

Agreement of the Steering Group on Aggression and violence against journalists^{1*}

Introduction

In 2017, Professor Brenninkmeijer and Dr. Odekerken concluded in their report, ‘A threatening climate’, that the seriousness of threats towards journalists in the Netherlands has increased. Serious threats targeting renowned crime journalists and the recent incidents at the editorial offices of de Telegraaf and Panorama underscore this concern.

This has consequences for how journalists conduct their work; it can potentially result in journalists avoiding certain topics.

When guaranteeing the safety of journalists and the conditions in which journalism can function optimally, it is important to take protection of sources into account.

The police and the public prosecution service endorse the importance of protection of sources and will make every effort to ensure that this is acted on within their organizations.

Furthermore, the public prosecution service and the police will actively develop policies to make their organizations aware of this prioritization, through guidelines and trainings. In addition, the annual reports of the public prosecution service will include an annual report on this policy and whether there have been cases in which journalists or the media have been involved in any way.

If any incidents do come to light, the police and the public prosecution service will, as is customary, inform the NVJ [Dutch Association of Journalists] and the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief about those incidents directly. This will all be done ahead of and in line with the Law on Protection of Sources in Criminal Cases, which will enter into force on 1 October 2018.

Steering Group Aggression and Violence against Journalists

The parties comprising the Steering Group on Aggression and Violence against Journalists – the public prosecution service, the police, the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief and the Dutch Association of Journalists – wish to contribute to the ability of journalists to continue to fulfil their important role in society.

The Steering Group on Aggression and Violence against Journalists has reached the following agreement on the strengthening of the position of journalists against violence and aggression. In a meeting with the Minister of Justice and Security, the latter, exercising his responsibilities, reaffirmed the agreements below. These agreements will be further developed in the coming period.

1. Increase awareness

Journalists need to have more knowledge and awareness if they are to be more resilient to aggression and violence. That can be achieved by drawing up a safety plan for journalists. The safety plan will include a practical approach in the areas of prevention and training, but

¹ We consider as journalists: journalists, photographers, camera personnel, publicists, cartoonists, writers, programme makers, bloggers and vloggers, in short, professionals working or publishing in the media.

also clear procedures about which measures must be taken after an event, including the reporting of an incident or of a crime, and the aftercare.

The Steering Group will develop a framework for the safety plan. Responsibility for the plan and for a safe working environment for journalists lies with media companies, as they are the employers/commissioning parties for journalistic output. Freelancers are expressly to be included in these plans, but the NVJ will also act separately as a contact point/coordinator for freelancers.

The safety plan can be implemented through a collective labour agreement and a covenant for freelancers. Apart from that, the NVJ can also draw up a safety plan for freelancers in cases where the commissioning party does not have one.

2. Collective norm

After close consultation with the profession, a collective norm will be incorporated into the safety plan, setting out which types of (aggressive and intimidating) behaviour are considered unacceptable and always lead to action by the employer/journalists. This means that in such cases, the journalist concerned will report the incident to the employer/NVJ and, if appropriate, a criminal complaint will be made.

The Steering Group underlines the importance of this collective norm for sending out the message that such behaviour will not be tolerated and action will be taken against it.

3. Violence against the media (VAM) app

A VAM app will be developed as a practical tool or extension of the safety plan. This app will cover practical matters, such as: what are criminal offences?; how do I report a crime?; how do I deal with a serious threat?; what is the difference between reporting an incident and reporting a crime?; why am I obliged to report a crime and what can I expect to happen afterwards?

4. Public support and training programmes

Courses and trainings to ensure that journalists can defend themselves against forms of aggression and intimidation are being developed further and will become part of the agreements in the safety plan. This, together with the app and an active communication process, will have to achieve support within the sector.

5. Police and Public prosecution service

The following agreements have been made with the police and the public prosecution service:

1. Unambiguous registration by the police and public prosecution service of reports of incidents and crimes by journalists;
2. High priority for the detection of, and prosecution for, aggression and violence against journalists by the police and the public prosecution service;
3. There will be attention for the quality of the investigations and police reports;

Unofficial translation – for information purposes only

4. Zero tolerance will be applied as much as possible, fast-track justice/ZSM.²
5. Damages are to be recovered insofar as possible from the offender;
6. The public prosecution service will apply a higher penalty that is set out in a guideline;
7. Victims and the employer will be optimally informed about their position and possibilities in the criminal proceedings and the settlement of the case;
8. An active communication policy (dissemination of successful results) is part of this approach.

The above agreements with police and justice shall be laid down in a Protocol on Violence against the media.

Follow up

In the coming months, the above agreements will be further operationalized and the Steering Group expects to present an implementation plan towards the end of the year.

Mr. G.W. van der Burg

Openbaar Ministerie

Korpschef Politie, namens deze

R. Verkuijlen MA, Commissaris van Politie

M. Gelauff

Nederlands Genootschap van
Hoofdredacteurs

mr. T.L.W. Bruning

Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten

The Hague, 19 July 2018

* Unofficial translation by [T. McGonagle](#). For the original text and context of the *Akkoord Stuurgroep Agressie en geweld tegen journalisten* (both in Dutch), see: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2018/07/25/tk-bijlage-akkoord-stuurgroep-nederlandse-vereniging-van-journalisten>. See also the [NVJ news item](#) (in Dutch).

² [Translator's note] The Dutch text reads: "(super)snelrecht/ZSM". 'Snelrecht' implies that a case against an offender should be heard within 17 days of the arrest. "Supersnelrecht" implies a period of three days. "ZSM" is an acronym for "zorgvuldig, snel en op maat", which means, "careful, fast and tailored".