Dear Journalist,

This booklet from the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) contains simple tips to help you stay safe both online and offline. It is meant to give you practical advice on how to navigate the challenges of reporting in today's world, particularly in situations of conflict or tension. Our goal is to help you feel more confident and secure whether you're out in the field or working online. We hope you find these tips useful in your work.

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Know your rights

**Why?**
Understanding your rights under the law is essential for protecting yourself while reporting. It empowers you to navigate potentially challenging situations with confidence and clarity.

**Take note**
Familiarise yourself with the legal protections afforded to journalists, including freedom of speech, media freedom and access to public information. Stay informed about the legal framework that governs journalism in the country.

**How to**
Keep contacts for legal advice handy, and don't hesitate to consult a media law expert if you face any legal issues while on assignment.
Know your responsibilities

Why?
Being aware of your responsibilities as a journalist upholds ethical standards. It ensures that your reporting is conducted in a way that minimises harm and respects the dignity of all involved.

Take note
Ensure your reporting is accurate, fair, and respectful of privacy. This upholds journalistic integrity but also contributes to a safer reporting environment. Familiarise yourself with industry ethics codes and guidelines to guide your reporting.

How to
Stay updated on professional codes of conduct and journalistic ethics. Regularly review guidelines provided by reputable journalism organisations or associations.
Develop security protocols

Why?
Creating internal security protocols is essential for safeguarding journalists. These measures encompass internal procedures that collectively contribute to a safer working environment.

Take note
Collaborate with colleagues to establish clear security protocols. Conduct regular training sessions to ensure everyone is familiar with safety procedures.

How to
Develop a plan that include a system for checking in with someone, knowing who to call if there's an emergency, and understanding what to do if things don't go as expected.
Conduct a risk assessment

Why?
Developing a risk assessment plan helps identify potential hazards and prepares you to navigate them effectively while on assignment.

Take note
Pay attention to the specific risks associated with the locations and situations you'll be reporting on. Consider factors like political stability, local laws and potential sources of conflict or danger.

How to
Start by thoroughly researching the area you'll be working in. Develop a plan to mitigate risks. This may include having emergency contacts, knowing evacuation routes, and being aware of safe havens or shelters in the vicinity.
Stay informed

Why?
Researching and understanding the places you’ll be working in helps you prepare and adapt to different situations.

Take note
Before heading out, take time to learn about the locations you’ll be in. Look for information about safety, geography and any potential risks. Plan your routes carefully, avoiding risky areas or times when possible.

How to
Consider avoiding poorly-lit or secluded areas, and always prioritize well-traveled routes. When in unfamiliar places, connect with local contacts or authorities for insights on potential safety concerns.
Gear up!

**Why?**
Using cost-effective protective equipment like helmets and vests, and staying hydrated is crucial for your safety.

**Take note**
Seek affordable alternatives like lightweight helmets, durable vests, and reusable water bottles that offer protection without breaking the bank.

**How to**
Wear appropriate gear for the environment you're in. Carry a water bottle or hydration pack to ensure you stay properly hydrated, even during long and demanding assignments.
Pack essential items

Why?
Being prepared with essential items for your safety prepares you for unexpected situations during your assignment.

Take note
Make sure to have small bills for emergencies, bring your needed medicines, carry a torch with extra batteries for good lighting, and put together a simple medical kit for small injuries.

How to
In addition to plasters, antiseptic wipes and pain relievers, it's highly advisable to include items like cotton wool for wound cleaning, and any necessary personal wipes in your small medical kit.
Be professional, always

Why?
Upholding professionalism and independence helps maintain a safe working environment by establishing clear boundaries and minimising personal involvement in potentially sensitive situations.

Take note
Emphasise accurate reporting, cross-verify information from various sources, and abstain from endorsing actions or behaviours that could compromise your professional integrity.

How to
Steer clear of emotional involvement or taking sides in the events you're covering. Stay neutral and objective to protect your credibility and well-being. Refrain from engaging in arguments or confrontations.
Work with colleagues

Why?
Working together with colleagues helps keep everyone safe. You can support each other and be aware of any potential dangers, making sure you're all prepared to respond if things get tricky.

Take note
Maintain open communication with colleagues, observe each other’s surroundings, and be alert to signs of imminent danger.

How to
In a tense protest, journalists working together can assign roles such as "spotter" and "navigator". By staying in touch and working together, you're making sure everyone stays safe.
Maintain a safe distance

Why?
Keeping a safe distance from potential clashes ensures the journalist's physical safety and allows for objective reporting without becoming inadvertently involved in conflicts.

Take note
Identify any signs of escalating tension, confrontations, or aggressive behaviour between protestors and law enforcement.

How to
Keep a safe distance by strategically positioning yourself behind a barrier, using zoom lenses for close-up shots, and periodically reassess your proximity to potential clashes between protestors and law enforcement.
Keep a low profile

Why?
By minimising media affiliation in particular volatile situations, journalists lower the risk of hostility, enabling safer reporting.

Take note
In hostile situations, avoid drawing attention to yourself. This means not doing things that might make people notice you, like carrying big equipment or wearing attention-grabbing clothes.

How to
Keep your ID clipped to your belt, not on a lanyard. Wear neutral clothing without prominent media logos and ensure equipment lacks visible branding to avoid drawing attention or becoming a target in sensitive situations.
Don’t outstay your welcome

Why?
Leaving promptly when you’re not welcome is a matter of common sense and paramount for your safety.

Take note
Pay attention to signs of tension or hostility in the crowd. Trust your instincts and be aware of your surroundings.

How to
Continuously assess the crowd’s behavior and trust your instincts. Have an exit plan prepared, and leave promptly if the atmosphere. This simple precaution can prevent potential harm and ensure your safety.
Understand local customs

Why?
Appreciating local customs and laws is essential for journalists to operate smoothly without cultural misunderstandings that could hinder their reporting.

Take note
Be attuned to cultural sensitivities, and stay informed about any specific restrictions pertaining to journalistic activities within the area.

How to
Ask a colleague about any culturally sensitive issues to take note of that can make a difference in how you are perceived or received.
Check your privilege

Why?
Avoiding displays of wealth or elitism is crucial to maintain a low profile and reduce the risk of becoming a target, especially in potentially sensitive situations.

Take note
Be mindful of your surroundings and the potential socio-economic disparities that may exist. Avoid wearing or showcasing expensive personal items that could draw unnecessary attention.

How to
Leave expensive personal items at home and opt for modest attire. Maintain a humble and approachable demeanor to foster a sense of trust and minimize any potential animosity.
Nurture alliances

Why?
Establishing bonds with authorities and trusted opinion leaders fosters a network of support and expertise that you can rely on in various situations.

Take note
Consider connecting with trusted opinion leaders and legal experts. Remember to approach these individuals with respect and a genuine interest in mutual collaboration.

How to
Ask a colleague about any culturally sensitive issues to take note of that can make a difference in how you are perceived or received.
Fortify your digital defense

Why?
Strengthening your digital security is crucial in safeguarding sensitive information and protecting yourself from potential cyber threats while conducting online research and communication.

Take note
Use encryption tools, adopt strong passwords, enable two-factor authentication, and use reputable antivirus software to create multiple layers of protection.

How to
Regularly change passwords and keep your devices and software up-to-date. Be cautious when sharing sensitive information online, even with trusted sources.
Protect your information

Why?
Safeguarding your information and sources is crucial for both your safety and the integrity of your work. It ensures that critical data remains secure and accessible.

Take note
Be vigilant about regularly backing up your data on secure devices, and consider using encrypted storage solutions. Keep detailed records of your sources in a secure location to preserve their anonymity and protect their identities.

How to
Keep a well-organised record of your sources in a confidential location. When it comes to sensitive material, consider alternative storage options like a secure lockbox or a trusted colleague's office.
Beware of trolls

Why?
Ensuring your safety online is crucial, especially for female journalists who may face targeted harassment.

Take note
Be vigilant for signs of online harassment, including derogatory comments, threats or stalking.

How to
Familiarise yourself with reporting and blocking features on social media platforms. Utilise tools like filters and moderation settings to control comments. Avoid sharing personal information or specific details about your location online.
Mind your mental health

Why?
It's crucial not to keep your emotions bottled up, especially when facing challenging tasks. Your mental health matters.

Take note
Recognise that it's okay to feel overwhelmed at times, and seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Trust your team to provide support and understanding.

How to
If you find a task particularly difficult, don't hesitate to talk to your superiors, colleagues and a mental health professional about it. Share your feelings and concerns openly, and be open to their feedback and suggestions.
Take action against threats

Why?
Promptly reporting threats is crucial for your safety and the safety of fellow journalists. It helps prevent future incidents and upholds the integrity of journalism.

Take note
Document incidents thoroughly to ensure a clear record of events. Inform your journalist association or union so they can provide support, resources and advocate for your safety.

How to
Be vigilant for any signs of threats, harassment, or violations against your safety. Should you face any threats to your safety or witness violations, it's imperative to take action.