



**INSI**

INTERNATIONAL  
NEWS SAFETY  
INSTITUTE

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

JOURNALISM | SAFETY | RESPONSIBILITY | COMMUNITY



“ AS THE IDF TOLD OUR MEMBERS THEY COULD NOT GUARANTEE THE SAFETY OF NEWS BUREAUS OR STAFF IN GAZA, THERE WAS A SHOCKING REALISATION THAT TRADITIONAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT APPEARED TO NO LONGER APPLY.

– Elena Cosentino, INSI director



Cover image : An aerial view of buildings destroyed by Israeli air strikes in the Jabalia camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza City, on October 11, 2023. Yahya HASSOUNA / AFP; This page: Palestinians carry away photojournalist Ayman Nobani who has been wounded by Israeli gunfire while covering clashes in the occupied West Bank village of Duma on February 2, 2023 following the demolition of a Palestinian owned house. Zain JAAFAR / AFP

# INTRODUCTION

By INSI Director, Elena Cosentino

**FUNDED BY JOURNALISTS AND RUN BY JOURNALISTS, INSI WORKS TO MAKE GREAT ALLIES OF FAIR COMPETITORS SO THAT THOSE WHO COVER THE MOST DANGEROUS AND CONSEQUENTIAL STORIES OF OUR TIMES ARE PROPERLY SUPPORTED, WHATEVER THEIR ETHNICITY, CREED OR IDENTITY MAY BE.**

This year we marked INSI's 20th anniversary. It now feels like a small miracle that we managed to squeeze in a proper in-person celebration in London, attended by INSI's 50 member organisations and other allies, just before the awful events of October 7th and all that followed.

The September event at London's Royal Geographical Society and subsequent INSI plenary summit at the Frontline Club gave us all a huge boost and renewed clarity about our purpose, focus and mutual trust as a network, just as we were about to need it so badly to deal with the most divisive, distressing and deadly conflict for journalists in a long time.

The previous nine months had been marked by war in Ukraine and Sudan, devastating earthquakes in Turkey, Syria and Morocco, apocalyptic floods in Libya and ever-growing threats to journalism worldwide. It proved crucial that INSI members from around the world were able to meet in person to mark our collective achievements of the past 20 years but also forge a clear path ahead.

In an inspiring keynote speech, Nima Elbagir, CNN's Senior International Investigative Correspondent, shared details of how risks and challenges have mutated during her reporting career, intertwining with INSI's two-decade long history.

In particularly timely remarks, Nima also highlighted the growing threat by both rogue and state actors, and the devastating impact their attacks can have on journalists' safety and mental health, particularly if they are 'local', or perceived as such, to the story. A short and powerful film, now published on our website, summed up, in the words of our members, how INSI enables the best and boldest journalism by putting risk management, cooperation and responsibility at the heart of the news media industry. As Richard Tait, one of INSI's pioneering founders put it, "INSI's fundamental achievement is that nobody in the industry today can pretend they don't know what good safety standards are". He also reminded us that there are still lots of colleagues working in dangerous environments without much protection or back up, and predicted our work will

have to be redoubled over the next 20 years. Nobody doubted our toughest days may still lie ahead. We just didn't know they were literally around the corner.

Two weeks later, Hamas launched their unprecedented attack inside Israel, which, in turn, declared war on Hamas in Gaza. We were in no doubt over the gravity of the news which had just broken and the ripple effect that a renewed conflict in Israel and Palestine would likely have around the world. Within minutes, INSI members began exchanging information about flights into Israel, land access from Jordan and PPE availability on the ground. Soon after, INSI secured emergency access to Dataminr's alert system for members. Within a few hours, details about acts of hostility towards news teams began circulating within our confidential groups, as well as warnings of near-misses at members' offices in Gaza.

It was clear to everyone in our group that this conflict was going to have a profound impact on staff and colleagues' welfare, mental health, and even physical safety.

Seven journalists were killed on the first day of the conflict alone – four Israelis and three Palestinians. Within a few days, Reuters' Issam Abdallah was killed and AFP's Christina Assi was severely wounded, by what were later confirmed as Israeli tank shells fired on their live position along the Southern Lebanon border. Five more journalists were wounded in that incident. INSI news outlets rallied together to help their colleagues both on the ground and remotely in any way they could.

As the IDF told our members they could not guarantee the safety of news bureaus or staff in Gaza either, there was a shocking realisation that traditional rules of engagement appeared to no longer apply. Since then, dozens more journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza, the West Bank and Southern Lebanon. Two months in, it's the largest journalist toll in a conflict since records began. As international journalists have been prevented from entering the strip, Gazan journalists and freelancers have had to carry the burden of documenting the conflict alone, while struggling to survive with little or no food, water or





Friends and colleagues of two Palestinian journalists Hassounah Salim and Sari Mansour, killed in an Israeli strike, mourn over their bodies during their funeral in Deir al-Balah in the southern Gaza Strip on November 19, 2023. Bashar TALEB / AFP

electricity, let alone safety. Al Jazeera's Samer Abudaqa was killed in an Israeli drone attack and other journalists lost members of their family, even their children, yet have continued to work, in a display of resilience and dedication that commands the highest respect.

INSI members' frantic efforts have been primarily focused on assisting local staff caught in harm's way. We received dozens of individual requests for support and information in connection with sending money, moving and evacuating the injured, and tracking down the missing. Senior leaders within our network have been in regular contact over diplomatic efforts to get colleagues in need out of Rafah, and into Egypt.

From the vicarious trauma and moral injury of those affected by reporting on the horrors of Hamas' October 7th attack and the subsequent war on Gaza, to the agony suffered by Palestinian colleagues trapped in the strip with their loved ones, members have described this situation as unprecedented and even unbearable. To make things worse, the appalling rise in both antisemitism and islamophobia, both real and perceived, risks driving a wedge even between colleagues in the field and in the newsroom. We are hearing that a sense of impotence, anger and hopelessness is at an all-time high among journalists, including many of our members.

The extreme toxicity of the public debate about this conflict has only added to the psychological strain many journalists and news managers have

been suffering over the past several weeks. News organisations and individual journalists are being singled out and viciously attacked in thinly veiled propaganda publications and by social media trolls. That's not new and, sadly, has come to be seen by many as an occupational hazard.

Yet, what I perhaps find most dispiriting of all, is when I see some mainstream news outlets – none of them INSI members – piling on the bitterness and toxicity of the discourse around this conflict to undermine professional peers, by questioning the bona fides of their direct competitors' work. Scoring cheap points at such difficult times only adds to the risk and tremendous stress that all journalists collectively face. It is also utterly self-defeating as we know that propagandists on all sides seek nothing better than to discredit journalism as a whole.

So, where do we go from here?

Journalists and media organisations desperately need each other at times like these. Funded by journalists and run by journalists, INSI works to make great allies of fair competitors so that those who cover the most dangerous and consequential stories of our times are properly supported, whatever their ethnicity, creed or identity may be. Journalism is not a zero-sum game and everyone who shares and applies these principles in good faith is most welcome to join us.

– Elena Cosentino, INSI Director



# MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

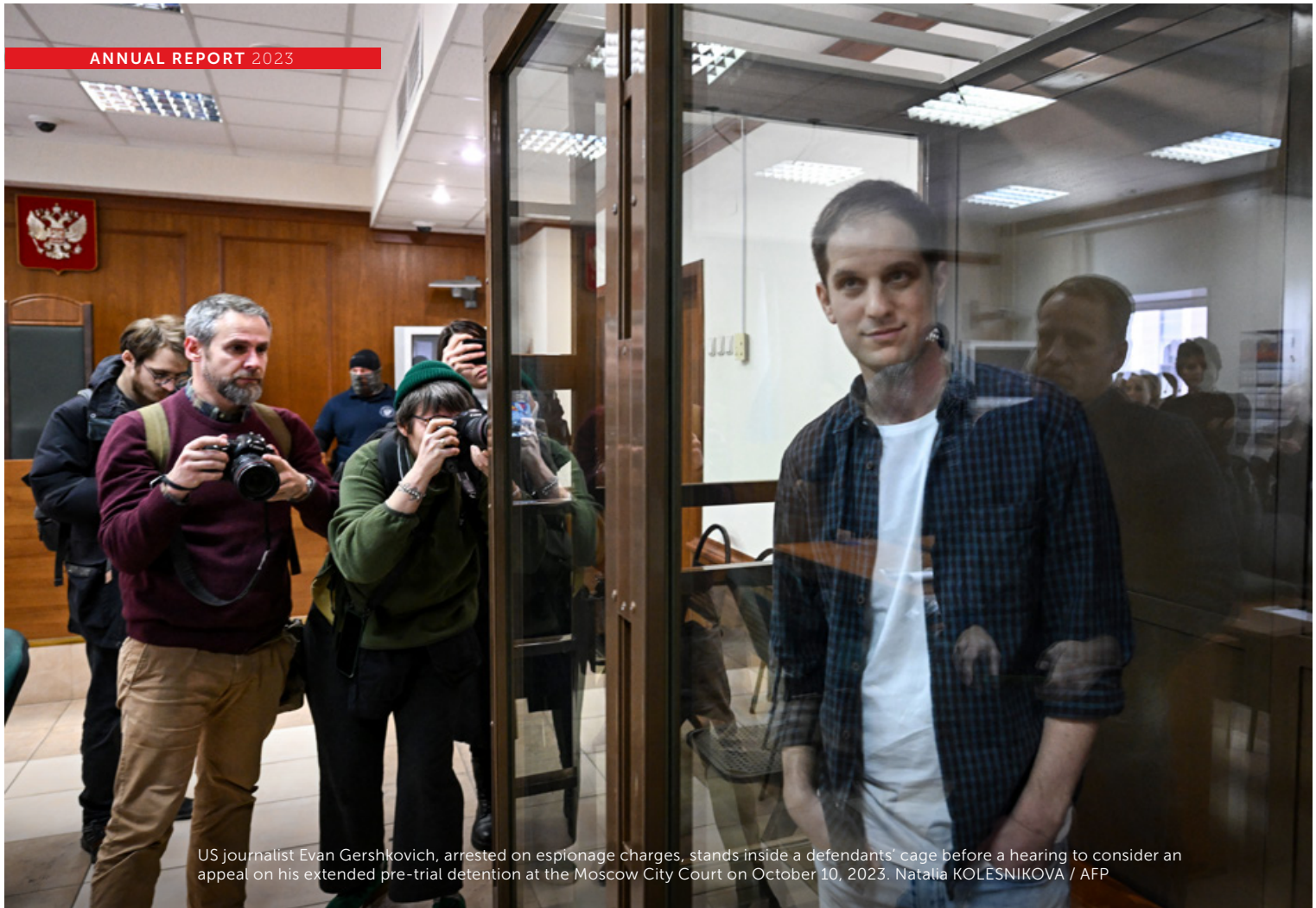
In January, we published our annual *Killing the Messenger* report, a sobering summary of journalist deaths over the previous year. At least 85 journalists were killed in 2022, an increase of 50 per cent compared to 2021. Mexico, for the fourth year running, retained its reputation as the deadliest country for journalists, with 16 losing their lives, while at least 14 of our colleagues died in Ukraine, many in the first few months of the conflict

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AFP cameraman Dylan Collins speaking on his mobile phone after being injured by Israeli shelling at Alma al-Shaab border village with Israel in southern Lebanon on October 13, 2023. Hassan AMMAR / Courtesy of the Associated Press (AP) / AFP;



US journalist Evan Gershkovich, arrested on espionage charges, stands inside a defendants' cage before a hearing to consider an appeal on his extended pre-trial detention at the Moscow City Court on October 10, 2023. Natalia KOLESNIKOVA / AFP

## EXPERT BRIEFINGS, ONLINE AND IN-PERSON MEETINGS

INSI members continued reaping the benefits of online meetings this year. What started as a fallback option during the pandemic, became a daily necessity in the first months of the Ukraine war, and is now standard INSI practice. Throughout the year, online meetings have been the most effective way to gather members from around the globe at a moment's notice to discuss and tackle critical issues in real-time. Nonetheless, more hybrid and in-person sessions were held again this year than any time since before the pandemic, as to encourage real contact and networking between members.

We started 2023 with an expert forecast for the year ahead by geopolitical intelligence firm Dragonfly who, among other things, predicted the high likelihood of a war between Israel and militant groups in Gaza leading to a complete closure of the strip.

The Ukraine war remained high on INSI's agenda in 2023. In February, ahead of the first anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, members came together to consolidate learnings from a difficult year of frontline coverage. An INSI survey revealed a growing, unmet demand for high-risk advisors with suitable media experience and a lack of defined standards of reference for this increasingly crucial role. This led to the creation of a dedicated INSI members' working group, tasked with delivering a guide, soon to be published, to improve the process of matching the right advisor to each high-risk deployment.

In May, the death of AFP's journalist Arman Soldin in Ukraine dealt a devastating blow to our colleagues and the whole journalism community. Members turned to one another for support and advice on how to deal with such a tragic loss.



Natural disasters also posed a big challenge for reporting and news safety this year. Following the devastating earthquakes in Turkey, Syria and Morocco and the collapse of the dams in Libya, difficult access, lack of infrastructure and, in some areas, conflict, made our members' jobs particularly testing. Highly attended online meetings and information exchanges among members proved crucial. Our follow-up conversations on the topic encouraged members to share their improved protocols, from making regional bureaus fully equipped and more self-sufficient, to better supporting traumatised staff.

Encouraging and supporting advanced preparation is also a key part of INSI's mission. Because of Taiwan's unique geographical position, few stories require longer-term safety planning than a possible invasion of the island state. A fascinating hybrid session on the topic allowed all members, including those with fewer resources, to benefit from the network's collective expertise and strategic work on logistics, communication security and staffing concerns, both in Taiwan and China. The arrest of Evan Gerskhovich, Russia correspondent for INSI member The Wall Street Journal, dramatically



Turkish journalist Yuksel Akalan reports on the scene of the earthquake in Turkey in February as a shockwave struck, and is seen in footage evacuating the area and assisting a young girl. Image via Reuters (on X)

highlighted the risks of being used as hostages for geopolitical bargaining by authoritarian regimes.

The conflict in Sudan – as well as the numerous coups and attempted coups in Sahel and beyond were also addressed, with the expansion of our network across Africa emerging as a pressing need.

Again, for the longer-term capacity building, we tackled another complex deployment challenge: medical support in hostile environments. Medical qualifications, training options, competencies and responsibilities are sometimes poorly understood in the news media industry, with the risk of both moral and legal consequences should something go wrong. In a very useful masterclass with industry experts from Iqarus, we mapped a clear way for our members through the maze of acronyms and conflicting information plaguing this specific topic.

In other activities, INSI members were able to exchange real-time information on the Nanterre riots, receive detailed advice on covering wildfires safely and share the extreme experience of following the migrants' trail through the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama.

The October 7 Hamas attack that killed around 1200 Israelis and the subsequent Israeli war with Hamas in Gaza has of course dominated the last months of INSI members' activities in 2023, as already highlighted in this report's introduction. The strong bond of trust and mutual respect among INSI members has proved invaluable while covering a topic so fraught with animosity, divisiveness, collective trauma and propaganda. From the beginning, members have been able to share information in confidence on access, logistics, incidents and threats across Israel, Palestine and Lebanon in a safe space, free from the toxicity of the public discourse. The impact of this conflict and the deaths and wounding of so many of our colleagues continues to be INSI's utmost priority.

## NOTES AND EXCLUSIVE ADVISORIES

Providing detailed notes and other confidential materials to help our members make critical decisions about deployments on the ground remains a core part of INSI's work.

The harassment of journalists – be that while reporting in China or covering the Brazilian inauguration protests – was a worryingly recurrent theme in 2023, tying into global trends of mainstream media hostility and mistrust. Such concerns prompted INSI to speak to affected members and swiftly share confidential notes on how to support staff and minimise the chance of harassment in such volatile environments.

The prevalence of earthquakes, wildfires and floods throughout the year also highlighted the need for robust natural disaster guidance across newsrooms,

and prompted INSI to share a collection of core safety reference materials and advisories on the subject.

INSI also helped with numerous individual requests from members on a range of topics, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh.

Our members' notebooks – first-hand accounts from correspondents on the ground – continued to be a popular and well-received source of ground truths for our members. From working under the radar in Egypt and reporting from Iran, to tracking the Wagner group in the Central African Republic, and following migrants on the dangerous Darién Gap trail, we work to preserve the precious and unique experiences that our colleagues build at great personal risk, covering some of the toughest assignments in the world.

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– Elena Cosentino, INSI director

Colleagues and family members mourn over the body of Al Jazeera cameraman Samer Abudaqa, who was killed in Khan Yunis on the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment on December 16, 2023. Mahmud HAMS / AFP





Tear gas canisters are fired among journalists and demonstrators during a protest demanding better pay and living conditions in Lebanon's capital Beirut on April 18, 2023. Anwar AMRO / AFP

## NEW MEMBERS AND BOARD CHANGES

Just as the outbreak of the Ukraine war was a catalyst for new members to join INSI last year, the Israel-Gaza war has prompted other hugely respected media organisations to become part of our network. Irish broadcaster RTÉ and Channel 4 joined in October and November 2023. We look forward to working with them and hearing their vital contributions.

We were delighted to welcome Mark Grant and Simon Gardner to the board, representing the Associated Press and Reuters respectively. Their additions will help ensure the board will continue to play a vital role in INSI's development in 2024.

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Protesters gather on a stage holding signs showing portraits of Israeli hostages held in Gaza since the October 7 attacks, during a demonstration calling for their release outside a plaza in Tel Aviv informally called "Hostages Square", on December 9, 2023. Ahmad GHARABLI / AFP



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