

assemblea

43rd Session – Human Rights Committee Geneva, March 5th, 2020

HRC to consider report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. A/HRC/43/26

Intervention of the Catalan National Assembly (Civil Society Organization)

The situation of the freedom of the press in Spain is becoming an issue of increasing concern. In 2015, Spain reformed the Criminal Code and the Law on the Protection of Public Security—the so called “gag law”. Its abusive application by the Security Forces has resulted in dozens of journalists being fined, having a negative impact on the exercise of the right to freedom of information, and engendering self-censorship for journalists and those who want to document police actions, as has been denounced by organizations such as Amnesty International.

In a similar vein, police violence against media professionals has also seen significant growth during the last years. It was in autumn 2019 when most of the case were recorded. After the Spanish courts handed down harsh sentences on the Catalan civic and political leaders, massive nonviolent demonstrations were held across Catalonia. Police attacked and harassed demonstrators and journalists alike, even if they displayed credentials as journalists. Some were hit with direct foam bullet shots (illegal by law in Catalonia). According to the Catalan Critical Media Observatory, 70 journalists suffered injuries. One reporter from the media “El Pais” was even detained and taken into custody for no reason by Spanish police and released the day after with no charges.

All these violations of free journalism were denounced by Amnesty International, the European Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, among other international organizations.

During the recent Universal Periodic Review of Spain, member states like the USA called on the Spanish authorities to hold accountable those responsible for crimes against journalists or that otherwise undermine the exercise of freedom of expression, regardless of whether they are non-state or state actors, and fourteen other countries expressed their concern at the situation of freedom of expression in Spain.

For all these reasons, the AIDL calls on the Spanish authorities to respect the rights of journalists, and to promote freedom of press and information.