

**The State of
Press Freedom
Worldwide**

**Believing in the job:
Press freedom in
the Middle East and
North Africa**



The Backstory

Season 5: The State of Press Freedom Worldwide

Episode: Believing in the job: Press freedom in the Middle East and North Africa

(Soundbite of music)

ANDREW HESLOP, HOST: Press freedom in Tunisia has transformed since the 2011 revolution, when long-standing dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was removed from power:

MALEK KHADHRAOUI: From 2011, there is like an explosion of media outlet, freedom everywhere, all the censorship was cut off.

HESLOP: Malek Khadhraoui is the director of the Tunisian investigative magazine Inkyfada.

KHADHRAOUI: There is a lot of new laws and rules allowing freedom of press, freedom of expression, a new constitution. Who really sacrilized the idea of freedom of expression.

HESLOP: But since then, things have changed.

KHADHRAOUI: Generally, the environment was quite safe and protective to the work of media and the work of journalists until, I will say 2021 and the arrival of Kais Saied, with his constitutional coup. He shut down the parliament, took all the power. Rewrite the constitution, excluding one of the most maybe revolutionary acts in this constitution that regarding to freedom of press, freedom of expression and started since quite cracked down on the work of the journalists.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: This is The Backstory, a podcast from Wan-Ifra, the World Association of News Publishers.

I'm Andy Heslop, Wan-Ifra's press freedom executive director. In this season of the podcast, we're checking in on the state of press freedom around the world.

In this episode, we dip into the immense challenges facing journalists in the Middle East and North Africa – an area of great upheaval over recent years, with revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, and conflicts that engulf the region, like the current war in Gaza.

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AYMAN MHANNA: The Middle East and North Africa is unfortunately, one of the most dangerous areas in the world for journalists. There is a real challenge related to the nature of political regimes that are running the countries. Most governments are hostile to the very idea of independent and accountability-oriented journalism.

HESLOP: Ayman Mhanna is the executive director of the Samir Kassir Foundation's SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, a press freedom and media development organization based in Beirut, Lebanon, that works across the Middle East and North Africa.

He monitors journalists, but also civil society.

He told Backstory producer Irene Abalo that hostile governments open the door to other, more systemic problems for journalists.

MHANNA: In this context, it is not surprising to see other challenges that come and compel the initial one, whether economic challenges in a region where levels of poverty are very high, levels of unemployment are very high, and also problems related to the manipulation of the information ecosystem by powerful political, military or religious establishments.

IRENE ABALO: Would you say as of now, the key concern for journalists who are working in the Middle East is safety, or there are other concerns?

MHANNA: Safety is always a top priority, but we are also working in a region where there is very strong political cooptation of media outlets. Most media outlets in the region are directly owned by powerful political figures, either in government or heads of major political parties or affiliated with the big religious institutions. And even when they are privately owned, the businessmen who own most of the media in the region are literally in bed with government, and they would do anything to actually support their governments because they are also present in other sectors, public works, construction and where they need government contracts. So the concept of media independence is very, very weak in the region. However, there is an emerging independent media scene that is trying to break free and perform what journalism was initially designed to do, which is inform citizens. And there are definitely other challenges related to the legal environment in our region. Most laws are either against media freedom or even when they are on paper pro media freedom, they are written in a very elastic way that is subject to interpretation according to the political

winds. And this means that there is no real legal protection for quality journalism work.

ABALO: So does that mean that journalists are not seeking legal redress when their press freedoms and they cannot freely express themselves in Lebanon?

MHANNA: Legal redress is extremely rare because the judiciary system in our countries is not independent, which mean that very often it's a moot point to actually go to court to seek redress, because redress will not happen because the judges will not even dare conduct their work independently when the perpetrators are connected to the regime.

ABALO: If you look at religion, how does that play out for journalists in that region?

MHANNA: In our region, it is extremely hard to dissociate religion from politics. In countries that are monarchies, whether in the Gulf or Jordan or Morocco, the rulers claim to have religious roles, or have actually religious roles which are quite legitimate, and therefore their connection with the religious establishment is very strong. In other countries that are not monarchies, that are republics, except for Lebanon, there is a state religion, or religion for the head of state. In Lebanon, religion plays a fundamental role because our constitution is even built upon what we call political sectarianism or confessionaism or conciliationism. Which means that positions in government, the president, the prime minister, the speaker of parliament, the head of the police, the head of the army, the governor of the central bank. These positions are attributed to people according to their religious affiliation. So even when formally, religion doesn't play a role in politics, the fact that everything is divided according to religious and confessional lines means that rulers will always try to play the identity game. So whenever a journalist or someone in the opposition or civil society organizations point out to the corruption of a specific leader, that leader might say, I might be corrupt. However, I'm here to protect my community. And this is why a lot of people would tend to support the rulers even when there is so much evidence against him. And this is something that not only affects politics. It affects journalism. Because when journalists work for media institutions that are owned by these politicians, they have to take into account the interests of the religious establishment instead of looking at the facts or looking at what happened. And there are definitely taboo subjects related to religion that journalists cannot open freely or face problems when they open freely. One of them is the issue related to LGBT rights or issues related to women's rights.

DIANA MOUKALLED: Whenever you raise the issue of freedom of speech, freedom of journalism, you are always encountered with, oh, you are promoting LGBT, you are promoting gays, you are defending promiscuity, you are executing Western agenda, you are Soros agent.

HESLOP: Diana Moukalled is a veteran Lebanese journalist, who in 2017 launched media platform Daraj, which means "steps," to cover stories in Lebanon and the region that are under-reported in the mainstream media. Notably those related to corruption, crimes against humanity, issues related to women, LGBT and freedom of expression.

As she told Backstory producer Mariona Sanz, the subjects they touch on means they've faced backlash and intimidation.

MOUKALLED: The rulers of Lebanon are a group of sectarian leaders, militias, and warlords who managed to remain in power. All of that is affecting freedom of expression and mainly journalism. The authority have been mobilizing a lot against LGBT and against freedom of expression, against feminism. They created a new demon. People here are suffering like never before because of the economical crisis, because of all kinds of corruption. We don't have electricity. We don't have clear water. Our environment is taken. Our deposits have been stolen. But you are angry because a guy loved another. What flip of priorities are we living in? So, they are influencing people who are really suffering, the poor, the angry. Instead of directing their emotions against who really robbed the Lebanese people out of their future, they are directing this kind of anger towards people like them trying to defend them. We have several cases against us in the courts. Non-stop attacks and backlash on social media. It never stops. It's always there, accusing us of being agents, Zionists, promoting promiscuity, gays, you can name it, all kinds of attacks.

MARIONA SANZ: Who's behind these attacks?

MOUKALLED: Different members of authority. Because in Lebanon, when we talk about authority, you have the main key player, you have Hezbollah, who is the upper hand within the government, the parliament, the media, and arms. Hezbollah is an armed militia that is stronger than the state itself. So we see lots of backlash attacks against us by the media aligned to Hezbollah or by social media pages. You can see other actors within the authority. We call them sectarian leaders, prime ministers, ministers, who claim that they are defending Lebanon by waging huge attacks against refugees, against feminism, against LGBT. And they are using us, oh, you are the NGOs or the media that is being funded by the West. So you are agent, you are spy.

SANZ: We are seeing this all over the world, I think.

MOUKALLED: I know, I know. Exactly. But at least when you go outside, you can find some ways or means to you have some lawyers, you can use the law. Here they are having more and more grip on the judiciary, which is very dangerous. When you have cornering good judges, if they issue a good judgment, they are being cornered, the government appointing certain key players within the judiciary so they can, as it happens, for instance, in Lebanon, who suffered since 2019 from a major financial collapse and the banking system have collapsed, resulting in confiscating our deposits. None has been put in jail, or being questioned. So when you hijack a judiciary, and the parliament and the government have a kind of agreement between the key players to prevent accountability from themselves, this is when you feel that you are cornered. OK, we as journalists, we expose, we cover stories. You expect from judiciary, from authority, to do their duty, which is to investigate, to launch cases, to ensure that justice is being served. This part is not being done.

SANZ: In fact, I wanted to ask you also about the financial crisis. How has this affected the media and freedom of expression?

MOUKALLED: Gravely. Because even before the crisis, we had a problem where media is being politically funded. And when I say politically funded, either by parties or sectarian parties in Lebanon and also by regional power. We have money coming from Iran, from Saudi Arabia, from Qatar, from sometimes Turkey, you name it. And now with the financial crisis, who is surviving? Either you have political money still flowing or you are trying to align yourself with a key player in the region. Or you are screwed. If you try to be independent, you are screwed because the financial crisis has extremely affected many Lebanese, including those who are trying to be independent financially. We have our model, which is we get funding from international key players. And now we are also faced by lots of challenges. First of all, we are being intimidated. Also, the banking, because of the financial crisis, because of the type of stories that we cover, uncovering banking corruption. Now we are facing difficulties from the banks that we use to get funds and to send funds. They are either refusing to get our transfers or they are threatening to shut down our account. I don't know what to do, frankly. It's something that we are discussing. At the same time, you have a challenge, international challenge, where key players who believe in what we do and funding us, but they might have another priority. That happened when the issue of Ukraine rose up. We lost immediately 30 percent of our direct funding. Now you have major funders shifting their interests, either in the region or in the topic. So you really have to look again at the model that we are implementing. We try to improve a business model that is sustainable. But it's difficult. You cannot rely on subscription when you live in a country and a region, where hardship is all over and people have much more priorities than pay for a website to sustain. So we are faced with challenges. We're trying to figure out ways.

SANZ: Given all these challenges, in fact, my question is what keeps you doing this work?

MOUKALLED: Honestly, as a cliché as it might sound, I don't want to leave. I feel there is a meaning for what I do here. I believe in time. I believe even with the little we have, with the small groups that we coordinate with, there is something worth to defend and work for, I don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. It's frankly a kind of self-defense mechanism, it's to do what we have to do and not expecting good results in the near future.

SANZ: So you don't have any optimism in the near future?

MOUKALLED: In the near future, no. Honestly.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: A grim outlook, but for many journalists in the region facing crushing government and corporate control of the media, they have to find ways to get by.

In Tunisia, Inkyfada, an investigative magazine, came up with an innovative business model, offering website building and data visualization for civil society groups in the region.

Two thirds of the newsroom's budget has been covered by these data services. The rest from private donors.

But executive director Malek Khadhraoui says the funding model is now under threat, in the face of laws aimed at controlling where that money comes from.

MALEK KHADHRAOUI: There is a new draft of NGO laws, there is a lot of attacks against NGO, foreign fundings, our relations to international organizations. So populist speech, try to create like this rejection of the West. And it's something that it will impact our business model, it will impact 30% of our budget. It's quite big, but it's not hundred percent. But at the same time, it's prevent us from developing our business. It will certainly impact our capacity to operate. We need for that, maybe to increase our revenue coming from, from the services. But even for the services, our first customers are international organization, other media outlets. So even if the relationship is not a grant-making relationship, but it's a service relationship, but it can be impacted if those organizations won't be allowed to operate in Tunisia anymore.

HESLOP: Besides the NGO law, Khadhraoui told Backstory producer Sarah Elzas that the government is specifically targeting journalists with terrorism or defamation laws.

KHADHRAOUI: There is 17 journalists, in two, in the last two years, 17 journalists are sued by the government. Some of them are in prison for very serious accusation like complicity with terrorism or defamation of the army, of, of the president. And some of them are facing trials. Also a lot of citizens who are sued with a new law meant to prevent cyber violence and defamation. But practically it's a, it's a new weapon to sue any citizens or any journalists or media outlet who criticize the government or the president or the army or the police body.

SARAH ELZAS: Kind of all over the world you see these laws ostensibly put in place to fight against fake news or misinformation, but actually it gets twisted around. And you actually see how freedom of expression and journalism is so much tied to who's in power. Right?

KHADHRAOUI: Absolutely. Absolutely. There is this, I think, a new wave of populism hitting everywhere in the world and more and more countries, even some old democracies we have a crackdown on or at least, a like a kind of intimidation to the work of journalists, independent journalism. We see in France, journalists who was sued to, because they reported on a UN arm deal with Egypt, between the French government and Egypt. Tunisia is not an exception. And maybe also, as it was a new democracy, a new system put in place, it was easier maybe for the legislator to went back to a very repressive and restrictive law, legislations.

ELZAS: How are journalists and maybe you and Inkyfada in particular, how have you been navigating this, time you're in?

KHADHRAOUI: Yes so, Inkyfada mainly started the idea of the behind Inkyfada, it's to create a factual, fact-based media outlet. Uh, we have to consider that in Tunisia after 2011, even if we have the whole new legislation protecting freedom of expression, the work of journalists, we had also a big lack of professionalism in the media field. What we was doing during the last ten years, training a lot of journalists, making the confrontation as a, as a pillar of any investigative work. We try to be very careful on having all the things to support our claims or our investigation or, or any

anything that we put on the website. This is one of the way to protect ourselves. The other one is to have like a very strict position in terms of giving our opinion on what's happening. So the idea is not to be, is to be, as a journalist, as low profile as we can in the term of personal advocacy or personal visibility, and try to just make our work talk for us, if I can say it like this.

ELZAS: Is this at all a bit of self-censoring in a sense of, like, well, I'm going to hold myself back?

KHADHRAOUI: No, absolutely not. It's not censoring the topic that we want to cover. It's making our presence as chosen as journalists less visible on social media. It's not making personal in a way. Now we are, for example, investigating the actual prime minister in the country. So we don't have any limits in terms of where and what kind of topics and what kind of investigation we can do. But the idea is not to make our self like to present ourselves as heroes, or communicating on the persons, on the individuals, on the newsroom. So it's not a censorship, or like thinking about not talking about some topics. But it's the way we can do it, and the way that we promote it, it's protect our individual journalists as a person and put in front more the whole structure as a media, as a newsroom.

ELZAS: Can you explain more like specifically how does this happen? Like on a practical level, what do you do in the newsroom?

KHADHRAOUI: Yeah, we have weekly meetings within the newsroom. We have at the beginning, we have an editorial committee in a way to discuss topics, orientations, threats. And there is also regular daily, weekly meetings within the newsroom discussing the political situation, the new laws or the new orientation of the government. How to protect some of our journalists. Some of them are very young. So sometime we decide, for example, to sign articles with newsroom, not giving the name of the journalist itself. So yeah, it's really a weekly discussion about the general political situation, and the safety of the journalists, and at the same time continuing addressing the most important topics for our media.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: Egypt, like Tunisia, had a revolution in 2011. And like Tunisia, the freedom of expression landscape has narrowed since.

Today, most media is controlled directly by the state, intelligence agencies, or a few wealthy businessmen, who are connected to the government.

RASHA QANDEEL: My whole life changed when I decided to come back and live at home in Egypt. It is not a secret that surveillance and tight fist is practiced over journalists in Egypt. I am no exception of that, especially with the sensitivity of, and the profile that I have in the past quarter century. Twenty-five years of journalism. I've been a target of many campaigns of different countries. But I have to admit that it has been the most difficult in Egypt, giving that to my family lives here.

HESLOP: Rasha Qandeel worked as a journalist for media in Europe, as well as locally in Egypt, and is currently a professor at the American University in Cairo.

She told Backstory producer Colette Davidson about the measures she takes to get around government censors, and to stay safe.

QANDEEL: The, so many attempts of getting through my phone and my means of communication. So I have to be always updated with the procedures of cyber safety. I send the data of my mobile phones and other means of communication to friends abroad, especially in Europe and in the United States, to secure those gadgets that I'm using. And the other thing is personal safety, as we are always under the surveillance of the Egyptian security. We're literally monitored and tracked wherever we go, with whomever we meet. And this, as you can imagine, provides a major concern for us and our families, because everybody has private life and everybody has a family that they are trying to protect.

COLETE DAVIDSON: So how do you do your job under these conditions? How do you get sources to speak with you? Or do journalists just have to toe the government line?

QANDEEL: Whoever is toeing the government line, that is literally a sentence of death to any journalist wanting to remain independent. So, of course not. We are always trying to keep the means of communication private as much as we can. We try not to talk too much over the phones, even when we use Signal, which proves to be so far the relatively most secure means of communication. We are also very careful with that. Since the networks of Wifi in Egypt are all owned by companies who are openly assisting and providing information and data about their uses to the Egyptian government. So we tried to keep mostly everything face to face. And if there is, if there are sources outside of Egypt, we try to do this as secure as we can. And we immigrate the files as fast as we can and then we remove it from our devices. Because that's a very normal procedure in Egypt to be stopped at the street and asked to provide your mobile phone, your passwords for Facebook and other social media accounts, which is a total breach of individual and personal privacy rights.

HESLOP: Qandeel says the result of all this government control of the media is that the public simply doesn't trust it.

QANDEEL: I can comfortably say that there is zero trust in the media in Egypt, specifically the media that is pro-government, which is like the 100% of media. So basically it's just one narrative. Even those who are trying to provide a different narrative, like the independent websites now and newspapers. There are so many ways of stopping those means of journalism in Egypt by not giving them license or threatening them to be scrutinized with legal procedures. However, there are so many ways now of reading even the locked or the blocked websites. There are so many ways of getting over the banning, and people are actually keen to read those newspapers and websites. Specifically, they're saying what everybody's saying in the street, really, but they're not daring enough to say it publicly. So I think the real journalists in Egypt now, even though that they're becoming fewer and fewer, they're really respected deep inside.

DAVIDSON: And so this news, this blocked content, is this from independent media sites? Is it from international publications?

QANDEEL: There are both, actually. So there are still like one or two organizations that are under the heavy fist of Egyptian regime here. I would name Mada Masr and Al-Manassa. They're working independently. There are also two fact-checking, two platforms. They're fairly new, but they're doing a great job: Matsadaash and Saheeh Masr. Otherwise we choose to have our platforms from outside Egypt. I'm planning for my own platform and the only safe way to do that is to establish the organization outside of Egypt, outside and away from the mobile companies, the Wi-Fi companies, and the scrutiny of the legal system here.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: Establishing a media company outside of Egypt could be a way to get around censorship issues. But for readers, it could be risky because of deteriorating trust in anything having to do with the West. The war in Gaza has amplified this.

QANDEEL: There has been a wide public opinion, lacking trust in the West and the West, or the Western organizations. Or the Western media, as it's now being named and shamed. And I have to say that this, since Ukraine and since all the guidelines that we've been learning and working according to for 20 years and more, since the war in Iraq in 2003, let's say, have been breached and challenged in the Ukraine war. People are getting really angry that the same guidelines seem now to be worshiped by the Western media organizations when it comes to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. And this made people specifically here in Egypt, since I'm being near to the Egyptians now, who read the news and are very connected to the Palestinian cause for decades. They don't know whom to follow, to be honest, because the traditional media in all of the Arab countries are following the official narratives of their governments. And these narratives have not been satisfying. And if they go to the Western media, who they once used to look at with respect, they find that there are big double standards. So to be honest, the independent media are playing a very difficult role under a very heavy fist now to try to achieve the fair, objective, truthful coverage of this war.

DAVIDSON: And what does this mean for journalists covering the conflict?

QANDEEL: It makes their job more difficult in terms of getting their facts right, because there is a monopoly for the government media organizations only to cover what's going on on both sides of the Rafah cross border. But however, journalists are not really very fearful to speak about the cause or the Palestinian suffering or the war in Gaza launched by Israel against civilians just because it's in a way the same narrative that the government is adapting.

(Soundbite of music)

KHADHRAOUI: We are facing a big crisis in terms of trust and the relationship between readers and media outlet. And the crisis, what happened in Gaza and the war. It amplified this, this sentiment that media outlets are not independent, are not always giving us the truth.

HESLOP: Malek Khadhraoui, of Inkyfada, in Tunisia.

KHADHRAOUI: They are looking for information in the unfiltered channels, as

Telegram or WhatsApp groups or other stuff, which is good, sometimes giving real images coming from the ground, but without any context, without our, the work of the journalist to verify to check all the elements of a story, which make this distance between citizens and media outlet getting, getting bigger in a way that is like a mis, a misunderstanding of how journalism work. And there is also this, a reaction against their, mainly Western media like New York Times or Le Monde in France, or other references. People are accusing them to be not partial, to take only one side, and not to being playing this informative role that citizens are waiting for. So we have this big suspicions and tension between the readers and media outlets themselves. So people are asking us why we are not doing as much as they want, coverage in Gaza. We try to explain that we don't have the means to go to Gaza, and to send, to send our reporters there. And we are trying to explain to our readers that is not that we are taking only the information coming from the West, but also a question of, of having access. And we are justifying ourselves permanently on why we are not working on that, why we didn't work on that war when we investigate on certain issues. Why we don't investigate and other ones. So there is a big tension between the readers in general and media outlet today. Inkyfada still have a good reputation as an- as a neutral and factual media organization, but we, we are facing more and more criticism and questioning about our editorial line, our editorial choices.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: The only journalists who can cover the war in Gaza are local Palestinians. Entry is heavily restricted and controlled by the Israeli army.

The war has been particularly brutal for them. More than 80 Palestinian media workers have been killed by Israeli military operations.

Beyond the physical threats, Lebanese journalist Diana Moukalled says the war is escalating existing problems across the Middle East.

MOUKALLED: In the region, we still have the intimidation, we still have lots of restrictions, and now you have war that is spreading. We are seeing a new front in South Lebanon, skirmishes and exchanging of rockets between Iran, Iraq, now Pakistan on the line. We have Yemen, the Americans are bombarding Yemen, the Yemenis are jumping over ships coming in the region. So the scene is extremely chaotic and troubling, and that is affecting us tremendously. First of all, the sense that we are losing more and more the sense of minimum security and stability. We don't have that. We cannot predict what will come. And I feel extremely frustrated. As a liberal person, that I believe in international value, international human rights. Honestly, what I have seen after Gaza, after October 7 is I feel as a person I have been betrayed by the so-called democratic western countries. I didn't lose my faith in the values themselves. But I feel betrayed. I feel that I was fooled by major international powers, human rights is for them and not for everyone, the so-called international justice is not for everyone. The example of Palestinian journalists who have been murdered in front of everybody's eyes is a key example. There is a lack of solidarity with the Palestinian journalists. Everybody compared what happened in Gaza with what happened in Ukraine. And the double standards are really shocking. But we believe in the values and the rights. There is no way out, but to keep trying and trying. And even if certain democratic Western countries don't believe in the

value they preach, we believe in these values and we will defend these values till they are implemented on everyone.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: Many challenges face journalists across the Mena region. But some still have hope that things can improve.

Rasha Qandeel remains optimistic when she is in front of her students.

DAVIDSON: So what about the future of journalism in Egypt? ... is there still a desire for people, for young people to become journalists, given the situation?

QANDEEL: Actually, I have been skeptical about the answer of this until I started teaching undergrads at the American University in Cairo. I actually feel that when you give youngsters the power to speak their mind. The more you give them the chance to express themselves, the more they teach you stuff. And I think the generation that we're going to see of journalists in the Middle East and Egypt is no exception, is going to be probably the greatest journalists of all times. They have the empowerment, the self-confidence that we probably took a long time to have. And they have the knowledge, and the knowledge is now easier. So I think the people that I'm teaching today, which are probably going to be journalists in three or four years, are going to do wonders.

HESLOP: Ayman Mhanna, of the Skeyes Foundation, in Beirut, is concerned about the coming years, with the increased use of artificial intelligence, and how it will enable more surveillance and further restrict freedom.

MHANNA: However, at the same time, there is an awakening among young people that we cannot believe anymore the narrative that is propagated exclusively by those in power, and they are trying to seek alternative sources of information. And there are very interesting new media initiatives that have managed to grow outside government control and outside major businessmen control. So the role of my organization, of your organization, of many of our partners, is to further support these independent media initiatives in order to achieve sustainability, to achieve stronger ability to reach new segments of the population and actually provide them with the information that they need in order to inform societies and hopefully induce change.

ABALO: What motivates the journalists that are working to keep doing their work? Are you hopeful that things will change for the better, in terms of press freedom and freedom of expression?

MHANNA: Whether I'm hopeful or not is almost a moot point. This is a duty because if we do not do what we do. If good journalists do not do what they do, it is as if we are adopting a racist attitude towards our societies by saying that societies in the global south in general, but specifically in the Middle East and North Africa do not deserve democracy, do not deserve human rights, that they actually deserve to be oppressed and repressed, and that democracy, human rights, good governance is not for our societies. Freedom is a human right for everybody, everywhere in the world. So it's not about being hopeful. It's about a fundamental belief in human rights. And this is what drives us every day.

(Soundbite of music)

HESLOP: Journalists working in the Mena region face some of the biggest challenges to the profession, anywhere in the world.

But they're tackling them both pragmatically and creatively – every day – in order to continue promoting the truth. The belief that their work matters, and a little bit of hope, goes a long way.

For more resources about press freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, and around the world, please visit the press-freedom section of the Wan-Ifra website. That's w-a-n-dash-i-f-r-a-dot-o-r-g.

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Until next time, stay safe, and thanks for listening.

The Backstory production team is Andrew Heslop, Mariona Sanz, Irene Abalo, Colette Davidson and Sarah Elzas, who edited and mixed the episode.