



Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council

45th Session – November 2025

Universal Periodic Review – The State of Libya

State of Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom in Libya

Submitted by: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

CPJ is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide and defends the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal.

Contact:

Website: www.cpj.org

Postal address: P.O. Box 2675, New York, NY 10108

Phone: +1 (212) 465-1004

Email: info@cpj.org

Introduction

1. This submission documents a deterioration in the state press freedom in the State of Libya, facilitated by the legal framework, and violative practices. The information presented in this submission is based on evidence collected by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in consultation with local journalists.

Prior Relevant UPR Recommendations

2. Libya underwent its third UPR cycle in November 2020, its second in May 2015, and its first in November 2010.
3. In its third UPR cycle, Libya accepted 9 out of 12 recommendations from States related to freedom of expression and/or press and media freedom. Recommendations have not been implemented as of the date of this submission:
 - a. 148.158 Investigate all unresolved cases of the killing of journalists and media workers (Greece); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - b. 148.169 Consider taking advantage of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity as a means of strengthening the protection of journalists (Afghanistan); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - c. 148.171 Immediately release arbitrarily or unlawfully arrested journalists (Austria); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - d. 148.173 Protect journalists and human rights defenders (France); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - e. 148.174 Ensure the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and political activists from arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance (Germany); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - f. 148.176 Protect journalists, media workers and human rights defenders from acts of violence and harassment, investigate attacks against them and hold the perpetrators accountable (Norway); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - g. 148.179 Ensure that journalists and media workers can carry out their work without fear of reprisal (Republic of Korea); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - h. 148.159 Investigate all allegations of excessive use of force, as well as all human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, restrictions on freedom of expression as well as on the right of peaceful assembly and protest in Libya (Iceland); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - i. 148.89 Take adequate measures to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable groups, including human rights defenders, journalists, women, children, internally displaced persons, migrants and refugees, and that those responsible for violence against them are held accountable (Netherlands); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
4. During its third UPR cycle, Libya also noted three recommendations from States relating to press freedom and the freedom of expression:
 - a. 148.170 Amend articles 37 and 41 of the draft Constitution released in July 2017, to guarantee freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly (Australia); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4

- b. 148.178 Lift all existing restrictions on civil society organizations and their activities and take measures to protect human rights defenders and media and legal professionals (Portugal); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
 - c. 148.80 Review the Penal Code, the Terrorism Law, the Civic Associations Law and the Publications Law, as a restrictive legal framework on freedom of expression, as well as freedom of assembly and association, and bring it into line with international standards (Estonia); Source of Position: A/HRC/46/17/Add.1 - Para.4
5. Libya's failure to implement any recommendations comes amid an already perilous environment for journalists, marked by pervasive impunity, state fragmentation, and the unchecked power of armed groups. Journalists continue to face arbitrary detention, military trials, surveillance, and intimidation, while media outlets are raided, censored, or shut down, and coverage of corruption or dissent is met with harassment or exileⁱ.

Situation for Press Freedom in Libya (Since UPR 3rd Cycle)

Since its third UPR cycle, Libya has arbitrarily detained at least six journalists, passed a significantly restrictive press freedom law, the 2022 Cybercrime Law, and seen multiple violent attacks on media outlets and workers, including 2 armed raids and at least 3 cases of journalist harassment or forced exile. Despite accepting 9 of 12 press freedom-related UPR recommendations, none have been implemented, reflecting the continued erosion of media freedom amid political fragmentation and impunity.

Legal Framework

Rights-respecting laws

- 6. Libya has binding obligations to guarantee freedom of expression and press freedom under both **national and international law. Article 14 of the 2011 Constitutional Declaration**, which serves as Libya's interim constitution, guarantees freedom of opinion, expression, communication, press, and peaceful assembly, stating: "The State shall guarantee freedom of opinion, individual and collective expression, research, communication, press, media, printing and editing, movement, assembly, demonstration and peaceful sit-in in accordance with the statute."ⁱⁱ
- 7. Libya is also a party to **the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which enshrines the right to freedom of expression under **Article 19**. This includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, through any media of one's choice. Libya's legal obligations under the ICCPR require that any restriction on freedom of expression be provided by law, serve a legitimate aim, and be necessary and proportionate.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 8. A **Draft Constitution proposed in 2017** contains expanded protections for freedom of expression and media. **Article 46** guarantees freedom of expression and publication, prohibits incitement to hatred or violence, and obliges the state to protect private life. **Article 47** explicitly protects press freedom, guarantees plurality and independence of media outlets, and prohibits the suspension or dissolution of media institutions without a

judicial ruling. However, the draft constitution remains unratified and without legal force.^{iv}

Rights-violating laws

9. In contrast to these commitments, Libya's current legal framework imposes severe limitations on press and media freedom. **The 1972 Publications Law** remains in force and criminalizes defamation, slander, and criticism of public officials and state institutions. The law authorizes the government to revoke licenses and seize publications considered contrary to public order or national values.^v
10. **Libya's Penal Code** also contains vague and overly broad provisions that are frequently used to target journalists and media workers. These include articles criminalizing "insulting the nation or its symbols," "defaming public officials," and "harming public morals or the reputation of the state." These provisions lack clear definitions and are regularly invoked to punish legitimate journalistic activity.^{vi}
11. **Cybercrime Law No. 5 of 2022** further expands the state's ability to prosecute online expression. It has been used to arrest individuals for social media posts deemed offensive to national traditions or threatening public order. The law's vague language allows for broad interpretation and opens the door to arbitrary enforcement against journalists, bloggers, and activists.^{vii}
12. In practice, these laws have created one of the most repressive media environments in the region. Journalists are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention, harassment, intimidation, military trials, and surveillance. News outlets have been raided, shut down, or forced to operate in exile, while armed groups and political authorities continue to suppress dissent and censor critical reporting with impunity.^{viii}
13. The fragmented political landscape, absence of unified governance, and proliferation of armed non-state actors have enabled a climate of lawlessness, further undermining the rule of law and press freedom. Despite Libya's formal legal commitments, the state continues to violate its obligations to protect the rights of journalists and guarantee freedom of expression.^{ix}
14. The vague and overly broad legal provisions outlined above allow Libyan authorities and de facto power holders to arbitrarily suppress independent journalism, restrict freedom of expression, and silence critical voices without consequence.

Press Freedom Violations

15. Since November 2020, Libya's political landscape has remained deeply fragmented, with rival governments, delayed elections, and a persistent power struggle between eastern and western factions undermining national cohesion. The absence of a unified, functioning central authority and the rise of parallel institutions have created a vacuum of accountability, allowing both state and non-state actors to operate with impunity. This unstable environment has significantly contributed to the continued deterioration of press freedom, where journalists face arbitrary detention, intimidation, surveillance, and

violence amid an expanding arsenal of restrictive laws designed to silence dissent and suppress independent reporting.

16. Between November 1, 2020, and January 31, 2025, CPJ and other rights groups' research show **the repressive media environment is shaped by a fragmented political landscape, widespread impunity, and a lack of effective central authority. Journalists are routinely subjected to arbitrary detention, intimidation, surveillance, and military trials, while new laws have further restricted online and offline expression.**^x

Legal Repression

17. In September 2022, the House of Representatives passed **Law No. 5 on Cybercrimes**. The law criminalizes online expression deemed to “undermine public order or morality” and grants authorities broad powers to monitor internet use, block websites, and penalize encrypted communications. The law’s vague language has led to increased censorship and the arbitrary arrest of social media users and journalists.^{xi}
18. In February 2023, the eastern-based authorities began enforcing the Cybercrime Law, leading to arrests of journalists and activists in connection to their online posts.^{xii}

Arbitrary Arrests and Detention

19. On March 26, 2022, **Ali al-Rifawi**, a reporter for 218 TV, was arrested in Sirte by members of the Internal Security Agency affiliated with the Libyan Arab Armed Forces. The arrest followed a complaint by the city’s mayor accusing al-Rifawi of “influencing public opinion” through his reporting on corruption. Al-Rifawi was released^{xiii} on July 5, 2022.^{xiv}
20. On May 15, 2024, **Saleh Al-Zerouali**, journalist at the Al Ghayma news site, was arrested and accused of supporting terrorism after publishing articles critical of the government. He was brought before a military court in March 2025 and remains in detention.^{xv}
21. On July 11, 2024, **Ahmed al-Senoussi**, journalist and owner of the Al Sada website, was detained in Tripoli for three days after publishing documents implicating the Minister of Economy and Trade in alleged misconduct. He remains under a travel ban.^{xvi}
22. In November 2024, **Mohamed al Sourit**, editor-in-chief of Al-Hayat, was arrested in Benghazi and held for nearly three weeks.^{xvii}
23. In the same month, **Ayed Abdeljalil**, an independent journalist, was arrested for criticizing a local official. He was detained in inhumane conditions in Tawergha before being released under judicial control. Earlier in 2024, he had been imprisoned twice for speaking out against corruption and racism.^{xviii}

Equipment Confiscation and Surveillance

24. In December 2024, **Islam al-Atrash**, a journalist contributing to both local and international outlets, had his equipment confiscated by an armed group in Tripoli while attempting to cover a local story.^{xix}

Harassment and Threats

25. In December 2021, authorities launched a crackdown campaign on online activists, arbitrarily arresting and detaining individuals for online speech, which significantly curtailed digital freedom and fostered a climate of self-censorship.^{xx}
26. In 2024, **Ikram Rajab**, a journalist with Al-Moustakbal, was repeatedly detained and subjected to mistreatment for criticizing local governance in eastern Libya. Her family has also been targeted.^{xxi}
27. **Khairallah Ibrahim**, who led a solidarity campaign for detained journalists, was threatened and closely surveilled by militias, prompting him to flee the country. He had previously been targeted in 2014, when his car was set on fire in retaliation for his reporting.^{xxii}

Attacks on Media Outlets

28. On January 7, 2024, the offices of **Radio Lam** in Tripoli were set on fire, and all broadcasting equipment was looted. Both online and on-air transmissions were disrupted. The station has not resumed operations and is awaiting the results of the official investigation.^{xxiii}
29. On January 13, 2024, Armed men stormed the offices of the weekly **Al-Waqt newspaper** in Tripoli. The staff were threatened and forced to evacuate the premises, which were subsequently seized. After a week-long interruption, operations resumed in a new office provided by the General Press Authority.^{xxiv}

Recommendations

In light of the aforementioned findings, CPJ calls on States participating in the UPR process to make the following recommendations for Libya to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release all journalists, bloggers, and media workers who are detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. This includes those held without charge, under military jurisdiction, or without access to legal representation, such as *Saleh Al-Zerouali* and others arbitrarily detained in 2024.

2. Ensure that all journalists, including those previously detained, are granted due process rights, including timely access to legal counsel, fair and public trials before civilian courts, and protection from torture or inhuman treatment during detention.
3. Repeal or substantially amend the 2022 Cybercrime Law (Law No. 5) to bring it into full compliance with Libya's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Vague provisions criminalizing "undermining public order or morality" and granting excessive surveillance powers must be revised to prevent censorship and the criminalization of online speech.
4. Immediately end the use of military tribunals to prosecute civilians, especially journalists, and ensure all charges against media workers under such courts are dismissed.
5. Conduct prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into all attacks on journalists and media outlets, including the arson of Radio Lam, the raid on *Al-Waqt* newspaper, the harassment of *Ikram Rajab* and *Khairallah Ibrahim*, and the confiscation of *Islam al-Atrash's* equipment. Ensure that perpetrators are held criminally accountable through civilian judicial channels.
6. Adopt comprehensive legislation protecting the safety, rights, and independence of journalists, bloggers, and media workers, in line with the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This should include clear safeguards against intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary surveillance by security forces or armed groups.
7. Establish an independent national body tasked with monitoring violations of media freedom and the protection of journalists, empowered to receive complaints, conduct investigations, and recommend actions to relevant authorities.
8. Repeal or revise laws that criminalize defamation, "influencing public opinion," "insulting officials," or similar offenses often used to suppress dissent, including relevant articles in the Penal Code and Publications Law. Replace criminal defamation with proportionate civil remedies.
9. Amend or repeal restrictive media laws, including the Publications Law, Civic Associations Law, and regulations requiring licensing or political approval for broadcasting and publishing. Ensure that such regulations are transparent, non-discriminatory, and in line with international human rights law.
10. Publicly commit to respecting the independence of the media sector and prohibit any interference with editorial content, intimidation of media outlets, or politically motivated suspension of licenses.
11. Guarantee freedom of access to information for journalists, including public data and government sources, by adopting legislation aligned with international standards such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Model Law on Access to Information.

12. Lift restrictions on civil society organizations working on media freedom, human rights, and anti-corruption and allow them to operate freely without fear of reprisal or bureaucratic interference.
13. Train security forces, judicial officers, and government officials on the rights and protections afforded to journalists under international law, including their role in fostering an open and democratic society.
14. Facilitate visits by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and allow access to international and regional human rights organizations monitoring media freedom.
15. Take immediate steps to unify Libya's fragmented legal and governance systems, to ensure consistent enforcement of human rights standards across the country to protect the media sector and eliminate the de facto impunity enjoyed by armed groups and local authorities.

ⁱ Committee to Protec journalists, 2020-2025, <https://cpj.org/mideast/libya/>.

ⁱⁱ Libya Constitutional Declaration, 2011, <https://security-legislation.ly/latest-laws/constitutional-declaration-of-2011-consolidated/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19, December 16, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

^{iv} Libya Draft Constitution, 2017, <https://security-legislation.ly/latest-laws/2017-proposal-of-a-consolidated-draft-constitution/>

^v Human Rights Watch, 'Libya: Drop Case for Defaming Public Officials,' January 22, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/22/libya-drop-case-defaming-public-officials>

^{vi} Human Rights Watch, 'Libya: Drop Case for Defaming Public Officials,' January 22, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/22/libya-drop-case-defaming-public-officials>

^{vii} Human Rights Watch, 'Libya: Revoke Repressive Anti-Cybercrime Law,' April 3, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/03/libya-revoke-repressive-anti-cybercrime-law>

^{viii} Libyan Center for Freedom of Press, 'Stakeholder Report – Universal Periodic Review 2019 Libya Freedom of Press,' UPR Info, 2019, https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-11/libyan_center_for_freedom_of_press_libya_upr_2019.pdf

^{ix} Libyan Center for Freedom of Press, 'Stakeholder Report – Universal Periodic Review 2019 Libya Freedom of Press,' UPR Info, 2019, https://upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-11/libyan_center_for_freedom_of_press_libya_upr_2019.pdf

^x Committee to Protec journalists, 2020-2025, <https://cpj.org/mideast/libya/>.

^{xi} Human Rights Watch, 'Libya: New Cybercrime Law Threatens Free Speech,' Sept. 19, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/19/libya-new-cybercrime-law-threatens-free-speech>.

^{xii} Human Rights Watch, 'Libya: Revoke Repressive Anti-Cybercrime Law,' April 3, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/03/libya-revoke-repressive-anti-cybercrime-law>.

^{xiii} Libyan Organization for independent mEDIA, 'tv reporter Ali Al-Rifawi Released After Being Abducted From Sirte For More Than Three Months,' July 7, 2022, https://lofim.org.ly/en/2022/07/07/tv-reporter-ali-al-refawi-released-after-being-abducted-from-sirte-for-more-than-three-months/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

^{xiv} Committee to Protect Journalists, *Journalist Ali al-Rifawi arrested in Libya, held in undisclosed location*, April 22, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/04/journalist-ali-al-rifawi-arrested-in-libya-held-in-undisclosed-location/>.

^{xv} Reporters Without Borders, 'Attacks on Libyan Journalists Continue in 2024,' (Mar. 2024), <https://rsf.org/en/libya-attacks-journalists-2024-continue>.

^{xvi} Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Libyan TV host Ahmed al-Sanussi arrested after corruption report,' July 12, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/07/libyan-tv-host-ahmed-al-sanussi-arrested-after-corruption-report/>.

^{xvii} Reporters Without Borders, 'Libye : harcèlement et arrestations, la presse sous asphyxie,' February 17, 2023, <https://rsf.org/fr/libye-harc%C3%A8lement-et-arrestations-la-presse-sous-asphyxie>.

^{xviii} Reporters Without Borders, 'Libye : harcèlement et arrestations, la presse sous asphyxie,' February 17, 2023, <https://rsf.org/fr/libye-harc%C3%A8lement-et-arrestations-la-presse-sous-asphyxie>.

^{xix} Reporters Without Borders, 'Libye : harcèlement et arrestations, la presse sous asphyxie,' February 17, 2023, <https://rsf.org/fr/libye-harc%C3%A8lement-et-arrestations-la-presse-sous-asphyxie>.

^{xx} Freedom House, 'Libya Freedom on the Net 2022,' 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/libya/freedom-net/2022>.

^{xxi} Reporters Without Borders, 'Libye : harcèlement et arrestations, la presse sous asphyxie,' February 17, 2023, <https://rsf.org/fr/libye-harc%C3%A8lement-et-arrestations-la-presse-sous-asphyxie>.

^{xxii} Reporters Without Borders, 'Libye : harcèlement et arrestations, la presse sous asphyxie,' February 17, 2023, <https://rsf.org/fr/libye-harc%C3%A8lement-et-arrestations-la-presse-sous-asphyxie>.

^{xxiii} The Arab Weekly, 'Climate of repression, harassment stifles journalists in Libya,' February 19, 2025, <https://the arabweekly.com/climate-repression-harassment-stifles-journalists-libya>.

^{xxiv} The Arab Weekly, 'Climate of repression, harassment stifles journalists in Libya,' February 19, 2025, <https://the arabweekly.com/climate-repression-harassment-stifles-journalists-libya>.