



Gender-Based Online Violence against Women Journalists: Statement by Hosts

On Friday 1st April 2022, at 8.30am BST, Doughty Street Chambers, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), were intending to host a private breakfast event at Doughty Street Chambers in London: an expert discussion about the problem of gender-based online violence against women journalists, and proposed solutions. This event was due to take place in person, with no online attendance, and under Chatham House Rules, to enable attendees to share their experiences in a safe space.

The multi award-winning journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Rana Ayyub – who is regarded as an emblematic case of targeted online violence – was invited to speak at the event in person, alongside Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Director of the IBAHRI and member of the High Level Panel on Media Freedom; Dr Julie Posetti, ICFJ; and Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC and Tatyana Eatwell, Doughty Street Chambers.

This event forms part of the stakeholder engagement required by the [Online Violence Early Warning System project](#) led by ICFJ, which was commissioned in response to the findings of ICFJ's [trailblazing research](#) on the issue published by UNESCO.

Regrettably, the organisers understand that, on Tuesday 29th March 2022, as Ms Ayyub was due to board her flight from India to the UK, she was held by immigration officials at Mumbai airport and prevented from travelling. An hour after she was stopped at the border, and before she was released by immigration officials, she was issued with a summons to attend court in India on Friday 1st April 2022, the day of the planned event.

Co-organiser of the event, ICFJ's Dr. Julie Posetti, expressed serious concern about the press freedom implications of the travel ban slapped on Ms Ayyub as she attempted to fly to the UK to speak at events at the invitation of civil society organisations, stating, *"I am appalled at the blatant targeting of Ms Ayyub in what appears to be retaliation for her independent journalism and critical commentary on the Indian government. I am also extremely concerned for Ms Ayyub's well-being in the context of the*

prolific, disinformation-laced online violence she experiences, which has only escalated since she was stopped from travelling to the UK yesterday.”

“It is highly ironic that a government which insists press freedom is not under threat in India, contrary to all the evidence, is now preventing Ms Ayyub from speaking in person at events about the safety of journalists and press freedom in India,” Dr. Posetti said.

Tatyana Eatwell, Head of Doughty Street International, stated, *“The actions taken by the Indian authorities appear to be part of an ongoing campaign of harassment against Ms Ayyub, a journalist who stands by her commitment to independent journalism. This event was to be an important discussion on targeted gender-based online attacks against journalists. Such attacks gravely undermine the right to freedom of expression and pose a serious threat to the safety of journalists who perform a public service that is a central tenet of democracy.*

Journalists, lawyers, academics, diplomats and members of expert civil society organisations were to come together to meet with Rana Ayyub and other affected journalists. We are extremely disappointed that this event has been halted at the eleventh hour.”

Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Director of the IBAHRI added, *“Online threats and harassment are a growing issue, with female journalists disproportionately targeted by harassment and abuse online. Rana Ayyub has bravely spoken out about this issue and the abuse she faces, and this is a missed opportunity to meet with her and discuss urgent actions that are required. It is particularly galling that she has been prevented from travelling at such short notice and without a meaningful opportunity to challenge the decision in sufficient time to join us on 1st April in London as planned.”*

Ms Ayyub is also due to attend other events in Europe following this session, including delivering the [keynote address at the International Journalism Festival](#) in Perugia (which takes place from 6th – 10th April 2022).

Ends