building international peace and cooperation in the areas of education, the sciences and culture. I believe it is crucial to address these problems that mark who we are as people.

Once again I am eager to be your Chair in UNESCO, and really looking forward to working with all of you! I expect my delegates to be respectful and well-mannered, as well as to be prepared and ready. Please remember to investigate thoroughly beyond the background guide, as it should not be your only source of research.

I am confident that I will do my possible best to have an incredible committee and make this a great conference for everyone. If you have any doubts, please do not hesitate to contact me at [geraldine.aceves@ciac.edu.mx](mailto:geraldine.aceves@ciac.edu.mx), good luck and see you soon delegates!

Geraldine Aceves, Chair

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Welcome Delegates,

My name is Atenea Estulin, and I'm beyond excited to be your co-chair for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for CancunMUN 2025. I'm 17 years old, and a senior at the International American School of Cancun. During my free time, I like to play piano, hang out with loved ones and read. I am passionate about doing acts to help those around me, both in my future career and in real life. Once I graduate, I would either like to study psychology or business.

I've been to a few Model United Nations conferences, this one being my 3rd one. The first time I participated in MUN, I was a delegate in the General Assembly in the 11th grade, and at the CMUNCE conference in New York, I was a delegate in the World Health Organization. I am joyful to take part in this committee, given that its mission is to contribute to the building of a culture of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information.

As your co-chair for UNESCO, I expect all delegates to be responsible and respectful, and to come prepared with thorough research beyond the background guide. While the guide provides a foundation, it shouldn't be your only source of information. I encourage you to investigate various perspectives and analyze credible sources to enhance the quality of debate. I look forward to working with each of you and witnessing engaging discussions that lead to meaningful resolutions. The most important thing is that you enjoy your experience!

If you have any questions or doubts, please feel free to contact me [atatenea.estulin@ciac.edu.mx](mailto:atatenea.estulin@ciac.edu.mx).

Atenea Estulin, Co-chair  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



## COMMITTEE MISSION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a specialized agency committed to build up people's global kinship via the advancement of education, science, culture, and communication. This committee goes by a principle, give rise to tools and acquire knowledge in order to generate solutions to some of the most impactful challenges of today's world, and promote a world with more equality and peace. With the work of 194 Member States across the globe, UNESCO accomplishes work on safeguarding biodiversity, acting in response to artificial intelligence, accomplishing first-rate education, conserving heritage, and providing accessibility to reliable information.

# Topic A: Combating the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property

## Introduction

Robbery, plundering, and illicit trafficking of cultural property are prevalent concerns that slowly diminish the world's heritage and identity of each nation. This continuous furtive trading concerns the unauthorized shifting and vending of cultural artifacts, which commonly leads to the inevitable and indefinite loss of irreplaceable cultural and historical heritage and information.

Provinces with abundant cultural heritage, including Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, are especially in jeopardy from this form of abuse. This situation worsens in conflict zones, where plundering and trafficking of cultural artifacts are constantly becoming a profitable business for crime organizations and terrorists.

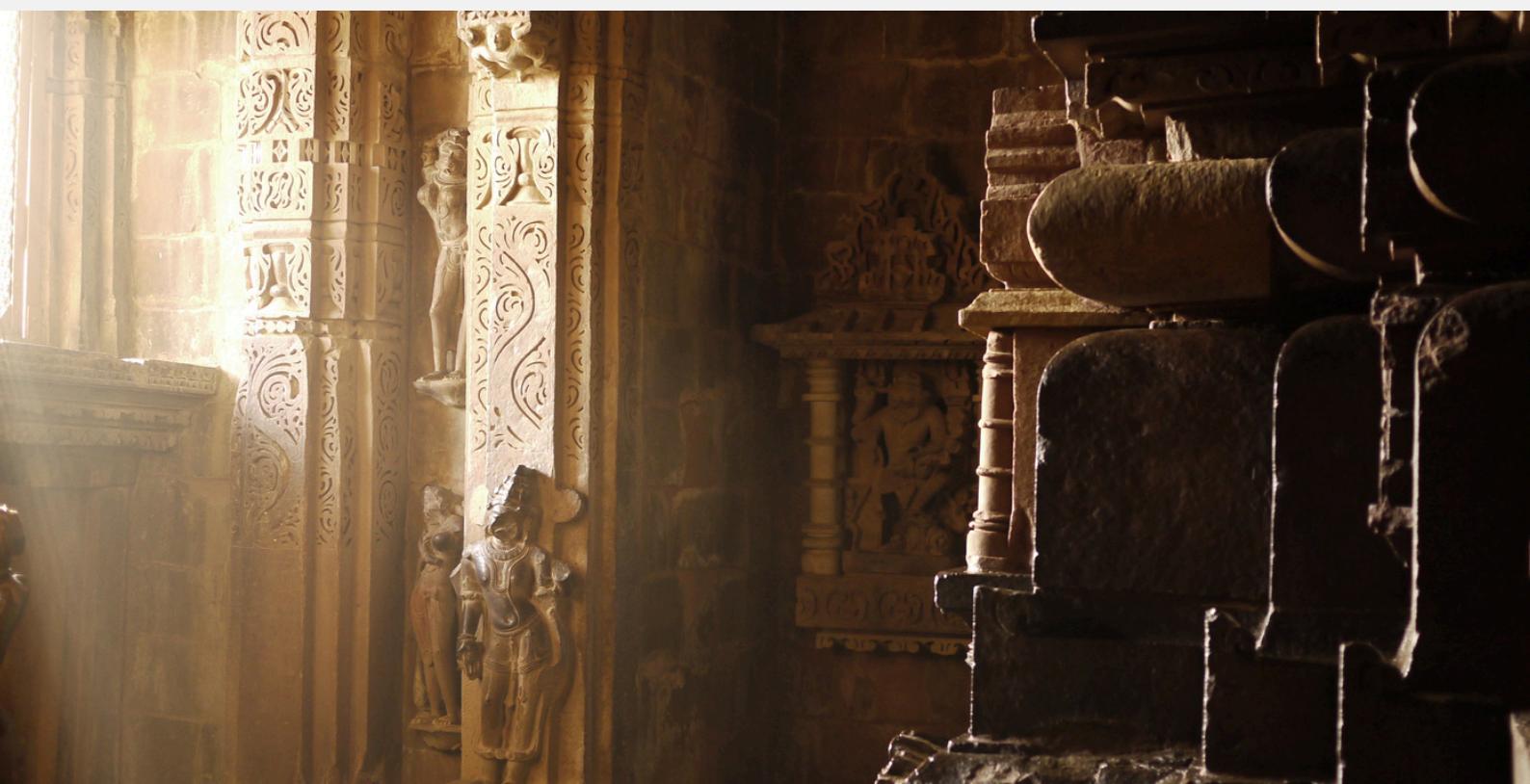
Combating illicit trafficking has the sole purpose of conserving the cultural heritage that forms the basis of a nation and its history. The absence of cultural artifacts wipes out a community's story, debilitates the nation's unity, and encourages criminal activities. For those reasons, vigorous measures and international cooperation are vitally important to prevent the illegal appropriation and illicit trade of cultural artifacts, guaranteeing the safety of each culture's heritage for future generations.

## History

The illicit trafficking of cultural property has become a long-term matter that is constantly affecting various countries, accelerating the number of notable losses of cultural and historical heritage. Throughout history,

various nation's cultural property has been raided, stolen, and illegally traded, often during disputes and vulnerability. Many attempts have been made over the years to manage this problem; this has resulted in multiple international conventions and leads intended to look after cultural heritage and put a stop to illicit trading.

One of the initial international attempts to safeguard cultural property occurred in 1954 with the acquisition of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. It was a convention to respond to the worldwide wrecking and sacking of cultural artifacts during World War II. This convention gave the first international legal framework designed for protecting cultural heritage during armed conflicts, making signatory states stand in the need to safeguard their cultural sites and avoid their illicit removal or permanent destruction. Nevertheless, despite the convention, multiple occurrences of cultural property theft have carried on, for the most part in conflict zones.



UNESCO established the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in 1970, and it is still nowadays one of the most noteworthy legal tools in the means of striking illicit trafficking. This convention initiated directions to stop the illegal trading of antiquities by mandating states to execute laws that work for the prohibition of unauthorized trafficking of cultural possessions. Additionally, it highlights the crucial need to give back stolen antiquities to their country of origin and further encourage international cooperation in tracing and repossessing lost cultural property.

In 1995, further attempts were made through the acquisition of the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects. In contrast to the 1970s UNESCO convention (which specifically involved state-level action), the UNIDROIT convention came up with more specific legal measures directed at private institutions and individuals. It accelerates the restoration of looted or illegally exported cultural property by setting up organized guidelines on return claims and management of owners of cultural objects.



Global actors such as NGOs (Non-governmental organizations) have also developed a key role in the topic of illicit trafficking. Organizations including the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and INTERPOL have enhanced databases and instruments to trace looted cultural objects. The Red Lists of Cultural Objects at Risk, created by the ICOM, works as a guide to assist the authorities in identifying and protecting vulnerable cultural artifacts. On the contrary, the INTERPOL keeps an international database of robbed cultural objects by helping agencies of law enforcement point out and get back stolen property across nations.

By labeling the instant connection between organized crime and illegal cultural property trafficking, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has also come up with solutions to address the issue. The UNODC acknowledged that most of the time, stolen artifacts profit criminal organizations, including terrorist groups. In response, they implemented plans of action to derange criminal networks that participate in the trafficking of cultural property.

Regardless of the efforts being made, the illegal trafficking of cultural property still carries on, mainly in conflict zones and politically unstable areas. A catastrophic and unfortunate example took place in Iraq in 2003 when extensive plundering occurred right after an invasion of the country. The Iraq Museum in Baghdad was looted, following the mislaying of numerous indispensable antiquities. Many of these stolen items have been found on the black market, now being owned by foreign

museums and private collectors.

Likewise, the occurring conflict in Syria has affected the large-scale sacking of archeological sites and cultural organizations. The rabid organization ISIS has strategically robbed and then sold antiquities to finance its activities, and in the process, ISIS has destroyed historical sites like Palmyra. As a solution, in 2015, the United Nations Security Council endorsed Resolution 2199, which directly forbade trading in cultural property from the nations of Syria and Iraq to cut off funding sources for terrorist organizations.

While various robbed artifacts have been able to be recuperated and returned to their nation of origin, difficulties persist with the rise of online marketplaces, as these work as a tool for traffickers in order for them to easily sell the artifacts anonymously.

## **Current Situation**

The illicit trafficking of cultural property continues to exist today as a major problem, and it is constantly being worsened by hostilities, political unrest, and the use of the internet as an easy online marketplace for incognito sales. Cultural property continues to be robbed and illegally traded regardless of the previously mentioned international agreements and monitoring systems, resulting in funds for crime organizations and terrorist groups.

Recently, there have been various reports calling attention to the escalating importance of digital platforms, which have been used to accelerate the process of selling artifacts. These platforms have been

authorizing traffickers to trade and sell stolen cultural property with minimal to no regulations. Auction houses, social media platforms, and the dark web are some examples of digital marketplaces where this has been often occurring. Nation's poor strict supervision has been a cause of the difficulty in tracking and getting back stolen cultural property.

Various new action plans have been executed to strike this issue. UNESCO set in motion an amplified version of their Database of National and Cultural Heritage Laws in 2022, which now permits customs authorities and law enforcement to justify the legal conditions of cultural property. INTERPOL also developed their Stolen Works of Art Database by now including AI technology to upgrade the tracking strategies of stolen cultural objects and their recuperation.

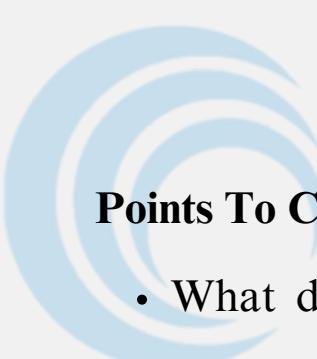
International organizations and governments did as well more hostile legal parts. In 2019, the European Union passed more strict regulations for imports of cultural goods; they made it obligatory to show evidence of legal exportation to be allowed to enter the product into the marketplace. The United States also took part and constituted a Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act in 2021, which is currently increasing sanctions for the people who get caught in an illegal trading activity involving heritage artifacts from a nation, and it is also building up a rightful cooperation with the nations that have lost cultural property and helping them recover it.

Moreover, escalating efforts have been made by NGOs to help with the tracing of illegal trading routes and the aspect of education regarding

raising awareness of cultural preservation importance; Non-governmental organizations such as the Antiquities Coalition and the World Customs Organization are the most remarkable ones that are currently leading the act of change. Numerous auction houses and museums are also currently executing more severe investigations to make certain that it is impossible to sack the nation's artifacts.

Regardless of these actions taking place, current conflicts have also worsened the illicit trafficking of cultural property. In Sudan and Ukraine, current war conflicts have led to an increase in property theft, including a rise in profit in illegal marketplaces. Correspondingly, global institutions are now pressing intensely for more strict measures in enforcement, expanding the transparency in the trading of art, and making stronger connections with law enforcement agencies, private organizations, and other governments.





## Points To Consider:

- What determines the challenges that hinder full implementation of international laws combating illicit trafficking in cultural property?
- What measures can be taken to better regulate digital platforms and online marketplaces to ensure that stolen cultural artifacts are not being sold?
- What responsibility do private collectors, museums, and auction houses have to verify provenance of cultural property?
- What lessons are there from your country with respect to decriminalization that could be learned from by the rest of the world?
- How can a country help raise public awareness and support ethical practices in the art and antiquities trade?

## Useful Links:

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<https://unctad.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0abKfEc2uRg>

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## COUNTRY BOX

Afghanistan

Australia

Brazil

Canada

China

Colombia

Egypt

France

Germany

India

Iran

Iraq

Israel

Italy

Mexico

Nigeria

Pakistan

Russia

Saudi Arabia

South Africa

Spain

Syria

Turkey

Ukraine

United Arab

Emirates

United Kingdom

United States

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*FALSE TRADES: UNCOVERING the SCALE and SCOPE of TRAFFICKING in CULTURAL*

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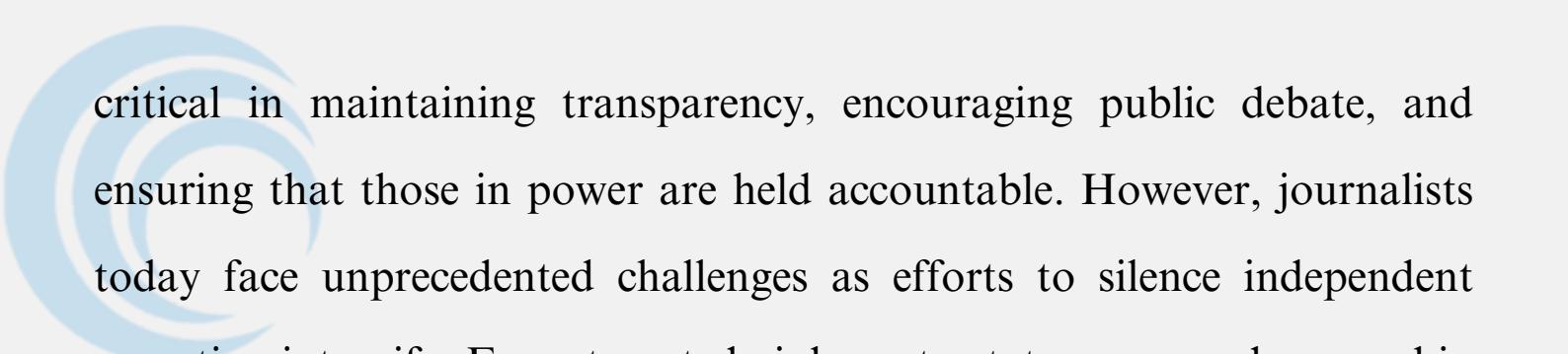
## Topic B: Threats to Freedom of the Press: Violence, Disinformation & Censorship

### Introduction:

Freedom of the press is a central point democratic societies, enabling the free flow of information, promoting government transparency, and empowering citizens to make informed decisions. A free and independent media is essential for a healthy democracy providing a critical check on power by holding governments, businesses, and other institutions accountable. Journalists, by exposing corruption, human rights violations, and abuses of power, contribute to a more just and equitable world. However, in recent years, press freedom has come under increasing threat from both state and non-state actors who seek to silence menacing voices and control narratives.

The modern threats to press freedom are multifaceted and complex. Violence against journalists, ranging from harassment and intimidation to imprisonment and assassination has surged in various parts of the world. At the same time, disinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by state entities or interest groups, have eroded public trust in the media and distorted public discourse. Censorship, both overt and covert, continues to restrict the free flow of information, especially in authoritarian regimes. These threats not only endanger journalists but also undermine democratic values and limit citizens' access to truthful and unbiased information.

Around the world, the role of the press has become increasingly



critical in maintaining transparency, encouraging public debate, and ensuring that those in power are held accountable. However, journalists today face unprecedented challenges as efforts to silence independent reporting intensify. From targeted violence to state-sponsored censorship and the deliberate spread of false information, these threats undermine democratic principles and erode public trust in media institutions. Protecting press freedom is essential not only for safeguarding human rights but also for fostering informed, resilient, and democratic societies.

## **History:**

The concept of press freedom has deep historical roots, emerging alongside the evolution of democratic governance. An early defense of press freedom was made by the poet John Milton in his 1644 pamphlet *Areopagitica*, written in response to the British Parliament's passage of a law requiring the government to approve all books prior to publication. "Truth and understanding," Milton argued, "are not such wares as to be monopolized and traded in by tickets and statutes, and standards." This sentiment appeared to win legal recognition on the other side of the Atlantic when in 1733 New York newspaper publisher John Peter Zenger, in a landmark jury trial, was acquitted of seditious libel on the grounds that the articles he printed, which were harshly critical of New York's colonial governor, were nonetheless based on fact. Twenty-five years after the Freedom of the Press Act came into force in Sweden, the framers of the U.S. Constitution enshrined the same principle in the document's First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom

of speech, or the press.”

On December 2, 1766, the Swedish parliament passed legislation that is now recognized as the world’s first law supporting the freedom of the press and freedom of information. Furthermore, the Freedom of the Press Act abolished the Swedish government’s role as a censor of printed matter, and it allowed for the official activities of the government to be made public. More broadly, the law codified the principle, which has since become a foundation of democracies throughout the world, that individual citizens of a state should be able to express and disseminate information without fear of retaliation.

The notion that the press should be free could have emerged only after the press itself had become commonplace. The invention of mechanized printing in the 15th century led to the proliferation of books, newspapers, and other publications that spread ideas faster and farther than ever before. However, because of the potential for these ideas to challenge official power structures, some political and religious authorities actively suppressed publications that they deemed subversive.

In the 20th century, global efforts to safeguard press freedom gained momentum with the formation of international organizations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, explicitly recognized freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information. UNESCO, established in 1945, took a leading role in promoting freedom of the press as a cornerstone of democracy, fostering global standards for media ethics and journalist



protections.

During the Cold War, the struggle for press freedom became a proxy battle between opposing ideologies. While democratic nations emphasized media independence, authoritarian regimes tightly controlled the press to suppress dissent. In Eastern Europe, state-controlled media served as propaganda tools, while dissidents risked imprisonment for publishing underground newspapers, or samizdat. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s brought newfound press freedoms to many countries; however, these gains proved fragile in the face of economic pressures, political corruption, and the resurgence of authoritarianism.

The advent of the internet and digital technologies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries revolutionized journalism, enabling instant access to information and the rapid dissemination of news. While digital platforms democratized information-sharing, they also introduced new challenges. Governments and corporations began exploiting surveillance technologies to monitor journalists, while online harassment and threats became increasingly common. High-profile cases, such as the 2018 assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, underscored the growing risks faced by media professionals.

Effectively, the history of press freedom in the United States —an important country in setting international standards— is far more complicated than a simple constitutional right suggests. Over time, the meaning of the First Amendment has changed greatly. The Supreme

Court largely ignored the First Amendment until the 20th century, leaving the scope of press freedom to state courts and legislatures. Since World War I, jurisprudence has greatly expanded the types of publication protected from government interference. The press now has broad rights to publish criticism of public officials, salacious material, private information, national security secrets, and much else. To understand the shifting history of press freedom, however, it is important to understand not only the expansion of formal constitutional rights but also how those rights have been shaped by such factors as economic transformations in the newspaper industry, the evolution of professional standards in the press, and the broader political and cultural relations between politicians and the press.

International responses to these challenges have included the establishment of legal frameworks and monitoring mechanisms. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012) aimed to create a coordinated global approach to protecting journalists and addressing crimes against them. Regional bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, have also played a crucial role in upholding press freedoms. Despite these efforts, violations of press freedom remain widespread, highlighting the need for renewed international collaboration and legal enforcement.

### **Current situation:**

In today's global landscape, threats to press freedom are pervasive and complex. According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index published



by Reporters Without Borders, journalism is fully or partially blocked in over 70% of countries. Nations such as China, North Korea, and Iran maintain strict government control over media, suppressing dissent and punishing critical reporting. In Russia, independent media outlets have been systematically dismantled, with new laws criminalizing the dissemination of "false information" about the government's activities, particularly concerning the war in Ukraine.

Even in established democracies, press freedom is under siege. The spread of disinformation through social media platforms has polarized public discourse and diminished trust in traditional news outlets. Foreign interference in elections, exemplified by the 2016 U.S. presidential election, highlighted how disinformation campaigns can undermine democratic processes. Economic pressures have also affected the independence of journalism, with media conglomerates consolidating ownership and reducing diversity in news coverage.

Violence against journalists remains a critical concern. In Mexico, for instance, drug cartels target investigative journalists reporting on corruption and organized crime, making it one of the most dangerous countries for media workers. In conflict zones like Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, journalists risk their lives to document war crimes and human rights abuses. The rise of digital surveillance has further endangered journalists, with governments using spyware tools such as Pegasus to monitor communications and stifle investigative reporting.

## Points to consider:

- How does your country define and implement protections for freedom of the press?
- What legal frameworks exist to ensure the safety of journalists in your country?
- How does disinformation affect public trust in media and government institutions?
- What strategies can be employed to combat online disinformation without infringing on free speech?
- To what extent is censorship used in your country, and what are its official justifications?
- How can international organizations, such as UNESCO, facilitate global cooperation to protect journalists?
- What responsibilities do social media platforms have in preventing the spread of disinformation?
- How can governments balance national security concerns with the protection of press freedom?
- In what ways do economic pressures, such as media monopolies and declining advertising revenue, impact press independence?
- What measures can be taken to ensure the safety of journalists reporting from conflict zones?
- How can international sanctions be used effectively against countries that systematically violate press freedoms?
- What role should civil society organizations play in advocating for press freedom and holding governments accountable?

## Useful links:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/threats-freedom-press-violence-disinformation-censorship>

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/books/violence-against-journalists-a-tool-to-restrict-press-freedom-in-mexico/>

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