I am a Libyan journalist

HIWAR • حوار
A personal perspective on Libyan journalism

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A CFI project, supported by the Crisis and Support Centre of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs
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CFI is committed to developing the media in Africa, the Arab world and South-East Asia. The French media development agency first of all identifies and analyses what is required, and then works tirelessly alongside media organisations and the professionals who run them, together with members of civil society, all of whom are fighting for inclusive and democratic news in their country.

CFI’s teams have initiated 30 projects forming part of four major programmes: **Media & Pluralism**, **Media & Development**, **Media & Enterprise**, and **Media & Human Resources**.

### 4 major programmes

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Introduction

In the light of the challenges and conflicts experienced by Libya over the past six years and the communications revolution facing Arab society, the media has been given new roles. It is now tasked with creating a climate of confidence and credibility in the eyes of the public (listeners, viewers or readers), communicating points of view and openly reflecting the true and clear picture of reality.

The key question lies in the degree of awareness and commitment of journalists with regard to the ethics of their profession and in the diffusion of these principles amongst young journalists.

The objective is to create a vigilant press acting in the public interest, and to work in support of a new generation of journalists, aware of the positive role played by the press in constructing a peaceful society. However, the code of ethics of the profession poses two problems:

→ The definition of the very concept of ethics: to what does it refer? Are its points of reference religious, customary or constructive? What are its principles? Are they restrictive?

→ The problem of translating this code of ethics into laws, procedures and regulations specifically determining the responsibilities of media organisations and journalists: their rights and duties, what they must and must not do. Hence the need to distinguish what is purely ethical, that is to say what refers to the individual awareness (of journalists and others) of what falls within the professional code of ethics.

In order to sustain democratic debate in Libya, CFI launched Project HIWAR in early 2017 in partnership with the Crisis and Support Centre of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

This project provides a forum for expression of different points of view on and by the Libyan press. A session, made up of four workshops, was organised in Tunisia. Twelve Libyan journalists, coming from Libya, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia, took part.

This booklet entitled “I am a Libyan journalist” brings together a variety of pieces written by the Libyan journalists who took part in the HIWAR session.
This is what the war has taught us

Khaled Ali Al Dib – Journalist at Radio Libya – Tripoli

A few years have passed since our Libyan Spring. They have been painful, agonising years that have scarred our bodies, warped our society and left psychological damage that cosmetic surgeons and the whole of modern medicine won’t be able to reverse. Despite everything, however, these years have taught us some lessons and some ideas to bear in mind for the future. These years have taught us a lot; without them, we wouldn’t have experienced many things or lived through so many adventures.

This war has taught us that the most extreme form of entertainment is to dash to the nearest restaurant, wolf down a meal and bring the family safely home without catching a stray bullet or having your car crushed by a shell.

This war has taught us that a holiday is an overindulgence, a superfluous frill. Finding the means to survive and earning your daily bread are far more important. This war has taught us that your salary belongs to the State, which grants it to you on a whim and takes it away at will. And even if you are granted your salary, it’s up to the bank to decide when to pay it out.

This war has taught us that oil is a blessing and a source of wealth, but also an endless curse and infinite ruin. Destroying the oilfields and burning the reserves is a national duty that stirs the people from their lethargy and wakes them up, so that they realise at last that counting on this ephemeral, exhausted wealth is a great mistake and an unpardonable sin. They should turn back the clock and go back to receiving foreign aid and UN handouts, so that they can experience life after oil for real.

This war has taught us that the army is a tool of the dictatorship and the police are an instrument of tyranny. To get rid of them is to win freedom in its truest sense and democracy in its noblest form. Men are born free – they know no limits or bounds.
These years have taught us that central government was a burden on the people and that only one government meant there was only one power. This is what we rebelled against, this is what we broke, this is what we paid such a price to overthrow. The absence, or disappearance, of authority was one of the goals of the people, who protested in the streets shouting “the people will smash the regime”.

The years of war have taught us many words and expressions of which we were ignorant, or whose true meaning and effects we did not know. In the media, we would often hear words such as exodus, forced displacement, kidnapping, body search, blockade, civil war and many more besides, yet we attached no importance to them.

This war has taught us that having a nice car or a new vehicle is daring or irresponsible, and that coming home late at night is suicide. Reason dictates that we should buy our transport from the scrapyard, or at most, call a taxi and take cover at home before sundown.

These years have taught us that power cuts are an article of the Constitution, that queues at the bakeries and banks are an everyday phenomenon, and that stockpiling petrol at home is a fundamental act of citizenship. This war has taught us that many of our ideas and beliefs are just emotional hand-me-downs we struggle to discard, such as sovereignty, patriotism, safety, security, freedom of movement, passports and plenty of other old, antiquated notions.

These years have taught us many lessons, but the biggest of all is that suffering is a bar to creativity.
The Revolution sought reform, development and the establishment of justice. Quite unexpectedly, it offered unbounded freedom to the media after decades of censorship. But this freedom turned to chaos, anarchy and then total absurdity because of political funding. This is the case now for the majority of private TV and radio stations.

Before the Revolution, there was hypocrisy, flattery and praise. Since the Revolution, we have political whims, vested interests, conspiracies and virtual assassinations. Nobody imposes any standards or limits. We associate all of that with the liberation movement and we proudly spout slogans, when what we’re faced with is a media that cheats society, either intentionally or through complicit silence. The sickness has two forms: one puts out misleading information, and the second stays silent about justice.

Corruption of the media isn’t limited to your professional life or to your conscience. Nowadays it also undermines your dignity, especially now that the private money is supplemented by money from abroad. That money rents, buys or appoints all those people who keep on wrecking the country through measures that are supposed to help it with its transition to a better future, not take it back to the past.

Society is under threat and the country is in danger, because of this situation that has spread and because of the corruption in the media. Their lack of professionalism could lead to an even worse disaster than the one they caused by their hypocrisy in the decades before, especially as they are in a transitional period. After the buzz of excitement that was about when the new media were created and launched, they slumped into pessimism and frustration and shifted to a narrative of hate towards individuals and institutions, inciting chaos and division and undermining democracy instead of propping it up.
The country is going through a crucial, delicate stage in its history. Most of the media distort public opinion by their constant contradictions; they’re all contaminated now.

In a country whose goals include good governance, it’s true that the media must have freedom of expression. But this freedom isn’t just for people working in journalism. It’s also for people who play an important role in the practical implantation of the three well-known principles of good government: transparency, responsibility and honest dealing. There’s also a mission to enlighten people, which is a responsibility of every modern organ of communication. They should enlighten people by providing the information they need to understand current events, by revealing the truth and fighting the forces of ignorance.

We need a media whose ultimate goal is to build and which will work to achieve that, to rebuild this country that years of weakness have wrecked.
I am a Libyan journalist, and have always been passionate about this profession. Who does not dream of glory and power?

Ibrahim Mohamad Alhaji – Journalist who graduated with a Master’s degree in journalism from Sheffield Hallam University in 1998 and has worked in the field of journalism since 1982 – Tripoli

I graduated in journalism from Sheffield Hallam University in 1998, and I have been working as a journalist in Tripoli since 1982.

My story begins in my childhood. Journalism to me was the most appealing way to achieve my ambition, which was to be famous. My imagination would run wild when I read articles by great journalists such as Haykal, Anis Mansour and other geniuses. I realised how famous they were, how much power they wielded, and how persuasive they were in everything they wrote. I imagined that one day I would claim the same throne, steering public opinion with my column in a renowned newspaper, with thousands of admirers reading my words.

This idea took root in me and dominated my thoughts. I would go to sleep and wake up with exactly the same goal.

After I finished school, I took the first step towards realising my obsessive dream by enrolling for a degree in journalism. I graduated from the university and found work as a journalist.

All my words and gestures conveyed this all-consuming ambition. There was no hiding what I wanted to be. My ambitiousness may have upset some of the people around me, especially the ones with more experience who had entered the field before me. So the first decision they made about me was to put me in the archive section of the newspaper I was working for.

That was never going to stop me from achieving my dream and attaining my goal. I wasn’t going to give up on fame and power. I was certain that there was power in the ‘fourth estate’.

I worked in the archive section and expanded my knowledge. I spent my working hours and more reading articles old and new that had been written for the paper over the years. A few years later, I moved up to the newsroom. My colleagues and I mechanically reformulated the dispatches we received from news agencies and correspondents. At that point, I started to ask myself, is this journalism? Is this what a journalist does? Just rewriting dispatches?

It dawned on me that I would never achieve my ambitions where I was. With several years of experience under my belt, I began working at another newspaper, in the hope that I would find what I was searching for there. The new job was encouraging, because it enabled me to write articles, express my point of view and proffer my opinion on subjects that interested people. I began to feel satisfied. My confidence was restored: one day I would reach my goal.
I was still young. I still dreamed of fame and power, and was convinced that I would make it. I admit that I pulled a few tricks of the trade to impose my authority on bosses who were frightened of the media. Where public authorities were concerned, I used to work for personal gain, to procure an advantage for myself as a journalist. I kept doing this until the day finally came, the day that ambition convinced me to write whatever I liked. I wrote an article that never saw the light of day, because this time the boss, my editor-in-chief, suspended me.

I realised then that there was no power in the fourth estate in my country. There was only one power: the power of the Leader. I grew up. I understood that authors who wrote about taboo subjects, of which there were plenty, ended up in jail and that journalism was a profession with pitfalls you could fall into at any moment. As a journalist, to be suspended was the least that could happen. Real disaster would be finding yourself in jail.

From then on I cursed the day I chose this career, which would never satisfy my thirst for fame and power. Years passed, in which I failed to free myself from the laws to which I was subject, or rather, to which others had subjected me. I spent years resigned to obeying the laws that ruled over journalism and journalists’ freedom.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, a new dawn rose on journalism in my country, which erased all the red lines and left only the highest authority in place. I desperately wanted to turn back time and relive the start of my journalistic career, so that my star could shine again. This period was the best time for journalism in my country. Freedom of expression was largely guaranteed and the press properly fulfilled its role as a power, albeit not as the fourth estate. Then what people call the revolutions of the Arab Spring happened.

I was sure, certain, that these events were nothing but a conspiracy to destroy and fragment the country. But was I bound to defend the revolutionary cause and this spring, as they call it, and fight with my pen in their name against the people who used repression as a weapon against me?

What about journalistic ethics? What about the lessons that the troubles of my profession had taught me? I retained my impartiality until the moment I realised that everyone was against the Leader. Then I joined the movement with my pen – a pen that had been oppressed for years, unable to write what I wanted it to, saying only what others told it to say.

A new era began. The first year passed and journalism prospered. The printed press rose to over three hundred publications – there had never been more than twenty before. The second year saw a lot of new journalists emerge. Everybody wanted to be in the media, amateurs or professionals. There were no limits, no restrictions. Then it all changed. Lots of new leaders arrived. The red lines were redrawn, and this time there were more of them. New standards were imposed, too: either you write what they want, or you die. Where the punishment used to be prison, now it was death.

The journalists left the country. Only one newspaper remained in publication. Freedom of the press disappeared, leaving a bloodier and more terrifying freedom in its place. Now I am a retired journalist and an observer. I hope there will be a better future for the generations to come.
Libya is entering its sixth year of instability. Libya has seen political conflicts transform into territorial division. Here we have a country with three governments, with militias, an army and the nightmare of Islamic State/Daesh, which is trying to exploit the chaos to gain a foothold and export terrorism all over the world. Split into east, west and south, our country is united by the crisis faced by its citizens, regardless of their ideology or affiliation, and by a vicious war whose main weapon is the local media, on both the national and international fronts.

In the face of kidnappings, intimidation, assaults and contempt for the law and rival ideologies, how can a journalist be professional? Will he treat events with objectivity? Has the crisis imposed new standards on the profession?

Asmaa Al Hawaz from Benghazi, a journalist for ten years, thinks that “what distinguishes a journalist from other citizens is his ability to transmit his ideas through the media on different platforms, which compels him to be objective, serious and impartial. Defamation, distortion and twisting the facts do harm to the journalist himself, as well as to his audience and his institution. Such practices lead inevitably to a loss of trust. It follows that the profession must never be used as a weapon to achieve a particular aim, despite what we are experiencing today, where the only standards applied are in the language and editing”.

By contrast, Saif Al Islam Abhih from Bin Jawad, a journalist for seven years, has decided to give up reporting directly on political issues and focus on social issues instead.

“With the events we are going through, the Libyan press no longer observes professional ethics when it investigates and reports on a topic. This is clearly due to the weakness of law enforcement, which ought to protect journalists and the institutions they work for from harm. As a result, everyone works to avoid all confrontation”.

Mohamad Nour El Dine, from Sabha, a journalist for six years, believes that “what we are experiencing is a profession in crisis. As a result, we have to be discerning and thoughtful when we treat rapidly unfolding chains of events. The press today follows a specific agenda set by their employers and their institutional strategies. The only agenda we ought to be following is the nation, and not some ideology, the government or the bosses.”
Mohamad Abdallah, from Awjila, a journalist for six years, believes that “It is really hard for journalists to find a happy medium in the way they report the news. This is because of fear, the nature of the region and the environment here, especially with regard to the worsening security situation and the political and military splits that the country is going through.”

Abed El Naser Khaled from Tripoli, a journalist for eighteen years, ultimately characterises the current media as organised and ruled by the demands of the conflict: “Professional ethics are principles and practices that don’t change, no matter what challenges a media organisation may face. Journalism has to take account of the public interest without bending the truth. To put it another way, it’s about finding a balance between the public interest and the truth, while respecting traditions, customs and heritage and avoiding things that stir up violence, hatred or anarchy.”

Lastly...

All of the fellow journalists I have quoted above, regardless of where they come from or how long they have been in the profession, agreed that we are not experiencing a crisis in the profession, but rather, a profession in crisis. This crisis has fettered journalism, using it as a lethal weapon against society. Thus it succeeds in hijacking our convictions to cement one faction’s control at the expense of another’s, while adopting a discourse of fear, famine, thirst and all of those basic needs that a government ought to provide for its people.

We have quoted many examples, but all the journalists say the same thing: they force you to work solely to feed yourself. The alternative is to sit at home. Any other choice risks death from an unknown bullet. There is no professionalism. The forces at the heart of the conflict today refuse to tolerate or coexist with one another, whereas the country itself welcomes us with open arms.
The story of a Libyan girl and war; I am a journalist

Malak Beit Al Mal – Journalist at the Al-Ahram Foundation in Egypt – Cairo

I never intended to leave. I was born and grew up there. I spent my childhood there, until I was twenty. I studied at the Law School; I dreamed of becoming a lawyer and defending the rights of Libyan citizens who had suffered injustice, but my dream turned into a job dealing with legal affairs at the power plant.

Everything around me forced me to leave, or rather flee.

I admit it. I fled from the chains that bound me in my country. Normally, people leave the countries they migrate to and go home, where they find safety and stability and reconnect with family, friends and neighbours. But I fled my country to take refuge in the darkness of exile, and I mean darkness because I had no idea where I was going, what my future would hold or what would happen to my family, my father, my mother and my sisters. Most of all, I had no idea what would become of us afterwards.

Libya was the only country I’d ever known. I’d never gone abroad. In fact, I’d never left Hay Al Andalus in Tripoli. My father was a simple clerk. He didn’t have the means to pay for his four daughters and their mother to travel. Anyway, he worried so much about us that he watched over us wherever we went. So I made do with family visits and the occasional trip to the beach in Tajura, when my father’s finances allowed.

I made do with little and dreamed of getting married, like every Libyan girl (to do the things I dreamed of, such as travel, leave my family and have the life I wanted). I was nearing thirty and still unmarried, partly because of life’s money problems; also, I was reaching an age that’s seen as quite old to get married in Libya. Mothers always want their sons to marry a beautiful girl in her early twenties. I’m no great beauty. I don’t think I’m ugly either, but I think luck hasn’t always smiled on me.

The Revolution happened. I lived through every stage of it in the streets of Tripoli. I had mixed feelings: I was a prisoner behind the walls of my home and I felt the fear that crept into all of us in the family, but on the other hand I was happy at the thought that everything would change for the better after Gaddafi. Yes, the Revolution got rid of Gaddafi. That’s when the story begins...

I remember the liberation speech given by Councillor Moustafa Abdel Jalil. My four sisters, my mother, my father and I were sitting there, waiting for the moment when the hero Abdel Jalil would appear and deliver the historic speech, to us and the world, that would put an end to eight months of suffering. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing: he allowed Libyan men to take four wives, claiming that that was their right under Islam.
That was when I realised that I was a girl in Libya and that my life from now on would be neither simple nor easy.

Events unfolded as if women were the only form of corruption that existed in the country. They took away the legal quota for women in the National Assembly and Parliament, and even in the training programmes for the different Libyan ministries. On top of that came the confusion caused by the law that barred women married to foreigners from passing on Libyan nationality to their children and the scrapping of the law that required men to tell their wives and get their permission before marrying another woman.

Women were turned on in the streets. They were verbally and physically harassed, especially if they weren’t wearing a headscarf or hadn’t covered up their skin. Sometimes girls would be threatened if they didn’t give in to those demands.

And the threats weren’t all. It could end in murder. It all started when two girls were raped and killed in Tripoli. Then other things happened too, until the worst crime in Libya’s history, which shook the world: when the professor and activist Salwa Bugaighis was cruelly killed by armed men who broke into her home.

It’s possible that I wasn’t enormously frightened at that point, because the crime took place so far away from Tripoli. But the fear began to grow because there were so many attacks in Tripoli, and children and young women were being kidnapped from their homes. That wasn’t why we left, however.

There were two reasons for our departure. One was the attempted kidnapping of my younger sister while she was in her last year at school. Three young men armed with guns on a pick-up truck tried to kidnap her and her friend while they walking home from school.

If our neighbours hadn’t been there with guns too, my sister wouldn’t be alive today. One of the gang members was killed in the confrontation. Afterwards, they wanted revenge and I know for certain that a lot of blood will be spilt before it all stops.

The second reason was a video that was circulating on social media, which showed an old woman being raped in her own home in Tripoli. It was very moving. She was crying out, “Don’t you have women?”

But the attackers carried on regardless. In fact, it just made them even more brutal. I couldn’t believe we had reached that stage in Libya: no respect for women, numbed consciences, yet these used to be fundamental values for the Libyan people. Everything collapsed.

In the end, my parents decided they had to leave the country and get away from the sexism, violence and oppression that women were clearly suffering. We will not go back to Libya until it becomes a proper country or goes back to what it used to be, so that we can live there. I don’t know where we will go or how we will live, but Libya is dominated by fear and danger, so I’m sure we’ll be better off, at least in the short term. You’re not safe abroad: that’s what we were taught, that was our principle...

But the things that have happened in Libya destroyed everything we thought was safe and Libyan. I only hope that I will be able to go home soon to a country that protects my rights and keeps me safe, because a person without a nation is a person without a history.
Fool, loser, supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, layman, agent, etc. Who am I?”

Mounir Almouhandes – Social media activist and writer, news and interviews producer for Sky News Arabia – Istanbul

I am a citizen, a journalist and an activist. I took part in the revolution of 17 February to overthrow Gaddafi’s regime and establish democratic principles and freedom of expression.

My professional experience began at the start of the Libyan revolution. I worked for a channel that supported the Arab Spring revolutions. During that time, I got to know other Arabs from the countries in which the Arab Spring took place.

As soon as they found out where I worked, they treated me as if I were a spy, even if they said it as a compliment or a joke. I’ve experienced the same thing many a time since the Revolution ended. It’s very frustrating. I try to keep my temper and explain my side of the story.

I always try to work in accordance with the principles of ethical, professional journalism, but that’s not enough, because the mere fact of working for a media organisation with an agenda inevitably makes other people see you as part of the machine.

I was then offered a job on an Arab channel with a different orientation. I seized the opportunity in the hope of moving to another stage in my life, one in which people would accept me. Once the political game in Libya started to mature, however, they found new names to call you that were no better than the old ones. The situation was complicated by the political split, to the point that just travelling to or happening to be in a particular country was an indictment that could get you arrested and labelled as a traitor.

On top of that, there are other situations, such as talking about something that was humanly unacceptable or just a chance meeting, that can determine whether you were for or against one side or the other. All these situations brand you, with no regard for your basic independence as a citizen.
I try to coexist with all sides and behave professionally, so that I neither influence others nor let myself be swayed by their views or opinions. But this is the hardest thing, because then everybody thinks you’re on the other side to them.

So basically, that’s my experience. I don’t support any side and I would never support any faction in Libya that fights another Libyan faction for power.

I try to do my job and earn my living with dignity. But these days, people will even judge you for having dignity if you let it show. Right now, the situation is like this: if you aren’t with me, you’re with my enemy. Why should I have to bend to someone else’s will and be the person they want me to be?

All I want is to be a citizen in a civilised country where I can enjoy freedom of expression, criticise whatever violates human decency, uphold other people’s rights through my journalism and report on real-life problems.
Imad Hamed – Director and presenter at Libya Rouhouha
AlWatan – Amman

Over the last twenty years, journalism and the media in Libya have gone through four very different stages, each of which has had consequences for journalists’ work and the public’s view of the media. This article describes these four stages of Libyan journalism for the reader.

Stage one: The media of the Jamahiriya

Stage one begins with Gaddafi’s speech at Zuwara in April 1973, in which he proclaimed what he called the *cultural revolution*, annulled all the laws and declared the revolution of the people. After this speech, Gaddafi put hundreds of intellectuals and journalists behind bars. This had repercussions for journalism, which went from being state journalism to revolutionary journalism.

Seventy per cent of the news was centred on Gaddafi receiving visitors or visiting parts of the country; the rest was articles on the Revolutionary Council, which only talked about outside plots, the third universal theory and other pet topics of the presidential media at the time.

Libya’s journalists were forced to choose between ideologically committed journalism, writing about art or sport, or finding another job.

Stage two: “The Libya of Tomorrow”

In early 2006, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi declared the start of a new stage in the history of the Jamahiriya: the Libya of Tomorrow. This saw the birth of new private media organisations which were meant from the start to enjoy wide freedoms. The same year, the newspapers Oea and Quryna newspapers appeared, as did the Al Shabab television channel and new radio stations.

The public was optimistic, and journalists felt free to write without interference. No one can deny that Libyan journalists enjoyed a lot of freedom from 2006-2010. Nevertheless, Saif Gaddafi had drawn some red lines that could not be crossed: it was forbidden to talk about Gaddafi, his sons and the people close to him, the “fat cats”.

But let’s talk about the freedoms.

For instance, newspapers in the Libya of Tomorrow tackled some subjects that had been previously been taboo, such as when the Quryna newspaper ran an inquiry into Abu Salim prison and its victims. On the other hand, Saif and his media were not able to talk about the executions on 7 April 1976, the death of Musa Al Sadr or other sensitive topics.
Stage three: The February media

When the Revolution erupted in February 2011, several new television channels and newspapers emerged, along with many new young journalists with no previous experience in the trade. This stage is extremely important in the modern history of Libya. It essentially marks the starting point of unlimited freedom of expression, with no observers censoring the opinions of others. The most important thing is that this period enabled journalists to unite in their narratives, to fight Gaddafi and put an end to his régime. This stage was short-lived, however, and gave way to the stage we are at now.

Stage four: Chaos in the media

In the last few years, the Libyan media scene has been occupied by a variety of TV channels and journalists. Some try to sell their ideology to the public, others work to undermine the credibility of their competitors. The majority abuse their power and try to brainwash people, cities and entire regions. Sadly, the media scene has transformed into a platform for partisan messages, each presenting a particular side as the country’s best and most natural guardian.

Sadly, the Libyan media have lost the trust of the public, which is beginning to doubt their credibility.

Throughout these four stages, the Libyan media have always sought to transmit the rosiest image of whoever was in charge at the time. Sadly, they have never thought about how to grow.
I am a journalist, and this is what I am

Rizk Faraj Rizk – Freelance journalist working on the Libyan section of the website Mourassiloun (“Correspondents”) – Tobruk

I think that, as time goes on, journalism is no longer thought of solely as a space in which we can connect with the world. I believe it is defined by terms such as responsibility, credibility, freedom, professionalism, respect for humanity and objectivity.

After about two decades of working in the field, I have a lot of stories that I think about every time I have a similar experience. Some of them bring back painful memories, others make me smile. Signing off an article in any newspaper used to fill me with joy.

I'd be over the moon, in seventh heaven!

In amidst censorship, repression, inaction caused by liberation policies dictated by national or international interests, and the politics of media funding, we find ourselves confronted by a huge challenge, in which our biggest enemy is temptation and our own lack of resolve. I am confident, however, that our profession is well grounded in its principles and customs. If I want to say, “I am a journalist”, I must arm myself with the strengths I need to resist temptation.

I am a journalist. I am responsible.

I am a journalist. I do not participate in the conflict. I take no sides. I am not a policeman, or a spy. This does not mean I do not support the interests of my country. My responsibility is to participate in the social and political development of my society. I must also be aware of the ethics and codes of my profession. It is my responsibility to honour my trade and its conventions.

I am a journalist. I do not lie.

Lying banishes me from the ranks of journalists. A journalist does not lie. Credibility is a cornerstone of his trade. It is one of the fundamental principles that enable journalists to deserve the trust of a truth-seeking public. My watchword is, “The citizen has a right to know”.

My opinions and my personal affiliations do not affect my ability to reveal the truth and communicate it to the public. Negative factors do not tempt me. Fanning the flames between rival factions and demonising opponents is of no interest to me.
I am a journalist. I am free.

Liberty consists in respecting others and their privacy. I am a journalist. Therefore I am free to practise my trade. I refuse categorically to stay mute or conceal my opinions. My freedom ends where my neighbour's begins. I do not violate the privacy of a human being, just as I tolerate no breaches of professional standards committed in the name of the media. I do not indulge in defamation for its own sake. Words that wound or ridicule are not part of my vocabulary. I have no predecessor in this field.

I am a journalist. I am a human being.

Humanity consists in sweeping away the outrages that hinder my profession, freeing myself from the temptations that prey on my professional conscience and upholding human principles despite the incitements to murder all around me.

I am a journalist. I am professional.

Professionalism means undertaking to respect the general rules of the profession, winning the trust of the public and being able to inspire them. Professionalism is to be present and remain on par with the competition. Professionalism is to resist the challenges of politics and personal affiliations that trap us into supporting one side against another.

I am a journalist. I am objective.

I am a journalist. Therefore I remain neutral when I report the news or tackle an issue. Objectivity means to be logical in my work, to allow neither additions nor omissions, to state the sources of quotations in complete impartiality and to be alert to the negative aspects of the side I belong to or which I prefer or support.

I am a journalist. This is what I am. I love my profession, it is a source of inspiration to me. I do not exploit media scandals to achieve fame. My weapon is my informed pen, which neither wounds nor ridicules. My enthusiasm and exhilaration always comes simply from seeing my name or my picture published in a newspaper, and my commitment is fired by my sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility is founded on freedom of expression, which by nature demands objectivity. It stimulates sincerity and professionalism, and is crowned by the humanity that resides in us all and guides us throughout our lives.

I am a journalist. My mission is noble.
I am a journalist, “”
I work in a minefield

Sleiman Al Barouni – Radio Alwasat – Cairo

I’ve worked as a newsreader and talk show host on radio stations such as Radio Echourouk, Nfousa FM, Awal FM, Radio Alwasat and the Dutch international station Huna Sotak. On TV, I’ve also been a correspondent and newsreader on the Al Asima channel, as well as office director at Rusiya Al-Yaum in Tripoli.

Ahmad, 25, always loved his job. He had a lifelong passion for it, and never imagined it would present him with so many problems and put him in such a complex situation.

He was barely seven when he first watched Khadija Benguenna present the television news on Al Jazeera. He was fascinated by her performance, her command of the language and her ability to move smoothly from one item to the next. At first, he wondered,

“Did she have to remember all those words before she came on screen?”

He couldn’t think of any other way she could do it. From that day on, his love of television journalism grew incessantly. As a boy, he was fascinated by reading books and newspapers, and the more he grew up, the more his interest in the profession increased. He used to picture how one day he would sit on the other side of the screen, memorising all the news so he could pass it on to the viewers.

He never imagined how hard it would be to make the dream come true.

In Libya, graduates in information, communications and journalism, and anyone else wanting to work in the field, had to show support for Gaddafi in every form. The TV news always began with the words “Our brother and colonel Muammar Gaddafi”, whether the Leader had hosted a visit from a minister, received a letter from a foreign president or simply woken up.

This was when Ahmad realised that he could never achieve the ambition he had carried with him since his childhood.

The years passed, and the Revolution erupted, putting an end to Gaddafi’s reign and offering him a chance to rekindle his old passion. Journalism and the media had emerged into a new light. The news on TV was no longer the same, and a new sheen of professionalism spread across the industry. Ahmad felt this was an opportunity to make his childhood dream a reality.
He joined various radio and television stations, and tried to learn about the profession and broaden his experience. Yet very soon, the country’s media began to split into different camps.

In his first year as a journalist, the haze of wonder in which he had been living began to clear, both in his head and in his heart – not because he under-appreciated the profession itself, but because of the people who had given him his opening in it, and certain truths which were only revealed to those on the inside.

In the end, you realise you’re just a clerk and this is where you work. You write what the department head wants you to write, which is the viewpoint of the editor-in-chief, who takes his orders from businessmen who work for the interests of one of the political parties.

The goal is to cosy up to them or try to achieve their aims by putting certain political factions in a more favourable light.

Ahmad discovered that before he became a journalist, he hadn’t known what happens in Libya’s corridors of power and that he didn’t have enough contacts, despite the contacts he made in the Revolution, which was still a fresh experience for a country that had spent four decades under Gaddafi’s rule. But despite the fact that being a journalist was physically tiring, financially insecure and just difficult, he couldn’t let it go that easily, especially not if he wanted to hold on to what we call principles.

Doing this job in Libya was no easy task, especially once parties and political programmes began to spring up. Each faction set up its own media to relay its own point of view and its own programme to the public. Professionalism was not a major concern for most of these organisations. They were happy to be their owners’ mouthpieces and put out whatever the owners desired.

After the war began in Tripoli in 2014, presenting the live news made Ahmad afraid. He would hear gunfire and missile strikes that shook the whole building. He kept imagining that armed gangs would burst into the studio. While he was presenting, he used to wonder, would he be able to escape and save his skin?

Or would he announce to the viewers that a militia had captured the studio?

Ahmad believes that the journalism he loved for so long does not entirely exist in Libya. He thinks that he, like others who resist the wretched state of the country’s journalism, will stick to his principles, defending his rights as a professional and the public’s right to genuine news. He rejects orders from people in power, spurns the businessmen’s money and refuses to bow down and broadcast lies for the political factions whose fight for power has brought Libya to its knees.

Ahmad is a citizen, and a young man who dreams of being a professional journalist and working in a job he adores. But what will happen to him if he refuses?

The militias will certainly put him in jail. He could end up jobless or even go abroad, because working as a journalist in Libya is like walking through a minefield.
I hope to develop journalism in Libya

Sefyan Khalaf Allah - Executive Director of the Centre for Media Development

After the call for positive change in the Libyan revolution of 2011, there was an urgent need to rebuild the country's media industry. For forty years, the media had merely been the promotional tool of an authoritarian, totalitarian system. The system suppressed freedom of the press, freedom of expression and human rights. Rebuilding the media industry and the press is one of the most important aspects of the transitional period towards democracy. There is no democracy without a free, independent media.

Libya’s totalitarian era had an enormous impact on the press in general and on journalists as individuals. There is a lack of professionalism in the industry. Moreover, the environment is hostile. Journalists and media workers cannot do their jobs freely and with skill. Laws and regulations that protect and guarantee press freedom and freedom of expression are lacking. The Libyan media industry needs support, so that it can rebuild and restructure, starting from scratch.

This is where my role is. Like every Libyan citizen, I want to strengthen democratic principles and culture in Libya, create stable changes of government, establish the separation of powers, and encourage my fellow citizens to be politically involved, and especially to vote.

I initially worked for the Democracy Support Organisation. Through this NGO, which I founded in late 2011, I was able to take part in a number of educational projects and initiatives on defending human rights, ethnic minority rights and women’s independence. We set up a team of 120 volunteer observers of both sexes to monitor the elections to the General National Congress in July 2012.

Like other civil society activists, I faced a lot of challenges and difficulties due to the country’s unstable political and security situation. I had to change or even cancel projects on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, these challenges only strengthened my determination and my conviction that my beloved country is going through an extremely important, delicate phase in which every contribution matters, regardless of how small they may be. So I chose to make a contribution to press development, to the reconstruction of this important industry, in order to rebuild a new, free Libya with rule of law and the institutions that uphold it, and to promote the values of tolerance and justice in the transition.

The Media Development Centre was an initiative I started as a national non-profit organisation in 2013, after I had gained experience in media development as executive director of another NGO, the Libyan Media Institute. I was mainly in charge of designing training courses for journalists.

I also worked on designing and carrying out a programme that aimed to enhance the capabilities of six local daily newspapers, in terms of news editing, setting up an editorial team, financial management and human resources.
At the same time, I held a training course for several journalists from different towns around Libya on the media coverage of the national parliamentary elections in June 2014.

My approach to managing training and skills enhancement programmes for journalists is based on sharing experience. The trainers were from abroad and had long-term experience in working in the press in countries transitioning to democracy, such as Libya or the countries of the Arab Spring. The aim of the programmes was to train Libyan journalists to international standards.

However, things changed after the war in the second half of 2014, when Tripoli international airport and the fuel reserves were set on fire. Diplomatic missions were immediately evacuated, as were the international organisations working in various fields, including media development. We couldn’t bring international trainers to Libya any more, because of the high risks involved.

I’m used to adapting quickly, so I designed an alternative programme to contribute to the development of the news industry. This involved training freelance Libyan trainers who could then take charge of training their colleagues around the country. I was able to carry out this programme thanks to partnership agreements signed with two international donors, International Media Support (IMS) and the Deutsche Welle Akademie (DW-A). We successfully completed the project in mid-2016.

Diplomas were awarded to thirteen Libyan trainers, who had assiduously followed eight months of training in Tunis with four international trainers sent by our two partners.

I then reached an agreement with IMS for a multi-stage training programme that would give the new Libyan trainers the chance to help train their colleagues around the country. I started in the second half of 2016 by creating a map of the news agencies working around Libya. The aim was to identify potential partners for local journalism training by working in direct collaboration with the journalists’ own news agencies. The results of the project showed that the most widespread and stable media providers in Libya were the radio stations. I therefore contacted all of the radio stations that matched our training criteria. A total of 24 stations were designated potential partners.

In December 2016, I managed to sign memoranda of agreement with fourteen local radio stations in eleven towns in the east, west and south of the country. That was stage two.

I’m currently in the middle of the third and final stage, which involves running a project based on the “news content of Libyan local radio stations”. It’s targeted at 56 radio journalists, who we train on site with two teams of four trainers each, all of whom are graduates of the train-the-trainer programme. It will run from March to April 2017. The programme will help enhance professionalism amongst the journalists and news agencies at whom it’s aimed.

In addition, I also take part from time to time in seminars and workshops on consolidating press freedom and freedom of expression. Recently, from January to April 2014, I was able to take part in four seminars that formed part of Hiwar: perspectives on journalism in Libya, a project run by CFI, the French media cooperation agency.

To sum up, I am firmly convinced that more effort is needed from everyone to ensure that the media industry, its people, its institutions and its environment are reconstructed and developed in accordance with modern international press standards. The media need to be free, independent and professional, and they need to contribute to creating civil peace and spreading democratic principles in Libya. There is no democracy without a free, independent media.