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**UNITED NATIONS YOUTH AND STUDENT ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRIA**

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VIENNA INTERNATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
05 August - 09 August 2012

**Abstract:**

**Human Rights Council (HRC)**

**“Establishing Mechanisms to Ensure Freedom of the Media”**

## Introduction

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an inter-governmental body within the UN system, which is made up of 47 states and responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe. The council was created by the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006, with the main purpose of addressing situations of human rights violations.

One year after holding its first meeting, on 18 June 2007, the council adopted its "Institution-building Package," which outlines guidelines for its work. Among these is the new Universal Periodic Review Mechanism, which assesses the human rights situations in all 192 UN Member States. Other features include a new advisory committee which serves as the council's "think tank," providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues as well as the revised Complaints Procedure Mechanism which allows individuals and organizations to bring complaints about human rights violations to the attention of the council. The UNHRC also continues to work closely with the UN Special Procedures established by the former Commission on Human Rights.

## Issue

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: *"everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."* Although freedom of the press or freedom of the media is one of the fundamental human rights, it is very often violated in many countries around the world.

In fact, according to Reporters Without Borders (RWB), a France-based international non-governmental organization that advocates freedom of the press and freedom of information, more than a third of the world's people still live in countries where there is no press freedom. In these overwhelmingly non-democratic countries, the state often interferes and uses all different kinds of direct and indirect sources of pressure against the free press. Moreover, for most non-democratic systems of government, strict control of access to information is crucial for their existence and their associated control systems and security apparatus. Hence, most non-democratic governments employ state-run news organizations to promote their political propaganda and often use police or military force and intelligence agencies to suppress any attempts by the media or individual journalists to challenge the approved government line on controversial issues. As a result, journalists challenging the state monopoly on the media in such countries often become subject to considerable intimidation by agents of the state. This can range from simple threats to their professional careers such as firing or professional blacklisting to death threats, kidnapping, torture, and assassination.

RWB reports that in 2003, 42 journalists lost their lives pursuing their profession and that, in the same year, at least 130 journalists were in prison as a result of their occupational activities. In 2005, 63 journalists and 5 media assistants were killed worldwide. In 2010, the countries where press was the most free were Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Among the countries with the least degree of press freedom were Eritrea, followed by North Korea, Turkmenistan, Iran and Myanmar. Furthermore, some regions including Chechnya (Russia), Myanmar, Ogaden (Ethiopia), Jammu and Kashmir (India), Waziristan (Pakistan), Agadez (Niger), or North Korea are completely closed for foreign reporters.

At VIMUN 2012, the UNHRC will debate on the topic "Establishing Mechanisms to Ensure Freedom of the Media" with the aim of finding practical and durable solutions for the international community to deal with this important issue. The recent events in the Middle East and other parts of the world have shown the importance and power of access to media in all forms. Ensuring freedom of the press is absolutely critical for the independence and education of people and thus for fighting corrupt, oppressive, and authoritarian regimes worldwide. Most of the time, however, it is not enough to simply establish legal frameworks and rules of law to assure freedom of the press, for the enforcement of these laws is in the hands of the state, which at the same time is most often also the perpetrator. Hence, the goal of the UNHRC will be to establish certain sustainable international mechanisms to help journalists worldwide to express their opinions more freely and to assure the freedom of the media in all countries.