

## Module 1: Interview with Jennifer Adams - Perspective of international Organisations

[00:00:00] Hi, welcome to the first module of Online Harassment: Strategies for Journalists' Defense. In the previous video I shared with you my personal story, and we looked at what online harassment is and the many forms and shapes it takes. To recap, we talked about targeted sexualized abuse and harassment, such as threats of violence, which include sexual assault, rape and murder against women journalists, as well as their family members, as was in my case. Gendered swearing and insults targeting their appearance, sexuality and professionalism designed to diminish journalist confidence and tarnish their reputation. Sometimes these forms of abuse and harassment may come from individuals or be part of a coordinated attack driven by misogynist groups.

[00:00:45] Today, I would like to welcome Jennifer Adams as my guest speaker for the course to pick up on where we left, and also look at what initiatives have taken up on the issue, and the kinds of work and awareness raising that has been done up until now.

[00:01:01] Welcome, Jen, and thank you for speaking with us today.

[00:01:03] Thanks for having me.

[00:01:07] Let's start from a broad picture, especially taking into account the years you've spent working on the international situation, pushing the safety of women journalists online. How did the attention to this issue develop in the first place?

[00:01:22] I think it was really just a matter of how many cases there were and how many women were being really vocal about their experiences online. And I know my office at the time, I was in the Representative Freedom of the Media, at the OSCE office, and our representative at the time, Dunja Mijatovic, really kind of saw this as a big concern in terms of marginalizing certain voices and really limiting the kind of information people were getting. So we started it then. I think it was in 2014. You were working with us then, and it kind of took off after this. It became really a big agenda item across the international organizations, and I think it was really A the women journalists who were experiencing this and really calling attention to it. And B, you know, this was right before the Me Too movement started. This was when we were really kind of starting to see impetus in terms of the international organizations, but also society in general, really looking to women's experiences and what women's marginalization was really causing to the rest of society.

[00:02:24] What do you think, then, has been the role of different organizations involved in this movement? Let's just describe it this way, because over the years we've seen how multiple organizations have kind of joined and tried to work together developing different programs and initiatives. How would you describe the role of these different organizations and institutions in addressing online harassment, especially identifying it as a problem that needs addressing and not just among international organizations, because they're also government institutions, governments themselves. How would you describe that and explain this to us?

[00:03:05] Well, you know, women journalists are already calling attention to this issue for a really long time. And I think the international organizations, at the time, I think that they weren't really sure what to do about it to be honest with you. The first kind of step was awareness raising. It was really alerting the governments that this was happening and that the governments based on international standards and also domestic laws, they had a responsibility to address it both as a gender issue and a press freedom issue. And I think once that happened, we saw a new round of initiatives where it was really awareness raising, but also providing tools, providing support, whether that's digital activism, privacy tools, legal support, psychological support, making sure that those resources got to the journalists themselves, especially journalists who were not affiliated with a news organization, and especially journalists who are in places where the media freedom environment was already pretty dire. And I think after that, there's been a lot of kind of a shaky response. I think especially in the Western Hemisphere, there's kind of this trend of once we've dealt with an issue, once it's been on the agenda for a while, what do we then do with it? And I see there's a lot of gaps still left in terms of research, so I think that's a really good place that the international organizations are looking to fill. UNESCO is doing good work in this area.

The International Center for Journalists is doing great work, but then also the trickle down effect to the smaller organizations and the media organizations. But I really want to emphasize the trickle up effect. So this is I think the piece that's missing is the international organizations tend to kind of see their work, their scope outside of society as such, just because they have this international viewpoint. It's hard to really look at the specificities of the issue in every country. And I think that they really need to kind of shift their work and really use their resources and use their network, which is key the networks of the international organizations, the resources that they have are crucial in really combating online harassment. But now it's about promoting the work that's being done by women journalists, I think. So providing a platform and magnifying the work that's being done, which is incredible. And there's a lot of organizations that have started out of a need or a trauma-centered approach, and I think this is the direction that we need to be going and really expanding on right now.

[00:05:31] And I guess the importance of the research that is being done is also not just for case studies of journalists who've faced different forms of online harassment, but also define and explain these case studies within the political context, because we've seen so many journalists complain about this issue. But as you said earlier, every country is different. The political context is different. The legal framework is different. So I think I've also seen a lot of different research done on this subject. But I think we often lose, perhaps not lose, but maybe this fact gets lost amid this research because what women face in the Western Hemisphere might be different than in the Southern Hemisphere and whatnot.

[00:06:17] So, yeah, the qualitative and quantitative pieces are really key here. So the awareness raising campaigns weren't just awareness raising campaigns. They were also generating data. They were also collecting stories. They were also...and this is a huge piece of that work, and that's being done best at grassroots level. The quantitative part of it. Where is this taking place? Which platforms are most at fault? "At fault." Which platforms are hosting the most hateful content? What kinds of hate is this? Are we talking about revenge porn? Disaggregated data. There are so few organizations that collect aggregated data by sex. So we're kind of starting still despite this having been on the agenda for a long time, we're still at kind of a ground zero. So, yes, so it does get lost. But these two components, this qualitative quantitative piece conveying that this is a situation that could affect everyone potentially, but it's part of a structural issue that we have at all levels in every country. No one is immune from this, but then also provide the facts, the figures, to back this up and really put pressure on those organizations and intermediaries where it's taking place.

[00:07:30] And certainly no one is immune from that. That's for sure. Speaking of platforms, what has been your experience working with social media platforms, especially taking into account how much of the harassment actually takes place on social media platforms? Have you seen any significant progress made? Have you been engaged with this? Or maybe you've seen other organizations have open discussions? What's the general sense?

[00:08:02] It's complicated, and it isn't, right. You know, I have been on panels and I have been at women at Facebook meetings, and they were bringing incredible women to the table, women from all spectrums of society, trans women, sex workers, really all of the people that we need to get together who are experiencing this kind of hate and harassment and talk about their experiences to share ways that Facebook could meaningfully involve themselves. So that was great. But on the other hand, we see, you know, the Facebooks, especially Facebook, but also other bigger social media intermediaries kind of taking user data and doing really pretty dangerous things with it. We see AI being developed that's really pretty indiscriminate in its targeting of marginalized groups and really removing especially content from women for a variety of reasons, whether they're not cis gendered slim women or they've said some word that somewhere is picked up. But it's being programmed by men using the same male gaze as is the problem that's at the root of the issue. So it's hard to say that the social media platforms are doing any meaningful work here. Any work that they do is meaningful in some way because of their reach and their resources. I mean, it's baffling. But without kind of transparency on why they're doing these things, and what they're doing with the data that's being collected, you know, it's a really thin coin. We know that Facebook will use the data that we give them indiscriminately. So how do people meaningfully engage with these platforms when there's no trust? That's kind of, I think, where we are right now, and I think where the women that I've spoken to have a real

issue. But it's also not a solution to say, well, come off all these platforms. This is how we share news. This is how we share information. This is how we participate in public and political life now. So it's a great question. And I think it really comes down to making sure, and this is where the international organizations come in again, really putting the pressure on the countries to making sure that these intermediaries are held accountable. It's a drop in the bucket to penalize them a million dollars every time there's hate speech. But it's about systematic, holistic change, which unfortunately has to come from every single level, which is why it's such a hard beast to conquer.

[00:10:40] Sure, and I think it's also just making sure that the social media platforms also bear the responsibility. While the government should be held accountable, also the social media platforms, I mean, whether it's community standards. The difficulty of even getting engaged with Facebook, when when someone is facing harassment, you know, you get an automated response, then you may be lucky to find someone to speak to. So these kind of issues, and I often feel like if there is a dialog, or there is a meeting between international organizations, governments and people who are affected by this, the social media platforms need to have like a team that won't be just a pretty face like we're representing the company, but actually be determined to help in the long term. And I think this is like one of the hardest things to to have, because every time someone does represent the companies, they go back and this communication isn't really followed up or follows through.

[00:11:45] Yeah, and I've worked with really, I mean, wonderful women at Facebook, and they do care and they want to help. At least on their part, I can't say corporate Facebook, and I certainly would never deem to think that I could wrap my mind around corporate Facebook, but they genuinely wanted to bring this diverse group of women together in order to create some solutions. But that just has to translate up the scale. And it just when the selling of data is so much more appealing because of the financial incentives and other incentives, possibly, where are you going to prioritize this, if that's the end goal? And unfortunately, because it is the end goal and because that is part of our systematic problem in terms of the patriarchy, it's just the solutions that come down in this kind of structure are really just going to continue to disenfranchise those most marginalized people and those people who are giving a message of, at this point, truth. It's a new targeting mechanism. And I have to say, especially when women don't have the leverage of their government, they don't have the leverage, they don't have the visibility of an international organization. There's only so many women journalists that have access to these resources. So, yes, as you say, that was a very long winded way of saying how do we get to the soul of Facebook in order to convince them to do the right thing?

[00:13:21] Access seems to be one of the biggest issues. Jen, thank you so much, and I feel like we could talk so much more about social media platforms and their responsibility.

[00:13:32] Like seven years now.

[00:13:35] But I do have a few more questions. And I think the one... We worked together on a project with you, your project, which was this amazing documentary film called a Dark Place. I've mentioned it already in the first video, so I'm really happy that we can talk a little bit more about it in detail. So for this documentary film, you have traveled pretty much around the world with the director of the film Javier from International Press Institute. And I wanted to ask you, you met countless journalists. You spoke to them. Some of them weren't even featured in the film because the film had to be a certain length. But of all the journalists that you've interviewed and you've spoken to, what was one thing that stood out? Or maybe not one thing, but perhaps the similarity of threats, or maybe the coping mechanisms, or maybe a couple of other things. What could you say struck you the most?

[00:14:49] The thing that drove me through the whole process and the thing that after the film I was the most grateful for was talking to those journalists in places where they were facing probably the most severe threats and the reality that many of those online threats could really transition into to the analog world. So those women...we went to a media organization in Turkey, and one of the one of the last few independent media organizations in Turkey. And this was right after many of the organizations had been closed or switched over to state sponsored, and many journalists have been put in prison, and many are still in prison. And at this organization, there were many young women working there, and they heard that we were there. And after we

interviewed the few people that we wanted to interview, we opened the door and there was just a line of these young women who wanted to talk to us, who wanted their face to be on the screen, who wanted to say what they needed to say, and we couldn't put everything in. But it was just..It was shocking to me. They have real risk, real threat, and they wanted to be heard and that was just amazing to me. And I think that that's an overarching theme, is the resilience of women, and the resilience of women when it comes to really threats from the highest levels. I don't think many of us can understand, you unfortunately can, what it means to be targeted from the highest levels of your government and then trickle down throughout society to unload on you and your life as a as a real person. I don't think we can understand this for those of us who haven't been through it. And to see women not self censoring and to see women, even the ones who do self-censor, to see them continue on, to move on to take these cases to court. Astounding. Astounding.

[00:16:57] Well, that's incredible. So getting heard, getting their voices heard and listened to. Yeah, that's that's incredible. If anyone wants to watch the film, where do they go to?

[00:17:14] If you are interested in the film, you can contact the Office of the Representative of Freedom of the Media at OSCE, or you can contact the International Press Institute.

[00:17:23] I will leave the links.

[00:17:29] Thank you. Thank you for that. Jen, my final question.

[00:17:34] Yeah.

[00:17:35] Well, maybe not the final, but we're getting there. To me, it feels a lot these days that there was a lot of interest at some point like in 2014, when it all kind of started, and it peaked maybe 2016, 2017, like a lot of studies came out around that time. You know there was all this interest and drive in getting more research done, and there were a lot of workshops organized and meetings organized, but still the number and types of harassment women journalists were facing, you know, I mean, not that we were expecting them to disappear, but they didn't reduce in numbers. So it feels like we may have raised awareness that there is now an overall understanding, but it didn't really help solve the issue of harassment because it seems to persist. What would be your observations on that, and what do you think is still missing? I mean, I know you mentioned some more research, but how do we...?

[00:18:46] I don't think research is going to save us. You know, we have moved into a different phase since 2014. We are firmly rooted now in the disinformation phase. I hate to use the term fake news, but it is what it is. And we unfortunately, that is a business model in the world of media. And that business model is a very lucrative one. And I think as long as that, the ad revenues and the clicks and paying for harassing content on Google ads and this horrible kind of spiral of financial incentive, as long as that continues to be front and foremost, I don't know what kind of work any other organization can do to deincestivize it. I also think that a lot of the politics of the current day, the slide toward fascism in many countries around the world, the toxic masculinity that seems to be a governing tool at the moment for a great number of countries. And those those people in power are really demonizing the media as fascists and dictators do, and people who want to take away images of themselves and want to portray something that is not there or shoot the messenger, as it were. I think that that environment is the one that we're currently sitting in, and I think that until we address that environment and that is a societal level, that is a political level, that is a legal level, we're not going to fix this problem. Women are going to be the target of toxic masculinity for as long as it exists. And I don't mean we can't make steps and we certainly have made tremendous progress, but it's going to continue as long as we allow it, I guess is the really simple answer. And the people allowing it are really at the very tops of our governments, and some of the ones who are the perpetrators of this type of abuse. And so I think that their rhetoric, their action really trickles down in society as a whole sees that this is an acceptable way to silence a voice that they don't want to hear. So it does look grim from where we sit right now, and especially with COVID and the lockdowns that are happening everywhere, online is becoming even more important. And I didn't think that that would have been possible, but it's the access for people, for marginalized voices, for different perspectives. And when we're now shutting that down, when we're creating a toxic environment online that kind of mimics

societal environments, it's just a recipe for the loss of our democracy, really. I hate to be dramatic about it, but that's the situation.

[00:21:46] So I think back to the international organizations. They need to do more to really point out those governments that are part of this problem, that are perpetuating it in other governments, that are spreading it around, and that are not meeting international standards that they have all signed up to and their own domestic legislation, if it's problematic, needs to be changed or needs to be adhered to if it's not. That's the bottom line.

[00:22:19] Responsibility on all levels and also finding, I guess, partners in this, right. Knowing where to go, who to get help from.

[00:22:32] Yeah, the networks. The networks are key.

[00:22:41] Jen, well, this was amazing. Thank you so much for your time. I really hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. I wanted to ask you one last thing. If people wanted to learn more about you and your work, where do they go? Where they look you up, and your tremendous research that you've done until now? If you could share that with them?

[00:23:07] I am on LinkedIn, and I'll send you my contact information. And you can find all about my work, the consultancies I'm doing, the research that I'm working on at the moment there.

[00:23:18] Excellent. Thank you, and I'll add it to our material that we have for the audience. Thank you so much really.

[00:23:24] Thank you. Thank you.