

International Conference on Protection of Journalists in Armed Conflicts kicks off



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Doha, October 8 (QNA) – The international conference on the protection of journalists in armed conflict zones opened Wednesday in Doha, organized by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) in cooperation with Al Jazeera Public Liberties and Human Rights Centre (PLHRC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The two-day conference, inaugurated by HE Maryam bint Abdullah Al Attiyah, Chairperson of NHRC, gathers international experts, media professionals, diplomats, and human rights advocates to discuss practical mechanisms for strengthening journalist safety, addressing impunity for crimes against them, and ensuring greater protection in war zones and dangerous environments.

In her opening remarks, HE Al Attiyah said the event reflects NHRC's strong commitment to monitoring journalists' conditions in conflict areas and following up on previous recommendations, including the 2012 Doha Declaration. She noted that several of its outcomes have been incorporated into UN resolutions, including the creation of a specialized unit for journalist safety within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

HE Al Attiyah emphasized the vital role of journalists in exposing human rights violations and humanitarian crises, often at great personal risk. She said the systematic targeting of journalists, their families, and their communities seeks to silence the truth, which is unacceptable under international law and demands an urgent global response.

"It is no longer enough to express condemnation," she said. "The growing scale of violations demands collective action involving governments, national institutions, and UN bodies to activate international legal frameworks, ensure accountability, and prevent recurrence."

She reaffirmed that NHRC will continue to work with partners to follow up on the implementation of this conference's outcomes, stressing that protecting journalists remains a top priority in support of truth, justice, and the right to information.

Speaking at the opening session, HE Sheikh Nasser bin Faisal Al-Thani, Director General of Al Jazeera Media Network, said the blood of Al Jazeera journalists in Gaza "has not yet dried" as journalism faces challenges that threaten its humanitarian role. He said 22 Al Jazeera journalists, including 10 in Gaza, have been killed while performing their duties.

"The press is not a party to conflict; it is a lens for truth and a voice for victims," he said, urging the UN Security Council to prioritize the safety of journalists and ensure implementation of relevant Human Rights Council resolutions. Sheikh Nasser called for stronger global solidarity among media institutions, governments, and human rights organizations to end impunity for crimes against journalists.

He also recalled the 2016 Doha Declaration on the Protection of Journalists, endorsed by UNESCO and the Human Rights Council, describing it as a landmark initiative led by a media organization within the UN framework.

In a recorded message, Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, stressed that journalist safety is essential not only for

protecting lives but also for safeguarding the public's right to reliable information. He reiterated UNESCO's ongoing commitment to strengthening international cooperation, national mechanisms, and training programs under the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists.

Ourveena Geereesha Topsy-Sonoo, Commissioner and Special Rapporteur at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, underlined that journalist protection remains central to the Commission's mission. She reviewed African resolutions adopted in 2019 and 2020 urging states to ensure accountability, legal protection, and effective investigations into attacks on journalists and media workers.

The opening session concluded with a moment of silence honoring journalists who lost their lives in conflict zones, followed by a photo exhibition showcasing images and equipment of reporters martyred in Gaza, Iraq, and other war-affected regions.