

THE PERMANENT PEOPLES' TRIBUNAL ON THE MURDER OF JOURNALISTS

Opening session, November 2nd, 2021, Nieuwe Kerk, The Hague

Statement of the PPT General Secretariat

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) held its **Opening session on the murders of journalists on November 2nd, 2021, in The Hague.**

The PPT was established in 1979 in Bologna, Italy, as transformation of the Russell Tribunals on Vietnam (1966-1967) and Latin-American dictatorships (1974-1976). With a [Statute](#) based on the principles and concrete objectives of the [Universal Declaration of Peoples Rights](#), the PPT is the most ancient institution that aims to respond to the requests of peoples exposed to the massive and systematic violations of their rights to life, dignity, self-determination, and even more to their intolerable invisibility and impunity.

This **50th public session** represents a further and original step of the PPT commitment and role: the persecution up to the murder of the members of a profession recognized as representative and the symbol of one of the fundamental rights of civil democratic societies, the freedom of expression, cannot be seen as the tragic sum of individual criminal events. Across the greatest diversity of contexts, actors, implications, the international order appears to be powerless or unwilling in providing effective and timely answers. The PPT has been invited to expand its research into this most challenging gap of international law and peoples' rights, as well as into the responsibility of States to protect and to act in case of a threat to journalist's life.

The Opening session was intended to lay out the broader pattern of impunity around the world: [several witnesses and experts, invited to testify about by the prosecution's team](#), documented the systemic nature of impunity for murders of journalists and its impacts on journalists and society. According to its consolidated methodology of investigation and qualification of facts, the PPT will proceed through **a series of hearings, from January to May 2022**, on three cases that have been submitted to the Tribunal as emblematic cases. **The PPT notified the States directly implicated to exercise their right to defence.**

The **panel of judges**, as clearly defined in the Statute, includes different competences who share, besides their verified independence and competence, a long-term experience in the field. In alphabetical order, their names and main qualifications are as follows:

Eduardo Bertoni (Argentina), Representative of the Regional Office for South America of the InterAmerican Institute of Human Rights; **Marina Forti** (Italy), journalist and writer; **Gill H. Boehringer**, (Australia) former Dean and now Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the School of Law, Macquarie University, Sydney; **Mariarosaria Guglielmi** (Italy), Magistrate, Vice President of Medel (Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et Libertés); **Helen Jarvis** (Australia-Cambodia), Vice President of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal; **Nello Rossi** (Italy), Vice President of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal; **Kalpana Sharma** (India), independent journalist; **Philippe Texier** (France), President of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal and **Marcela Turati** (Mexico), independent journalist.

At the conclusion of the Opening Session, focused on the general scenarios considered in the proposed indictment, **the PPT stated its readiness to activate its procedure in the following terms:**

The PPT is aware that the murder of journalists is a universal problem, not only in undemocratic countries but all over the world. The indictment delivered to this Tribunal

shows that since 1992 more than 1.400 journalists have been killed for doing their job. It adds that, at least 900 of these cases, journalists were killed in direct reprisal of their work. The PPT is conscious of the gravity and the importance of this plague, consequence of a hostile environment to press freedom. For that reason, the Tribunal accepted the Indictment and decided to hold a session dedicated to the murder of journalists.

The PPT recognizes that these serious violations of human rights, consequence of the harassment and attacks meant to silence journalists are characterized by the unwillingness of the governments to protect journalists against intimidation and finally absence of trial. The result is quasi-total impunity (90% of the cases go unpunished, according to the Indictment).

The lack of criminal trials sends very negative messages and can silence a community of journalists and stimulate self-censoring among journalists. The impunity has severe consequences not only for the families of the victims, but for society as a whole.

The purpose of this session is to hold States accountable for these violations and to draw attention on cases in which the States failed not only to protect journalists against lethal violence, but also to investigate the journalist's death. The Tribunal will base itself on the important work done by international and non-governmental organizations to document the submitted cases.

However, as the Opening session highlighted, murder of journalists and impunity are a wider trend. The debate of November 2nd has shown the globality of the problem. Cases in Colombia, Russia, The Philippines, Slovakia, Malta have been denounced, inter alia, but many other cases are worrying in the world. The Indictment reminds that examples of impunity for the murder of journalists exist around the world and the majority of unresolved cases are in thirteen countries. Just when the Tribunal was convening, a journalist was assassinated in The Philippines, as well as two more Mexican journalists have been killed.

We wish that this PPT session on the murder of journalist will help to gain a better knowledge of these crimes and, above all, contribute to stop impunity.

The Hague, November 3rd, 2021

Gianni Tognoni and Simona Fraudatario
PPT General Secretariat