

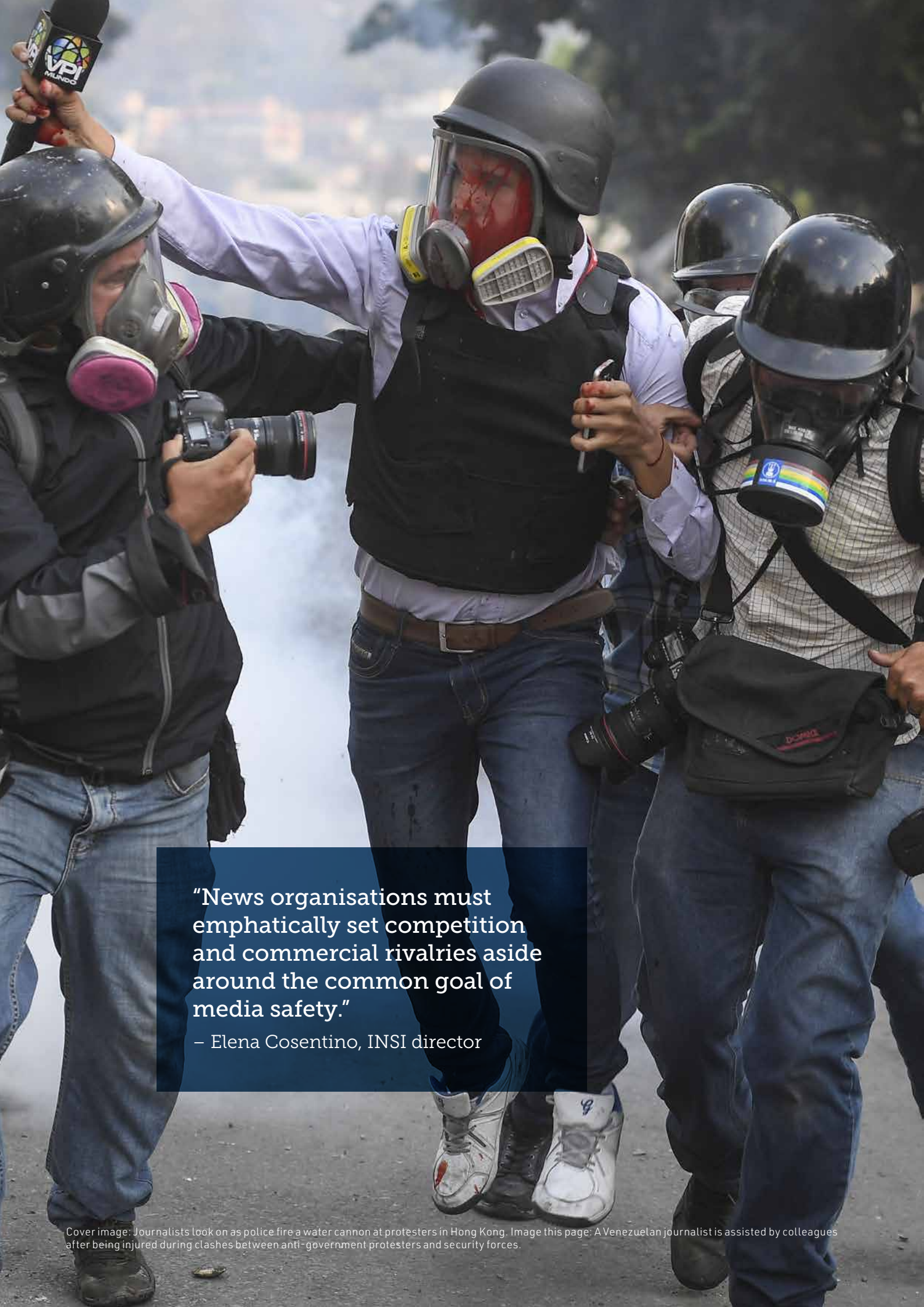
INSI



INTERNATIONAL NEWS SAFETY INSTITUTE

Annual Report 2019

JOURNALISM | SAFETY | RESPONSIBILITY | ACCOUNTABILITY



“News organisations must emphatically set competition and commercial rivalries aside around the common goal of media safety.”

– Elena Cosentino, INSI director

Introduction

INSI's mission has always been to encourage news organisations to share their experience and best practice when it comes to safety. Never was the need to stand together for the physical, mental and professional safety of journalists greater than it is today.

When I joined INSI in April 2019 I realised how relatively easy I'd had it covering international current affairs over the years. While my job carried some risk, I usually knew where the danger might come from: a disgruntled *narco* or corrupt *federal* in Mexico, a paranoid intelligence officer in Gadhafi's Libya, a trigger-happy gang member in Haiti or, simply, a rickety old taxi on a badly potholed road pretty much anywhere.

The threats were mostly predictable and geographically specific which certainly helped when it came to assessing risk and trying to mitigate against it.

Things began getting worse for the news media after the second Gulf war. Journalists were turned into highly prized targets of kidnapping – or worse – by radical jihadist groups and repressive regimes. Though the risks were greater, they were still largely confined to a limited number of journalists on high-risk assignments in conflict areas. That meant media organisations mainly trained staff assigned to hostile environments overseas, an expensive proposition but one that was fairly clear cut.

Over the last few years, however, things have taken a less predictable turn, as a perfect storm of technological progress and political regress has exponentially increased the number of journalists exposed to danger.

It has also made it much harder to define danger or evaluate the credibility and the source of the threat, let alone mitigate against it. The time and resources required to assess risk have spiralled as no threat can be taken lightly.

As media in some Western democracies are disparaged by their own governments as "enemies of the people" and "vile jackals", hostility towards journalists inevitably becomes normalised, spilling over into online abuse and even physical violence on what were previously considered safe assignments.

Journalists covering Westminster or a US election campaign now often need tailored safety training, back-watchers or even bodyguards to protect them from members of the public aping the abusive rhetoric they hear from elected political leaders.

Online threats have become a daily reality for all media workers, yet most journalists learn how to wipe their online profile of personal data only when it's too late.

No beat is entirely immune. Those covering sports, society, the environment and science can equally become targets and be harassed out of their jobs for sending seemingly trivial tweets. Unsuspecting media staff with no editorial responsibility in a production who, for instance, appear in the credits, may become soft targets for abuse as well. Reporters, and even their extended families, have been 'doxxed' or 'swatted' and scared into isolation, particularly in the US.

Women are particularly vulnerable to the anonymous threats and abuse.

Cyber attacks by individuals, politically motivated players and state actors are used to intimidate journalists, to blunt the impact of their work. News organisations cannot rely on the full backing of western governments, as many are effectively shrugging their shoulders when journalists are attacked, abused or even killed.

The financial cost to the news media industry of tackling this onslaught is huge. The human cost, particularly to mental health, has still not been fully calculated.

Media organisations are left wrangling with a mammoth task of potentially having to train all of their staff and freelancers on an ever-expanding list of dangers – both on and offline. It may eventually come to that.

But something needs to happen sooner. Without media safety there cannot be editorial freedom.

The seriousness of the situation requires a decisive corporate mind shift. News organisations must emphatically set competition and commercial rivalries aside around the common goal of media safety. This means having the willingness and courage to share real-time actionable safety information, as well as mistakes and best practices. It is the only way of identifying each other's blind spots and capitalising on the industry's collective strength.

INSI is here to help. Our mission is to work with our members, over 40 of the world's leading news organisations, and the wider journalist community, to develop new ways to cooperate for the protection of news media and journalism itself. That is what INSI was created to do 18 years ago and is what we intend to do more than ever in the year ahead.

– Elena Cosentino, INSI director

Members' services

In November we announced the launch of an exciting new project in cooperation with Facebook and Google to tackle the blight of online harassment against journalists. Over the course of 2020, the news organisations that make up INSI will sit down with the technology companies in a series of ground-breaking meetings to address an issue which is ravaging our media industry. The meetings are aimed at developing joint, practical, real world solutions. This project is unique as it promises to provide something that doesn't currently exist: an open communications channel, specifically dedicated to online safety, between the world's largest media outlets and the tech companies. The initiative developed by popular demand out of a series of landmark meetings INSI organised between its members and Twitter, Google and Facebook in 2018.

We continued to develop our core News Safety Group meetings, increasing their frequency and geographical spread, from London to New York, Stockholm and Paris where they were hosted by our members Agence France-Press, AP, BBC, CNN, Swedish Radio and BuzzFeed. Topics have included the rise of hostility and attacks on news crews and journalists on the Westminster beat, the safety implications of covering the far right across Europe, death threats to US newsrooms and the challenges of deploying to Syria.

Our exclusive members' advisories featured armed conflicts such as the war in Libya but also focused

heavily on dramatic escalations of civil unrest and political repression in Venezuela, Sudan, Hong Kong and Haiti. Our advisories have become more detailed and forensic in response to our members' growing needs and expectations – we've packed them with practical tips on reporting safely from hostile environments including deployment advice on getting in, where to stay and recommendations for reliable fixers and drivers.

Our members' webinars included a session on Brazil to discuss Jair Bolsonaro's first month in power and the current safety situation for journalists in the country. We plan to expand the webinars next year, increasing their frequency and making them more reactive to current events.

The renewed conflict in northern Syria saw us revive our confidential channel allowing members to exchange real-time information about high-risk developing stories.

“The more insidious threats of harassment and intimidation bring new challenges to a broader group. INSI plays a vital role in highlighting and combating this menace”

– Robin Elias, INSI chair

Opposite side (left to right): Mourners carry the coffin containing the body of Mexican journalist Celestino Ruiz; A Libyan journalist holds a portrait of fellow reporter Mohammed bin Khalifa who was killed covering militia clashes; Journalists gather at the border between Turkey and Syria; A photographer in Paris who was injured by a rubber bullet at a Yellow Vests protest is helped by a colleague; and US president Donald Trump speaks to journalists.





Staff changes

After almost nine years, director Hannah Storm moved on from INSI in early 2019. Replacing Storm was Elena Cosentino whose first hand experience covering natural disasters, wars, migration, drug trafficking, terrorism and organised crime made her the perfect choice to take INSI forward.

"I feel honoured to have been chosen to lead INSI at a time when 'inconvenient' journalism comes under threat from new and unexpected quarters," Elena says. "I passionately believe that protecting journalists, and their ability to do their job, is a fundamental responsibility of any democracy worthy of its name. Yet journalists are still being targeted, largely with impunity, the world over."

Robin Elias is the new chairman of the INSI Board of Trustees after Sue English stepped down in November. "It has been a great pleasure and a privilege to be the chair of INSI," says Sue. "Ensuring the safety of journalists is vital at a time when access to accurate and impartial information is under such threat. I'm delighted to be handing over to Robin whose experience and wisdom will keep INSI at the forefront of this important work."

Robin worked for ITN for more than 30 years - for 10 of them as programme editor of News at Ten. For the last 10 years he has been managing editor of ITV News. "The safety of staff has always been the most important responsibility of news managers," says Robin. "Our news teams continue to face danger in the field every day. The more insidious threats of harassment and intimidation bring new challenges to a broader group. INSI plays a vital role in highlighting and combatting this menace."

Other staff changes in 2019 included the departure of Anna Bevan as assistant director and the arrival of Naseem Khan as news and projects manager.

New members

2019 was a near record year for new members joining INSI. Early in the year we welcomed the Norwegian arm of the Schibsted Media Group to the network. Based in Oslo, Schibsted owns the Norwegian newspapers VG and Aftenposten. Also joining were the New York Times, Discovery, Radio France and Vox Media.

Opposite page: A fighter loyal to the Libyan government fires a machine gun during clashes with troops supporting Khalifa Haftar; and police fire tear gas to disperse protesters following a march against a controversial extradition bill in Hong Kong. Image below: A journalist broadcasts from in front of Britain's Houses of Parliament.





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