

**Forum:** Human Rights Commission

**Issue:** The Question of Freedom of Expression and Opinion

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## Introduction

The question of freedom of expression and opinion has been present all over the world already before we got evidence of it. It is a fundamental human right permitting everyone to have the right to their own opinions without interference. This freedom is established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, under Article 19.<sup>1</sup> In addition to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of expression also includes freedom of information, including a person's right to receive public information. Freedom of expression protects almost all forms of expression, regardless of the content and tone of your message. It covers all spheres: public and private spheres; political, artistic and commercial action; forms (words, pictures, sounds) and media forms (films, cartoons, radio, television, social media). The violation of this fundamental human right is unfortunately still present in every country, whether it is typical or quite imperceptible. The issue is most common in authoritarian regimes and strongly religious countries with laws that require obligation. Several organisations, including the Article 19 organisation and Amnesty International have been operating this issue all over the world.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Article 19

Article 19 is a human right that grants every person the right to the freedom of speech, opinion and expression without filtering the content. It is a condition of liberty, which is vital in our society.<sup>2</sup>

### Expression

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>,  
<https://blog.ipleaders.in/article-19-indian-constitution/>

Expression is a way of showing your beliefs, opinions and thoughts through a medium, which includes words and body language.<sup>3</sup>

## **Freedom**

Freedom is a state of being uncontrolled by other measures politically, socially, physically and mentally. It includes having the freedom to fundamental human rights and measures.<sup>4</sup>

## **Opinion**

Opinion is a viewpoint of a person that is not based on facts but rather on beliefs and an individual's judgement.

## **Rabat Plan of Action**

The Rabat Plan of Action includes tackling the instigation of discrimination under Article 19. Its objectives include the formation of possible resolutions and reaching an understanding of laws regarding hatred towards nationality, race or religion.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a document displaying all of the fundamental human liberties. This mandate works as a code of conduct and a base for the entire global community, even though it is not lawfully binding. There are 30 Articles in the declaration.<sup>6</sup>

## **United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

UNESCO, the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization is an agency of the United Nations. The commission focuses on creating world peace through collaboration within the fields of art, education, culture and sciences. It is a branch of its parent organisation, the United Nations Economic and Social Council.<sup>7</sup>

## **Violation**

Violation is a general act of not following the rules or the law, usually resulting in consequences.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expression>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freedom>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/freedom-of-expression>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violation>

## Explanation of the Question

The freedom of expression and opinion has been an issue violated since before we have records of it. The essential ability to express oneself and one's opinion is essential in a world working towards equality. This privilege became noticed as a human right on the 10th of December 1948, when the General Assembly of the United Nations took notice of it.

The freedom of expression and opinion problem has been present mainly in countries with an authoritarian regime. These countries have an agenda of limiting people's freedom to have control, status and power in the nations. Examples of countries with limited freedom of speech include Afghanistan, Iran and Sudan. The reason why this freedom is more limited in the countries is because of the economic status. The countries may not be as economically developed as compared to the rest of the world, which is why having authoritarian control is beneficial for getting back on track and keeping the country running. People who are ready for change and improvement in their nation are commonly targeted to have their freedom limited. These nations with little freedom generally punish people trying to rebel against decisions made by the government. Punishments include being tormented, tortured, kept as a hostage, and so on.

Journalism is a field that includes several attacked people. This is due to the fact that journalists are eager to inform especially their country and also the rest of the world about attacks and recent events all over the world. This however may not be permitted in several nations due to authoritarian rule and the objective of authorities to stay in control. Examples of this include reporters sharing confidential information which can lead to being released or prohibited from publishing.

## Key Member States and NGOs Involved and Their Views

### Afghanistan

In Afghanistan people, especially women, are terrified to go out onto the street, as women have been killed for not covering themselves in public. This problem has become well-known worldwide. An example of this is that the Taliban has shut down several media channels through which people have been expressing their opinion throughout the country. There have been journalists killed for reporting

information to broadcasting channels. The Taliban has also been taking control of the country and killing people who have been trying to express their opinion in the civil community.<sup>9</sup>

### Amnesty International

Amnesty International has been a fundamental non-governmental organisation facing and campaigning against human rights violations. Amnesty International has been tracking organizations and attacks worldwide, with regional offices on every continent. They have members from 150 countries, with a total of over 10 million people involved.<sup>10</sup> The organisation focuses on article 19, as it is connected to other fundamental rights of people, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Amnesty International specifically focuses on nations with infringements of Article 19; they target countries with regulations criminalizing people who protest and with limited media freedom.<sup>11</sup>

### Article 19 Organisation

The Article 19 organisation is an international establishment working on tackling the violations of Article 19, the freedom of expression and opinion. The institution works regionally and globally on most continents.<sup>12</sup>

### China

People in China in general have little freedom of speech and expression; only a few have the privilege to express their opinion. This group includes government officials and Communist Party leaders as well as a few belonging to the linguistic, ideological and intellectual elite groups, established by the government.<sup>13</sup> The citizens of China do not have many freedoms and rights, contrary to what the state has promised. There is still ongoing persecution since 2018 towards the protestors and media is strictly controlled.<sup>14</sup>

### Freedom House

Freedom House is an organisation working on human rights issues ranging from authoritarian regimes to freedom of expression, media and religious freedom. The organisation has made policy

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<https://www.article19.org/resources/afghanistan-we-stand-in-solidarity-with-citizens-journalists-and-civil-society/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.article19.org/about-us/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cecc.gov/freedom-of-expression-in-china-a-privilege-not-a-right>

<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.article19.org/reader/global-expression-report-2018-19/regional-overviews/asia-pacific-regional-overview/asia-pacific-countries-in-focus/country-in-focus-china/>

recommendations and written research reports as well as started programs in necessary countries worldwide.<sup>15</sup>

## Iran

In Iran, there are strict rules regarding how people should dress. A more specific example of human rights violations in Iran is of 22-year-old Mahsa Jhina Amini, who died due to oppression and unlawful use of force by the Iranian authorities. She had been arrested for wearing an “improper hijab” when leaving Tehran’s Haghani metro station. Mahsa was arrested, detained and taken to a detention centre, where she was punished and a few days later found in a coma.<sup>16</sup>

## PEN International

PEN International is a global association focusing on the preservation of written records worldwide during warfare and political disputes. The organisation also works on the issue of free speech and censorship through media platforms.<sup>17</sup>

## Russia

In Russia, people who thought it was not right for their own country, Russia, to initiate the aggression towards Ukraine, have gotten arrested for protesting against the actions of expressing their opinion towards an international matter of peace. An example of this is Alexandra, a young teenage girl, who has been arrested by the Russian authorities on the 11th of April 2022 for “public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of Armed Forces of the Russian Federation”.<sup>18</sup> She is currently at the Prosecutor of Saint Petersburg under conditions that do not take her medical condition seriously, meaning it is a violation of human rights.

## Sudan

In Sudan, human rights defenders have been captured and tormented by a higher power. People have been harassed, intimidated and even killed too for protesting against certain issues. In Sudan, censorship has taken place especially during elections and protests. Media channels, houses and news websites have been blocked and cancelled for expressing their opinion and “false news”. Also, several raids have taken place, attacking media houses. Some journalists have been targeted for recording the country’s opinion on certain issues.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/perspectives>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.article19.org/resources/iran-justice-for-mahsa-jhina-amini/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://pen-international.org/who-we-are>

<sup>18</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67908>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.article19.org/resources/sudan-un-must-examine-free-expression-crisis/>

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 10, 1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights document established with UNESCO being the first United Nations agency to declare its activity <sup>20</sup>
2020 - now	Freedom of expression restricted in several nations due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation <sup>21</sup>
2021	Freedom of expression worsening all over the world compared to a decade ago, demonstrating the population of China, Myanmar and Afghanistan in a severe crisis <sup>22</sup>

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UN involvement towards the freedom of expression and opinion has been quite little, as several other organisations have been more involved in tackling this issue. The main focus however has been on the topic of expression and opinion on social media and on the internet, as well as on the Rabat Plan of Action. <sup>23</sup>

The United Nations created a resolution on the 8th of July 2022, that states the following: “the right to freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of democratic societies and that restrictions on the free flow of information undermine the rule of law by preventing efforts to hold public authorities accountable and expose corruption.” The countries involved in leading this resolution include Brazil, Canada, Fiji, Namibia, Netherlands and Sweden, as well as 66 other member states. The resolution promotes the importance of digital, media and information literacy in order to improve the ability of people to express themselves.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/>

<sup>21</sup>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/covid-19-global-attack-on-freedom-of-expression-is-having-a-dangerous-impact-on-public-health-crisis/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2022/08/25/World-freedom-of-expression-report>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/freedom-expression-and-opinion>

- Resolution on the right of information, 22 July 2020 (**A/HRC/44/L.18**)<sup>24</sup>
- Resolution on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet (**A/HRC/47/L.22**)<sup>25</sup>
- Resolution regarding the safety of journalists, 18 September 2020 (**A/HRC/45/L.42/Rev.1**)<sup>26</sup>
- Resolution regarding disinformation and censorship, 28 March 2022 (**A/HRC/49/L.31/Rev.1**)<sup>27</sup>

## Possible Solutions

### Formation of councils and additional organizations

The lack of freedom of expression and opinion could be tackled by bringing awareness to the laws that prohibit people from expressing their opinion. People who have been detained for their race, religion, political views or sexual orientation known as prisoners of conscience could be unleashed around nations by the formation of additional organisations. These councils could check the laws of all countries, preventing the consequences of the violation of Article 19. An additional yet substantial act could be the formation of a new council which checks over the human rights status of each country. This would mean that instead of looking at the law, the council would investigate the depths of human action in all parts of the nation. The act itself would be difficult to organize yet it could secure the enactment of Article 19 in less developed countries.<sup>28</sup>

### Internet usage

Access to information and resources regarding daily life is essential to keep up the standard of freedom all over the world. The internet and access to public networks in smaller parts of the country should be well-provided to allow influencing and expressing people's opinions, though it would mean supplying money to less economically developed countries.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.article19.org/resources/hrc44-un-resolution-on-freedom-of-expression/>  
<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G20/180/77/PDF/G2018077.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>25</sup> [https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/47/L.22](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/47/L.22)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.article19.org/resources/hrc45-new-un-resolution-on-the-safety-of-journalists/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-disinformation/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/freedom-of-expression/>

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