National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

SAFETY HANDBOOK

FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA PRACTITIONERS



Know Your Rights.
Stay Safe. Speak Freely.

SAFETY HANDBOOK

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Published by the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria (NHRC) In partnership with **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**

FOREWORD

 Journalism Is a Public Service

Journalism is more than a job. **It is a public service.**

Every day, journalists go where others may not go. They ask difficult questions, uncover wrongdoing, report events and help people understand what is happening around them.

In doing so, journalists help protect **democracy, promote accountability and human rights.**

But journalism can also be risky.

Journalists may face:

- Threats and harassment
- Violence and intimidation
- Arrest and detention
- Online abuse and digital attacks
- Surveillance
- Equipment seizure or destruction
- Threats against family members

No journalist should have to choose between doing their job and staying safe.

This handbook was developed by the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** in partnership with KAS to help journalists:

- ✅ Understand their rights
- ✅ Recognise risks before they become serious
- ✅ Stay safer in the field
- ✅ Know what to do when something goes wrong
- ✅ Know where to seek help when their rights are violated

The central message is simple:

Journalist safety is a human rights issue. Protecting journalists is also a responsibility of the State.

The handbook draws from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the NHRC Act 2010 as amended the Freedom of Information Act and other relevant human rights instruments.

Chief Tony Ojukwu OFR, SAN
Executive Secretary/CEO
National Human Rights Commission

1.  WHY JOURNALIST SAFETY MATTERS

A free press is essential to a free society.

When journalists can work safely and independently, citizens can:

- Access information
- Ask questions
- Hold public officials accountable
- Participate meaningfully in public life

But when journalists are threatened, attacked, arrested or silenced, **the public also loses its right to know.**

Common risks journalists may face

⚠ Physical attacks
⚠ Harassment and intimidation
⚠ Arbitrary arrest and detention
⚠ Censorship

- ⚠ Legal action and SLAPPs
- ⚠ Digital surveillance and hacking
- ⚠ Online harassment
- ⚠ Psychological stress
- ⚠ Seizure or destruction of equipment
- ⚠ Threats against family members
- ⚠ Discrimination and gender-based harassment

Remember

Protecting journalists means protecting freedom of expression, access to information and democracy.

2. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Being a journalist does **not** mean giving up your human rights.

You remain entitled to the protection of the law while doing your work.

You have the right to:

Freedom of Expression

You have the right to seek, receive and share information, subject to lawful limitations.

Access to Information

The public has a right to access information held by public institutions, subject to the law.

Life and Security

You have the right to protection from violence and threats to your safety.

Safety and Protection of Journalists' Working Tools

Dignity

You must not be subjected to torture or degrading, humiliating or inhuman treatment.

Liberty

You have the right not to be arbitrarily arrested or detained.

Privacy

Your personal information, communications and private life deserve protection.

Effective Remedy

If your rights are violated, you have the right to seek help, investigation and appropriate redress.

3.  THE LAWS THAT PROTECT YOU

Journalists' safety is supported by national, regional and international human rights standards.

International

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 19:** Freedom of opinion and expression.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Article 19:** Freedom to seek, receive and impart information.
- **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity**
- **Sustainable Development Goal 16.10:** Protection of fundamental freedoms and public access to information.

African (Regional)

- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights – Article 9:** Right to

receive information and express and disseminate opinions.

- **Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa**

NG Nigerian (National)

- **1999 Constitution – Sections 22 and 39:** Freedom of the press and freedom of expression.
- **Freedom of Information Act 2011:** Right of access to public information.
- **NHRC Amendment Act 2010:** Mandate of the Commission to promote and protect human rights.

4.  THINK SAFETY BEFORE YOU ENTER THE FIELD

Good journalism starts with **good preparation.**

Before leaving for a potentially dangerous assignment, pause and ask:

What could go wrong?

- Where am I going?
- What is happening there?
- Who could pose a risk?
- Could violence break out?
- Could I be arrested or detained?
- Could my phone or equipment be seized?
- Is there a health or environmental danger?
- How will I leave if things become unsafe?

Then ask yourself:

What can I do to reduce the risk?

Tell your editor or a trusted colleague where you are going.

Agree on what should happen if:

- You lose communication
- The situation suddenly becomes dangerous
- You fail to return at the expected time

A few minutes of preparation can make a major difference.

5. ⚠ COMMON RISKS — AND HOW TO REDUCE THEM

A. 🧍 Physical Violence

Protests, political rallies, conflict areas and tense public gatherings can become dangerous very quickly.

Stay safer:

- Determine the safest location to cover your assignment.
- Identify exit routes early.
- Keep a safe distance from confrontations.
- Avoid getting trapped between opposing groups.
- Make your press identity clearly visible where appropriate.
- Leave when the situation becomes unsafe.
- Wear your safety gears when necessary.

Getting the story is important. Getting home safely is more important.

B.  Arrest and Detention

Journalists may face arrest and detention while carrying out legitimate professional duties.

Be prepared:

📌 Carry a valid media identification card.
📌 Know your legal rights.
📌 Keep your editor's contact readily available.
📌 Save a lawyer's contact on your phone.
📌 Keep NHRC and law enforcement agencies contact information accessible.
📌 Remain calm and avoid unnecessary confrontation.
📌 Emergency protocol be set on your phones

Keep Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers' Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU), International Press Institute (IPI), Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID, contacts on your phones.

When arrested, seek legal assistance and report the incident as soon as it is safe to do so.

C. 💻 Digital Threats

Your phone and computer may contain:

- Confidential sources
- Unpublished stories
- Personal information
- Sensitive documents

Protect them.

🔐 Basic digital safety

- Use strong passwords.
- Turn on two-factor authentication where available.
- Keep your devices updated.
- Lock your phone and computer.
- Be careful with unknown links and suspicious files.
- Use secure communication tools for sensitive information.

- Back up important work securely.
- Avoid leaving sensitive information unnecessarily exposed.
- Set up Google alert for your name, address, phone number, etc.
- Use experienced personnel

D. ❤️ Health and Medical Emergencies

Long assignments, extreme weather, conflict zones and remote locations can affect your health.

Before you leave:

💧 Carry drinking water.
🩹 Carry a basic first-aid kit.
💊 Take necessary personal medication.
🏥 Know where the nearest medical facility is.
📍 Tell someone where you are going.
⏸️ Take breaks when possible.

Your health and wellbeing matter.

6. YOUR FIELD SAFETY CHECKLIST

Before You Leave

Make sure you have:

- ☑ Media identification
- ☑ Accreditation
- ☑ Editor's contact
- ☑ Lawyer's contact
- ☑ NHRC emergency contacts
- ☑ Fully charged phone
- ☑ Power bank
- ☑ Secure storage for sensitive information
- ☑ A trusted colleague who knows your assignment and location
- ☑ Information about the security situation at your destination
- ☑ Water and basic first aid
- ☑ Emergency transport or exit arrangements
- ☑ Multiple network carriers

Before a High-Risk Assignment

Make sure trusted persons know:

- **Where you are going**
- **What you are covering**
- **Who you are meeting**
- **When you expect to return**
- **What to do if you stop responding**

7.  IF YOU RECEIVE A THREAT

DON'T IGNORE IT.

Even a threat that appears minor can become serious.

Use this simple four-step approach:

STOP → ASSESS → REPORT → ACT

 STOP

Take the threat seriously.

 ASSESS

Ask:

- Who may be behind it?
- What are they capable of?
- Is the danger immediate?

REPORT

Inform your editor, employer, NUJ, NHRC or appropriate authorities.

ACT

Move to a safer location and seek assistance where necessary.

Document the threat

Where it is safe to do so, record:

- Date and time
- Location
- What happened
- Who was involved
- Names of witnesses
- Screenshots, messages or other evidence
- Any injuries or damage

Never put yourself in greater danger simply to collect evidence.

8. SOS IF YOU ARE ATTACKED, ARRESTED OR HARASSED

Your **first priority is your safety.**

Once you are safe:

1. Contact your editor or trusted colleague.
2. Contact your lawyer.
3. Report the incident to the appropriate authority.
4. Contact the NHRC.
5. Preserve available evidence.
6. Seek medical attention if necessary.
7. Document the incident while the details are still fresh.

Don't suffer in silence.

Reporting violations can help prevent impunity and protect other journalists.

9. NHRC: WHERE TO SEEK HELP

If your human rights are violated, the **National Human Rights Commission** can receive and act on your complaint.

NHRC TOLL-FREE LINE

6472

Press attack tracker: 07060794989

You can also contact the Commission:

info@nhrc.gov.ng
nhrcanigeria@gmail.com

What can the NHRC do?

Depending on the circumstances, the Commission can:

- Receive and document complaints.
- Investigate alleged human rights violations.
- Intervene and mediate where appropriate.
- Make recommendations to relevant authorities.
- Refer cases for legal assistance.
- Provide referrals for psychosocial support.
- Monitor human rights situations.
- Advocate for protection and accountability.

When your rights are violated, speak up.
Help is available.

10. 🤝 OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Journalists should also maintain contact with relevant professional and support organisations, including:

- **Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ)**
- **International Press Institute (IPI)**
- **Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE)**
- **Nigerian Press Council**
- **Legal Aid Council of Nigeria**
- **Nigerian Bar Association (NBA)**
- **Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID)**
- **Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ)**
- **International Federation of Journalists**
- **Advocats Sans Frontieres France (ASF)**
- **Other relevant professional networks**

📌 **Keep important emergency contacts somewhere safe and easily accessible.**

11. ⚔️ SPECIAL SAFETY TIPS FOR CONFLICT REPORTING

Conflict reporting carries additional risks.

Before entering a conflict-affected area:

🔎 Research the security situation.
🤝 Use trusted local contacts or fixers.
🏢 Confirm safe accommodation.
📍 Share your location with your editor or trusted colleague.
🚪 Know your exit routes.
💧 Carry sufficient water and basic medical supplies.
⚠️ Avoid unnecessary exposure to dangerous areas.
👀 Stay alert to sudden changes around you.
🧠 Take regular breaks and look after your psychological wellbeing.

Remember:

You do not have to put yourself in unnecessary danger to prove your commitment to journalism.

12.  WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND OTHER AT-RISK MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

Not every journalist faces the same risks.

Women journalists, journalists with disabilities, younger journalists and those reporting on sensitive issues may face additional threats, including:

- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Online abuse
- Threats against family members

Safety plans should therefore take individual circumstances into account.

Everyone deserves equal protection, dignity and respect.

13. 📣 REPORTING IS POWER

When journalists report threats and violations, they create a record.

That record can:

- ✅ Trigger intervention
- ✅ Help identify perpetrators
- ✅ Support investigation
- ✅ Provide evidence for accountability
- ✅ Reveal patterns of abuse
- ✅ Help protect other journalists

Silence can hide violations. Reporting can help stop them.

FINAL WORD FROM THE NHRC

YOUR SAFETY MATTERS.

YOUR RIGHTS MATTER.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

Press freedom is a **human right**.

Journalist safety is not a favour. It is part of the obligation to protect human rights and create an environment where the media can work freely and independently.

The National Human Rights Commission remains committed to protecting journalists and media practitioners and promoting an

environment where they can work **without fear, intimidation or reprisal.**

REMEMBER

Know your rights.
Assess the risks.
Stay connected.
Report violations.
Seek help when you need it.

NHRC

WORKING FOR THE RIGHTS OF

JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA

PRACTITIONERS

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