

# Lincoln Smith-Anthony Bellanger Interview

Sun, 6/6 5:57PM 13:46

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

journalists, myanmar, china, journalism, anthony, today, countries, bbc, freedom, profession, media, journalist, remain, working, national press club, prison, podcast, secretary general, foreign correspondents, international federation

## SPEAKERS

Outro, Intro, Lincoln Smith, Anthony Bellanger

- I** Intro 00:10  
This is Update-1, the podcast of the National Press Club in Washington DC. Update-1 provides a forum for listeners to learn about national and international stories focusing on journalism and communication issues, news and politics. Now the latest edition of Update-1.
- L** Lincoln Smith 00:35  
Welcome to the National Press Club Update-1 podcast. I'm Lincoln Smith and we are joined today by the Secretary General of the International Federation of Journalists, Mr. Anthony Bellanger. Welcome, Anthony.
- A** Anthony Bellanger 00:51  
Hi Lincoln.
- L** Lincoln Smith 00:53  
You have been the International Federation of Journalists Secretary General since

September 2014. You hold a PhD in history, having worked the predominance of your career as a journalist in the French print media. Can you share with us a bit about the history of the International Federation of journalists to include the IFJ mission?

A

Anthony Bellanger 01:20

It was founded in 1926 in Paris, by a few regions around the world at the invitation of the French union, my union, the SNJ, sng, Syndicat National des Journalistes. Then over time, it became the world's leading organization for the profession. And today it represents nearly 600,000 journalists in 150 countries. Our headquarters is in Brussels. SNJas many missions. I don't have enough stuff, and time to do them all. We are kind of a fire brigade, trying to deal with emergencies of the profession around the world.

L

Lincoln Smith 02:11

As the secretary general of AFJ, what remain among your greatest challenges?

A

Anthony Bellanger 02:19

The greatest challenge is the of biggest challenges for for for us. Of course, the future of journalism, if I have to choose one. And because the pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, has changed all the balances, and from now on, we will have to work so that the a remuneration, the remuneration is equally shared between journalists and media. But there is also the problem of the safety and the protection of journalists, of course. We published in our global white paper last March 65 journalists were killed in 2020 last year, and 235 journalists are still in jail. It is a real problem for us today.

L

Lincoln Smith 03:26

To the journalism profession, Anthony, you have said, "The profession faces huge challenges today. The security of our colleagues remains elusive. Many countries warn the reign of impunity for crimes against fellow journalists threatens freedom of expression in many regions of the world." Can you expand on this quote?

A

Anthony Bellanger 03:53

Yes. A story from the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation. They did two April 2020, entitled China Driving Out Journalists. As you said, the BBC released the details the harassment of the BBC reporter John Sudworth by Chinese authorities. As a result, Mr. Sudworth left Mainland China after nine years for safe haven in Taiwan. What are among

the documents on this most recent story involving Mr. Sudworth? At least 18 foreign correspondents were expelled from China in 2020. And we are truly concerned about the decline of media freedom. The harassment of journalist Sudworth is a typical example of China trying to control the narrative over what's happening in the country. The BBC has been caught up in rising tensions between the United Kingdom and China. In February of the UK Government revoked the broadcasting license of state owned China global television network. And Beijing retaliated by banning the BBC in China. We have urged the Chinese government to stop arresting and using coercive tactics against foreign correspondents.



Lincoln Smith 05:33

To expand on that a bit, Anthony, why is the security of journalists under such threat around the world today? In 2021?



Anthony Bellanger 05:45

I can mention of course, a few countries like Mexico, a most dangerous country, for journalists in the world. Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, but also Myanmar, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey. To be honest, there are so many countries where it's so difficult to be a journalist today.



Lincoln Smith 06:14

Over to Russia, Anthony, do you believe freedom of speech is on the rise in Russia? Or perhaps not?



Anthony Bellanger 06:21

That's a real good question. It depends on the situation and the case. I know that our unions, the Russian union and the Russian union of journalists is working very hard to remind people that Russia is a democracy, that it must allow journalists the freedom to work, but we have to admit that is for us a daily struggle. Our job is always to remind people that freedom of the press is one of the pillars of democracy. And it's the case in Russia every day. It's a daily struggle. But it's the case also in France, in the UK, in Myanmar, or in many countries. No senior today can be taken for granted.



Lincoln Smith 07:18

Anthony, we talked about the nation of Myanmar earlier and to the nation of Myanmar

civilians have indeed been arrested for speaking with Cable News Network, CNN, reporters. Over the long term, do you see the conditions in Myanmar improving for journalists or not?

A

Anthony Bellanger 07:40

The situation in Myanmar has been dramatic since the coup outbreak in February, and journalists are risking their lives to report. To silence journalists, the military coup leaders allowed telecommunication companies and internet services to blow up social media platforms and shut down their networks to stop access to information and news. Five independent media have been shut down. Journalists are in hiding and are not getting paid but yet they continue to report. The international community cannot remain silence. We have recently made a submission to the Australian government asking them to oppose the grotesque human rights violations of the Myanmar military regime through diplomatic representations in international affairs, and with the implementation of sanctions. We also need urgent support for journalists on the ground who are very much in peril.

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Lincoln Smith 08:57

Over to me imprisonment a bit again, Anthony, of now 235 journalists around the world. Can you briefly highlight which of the nation's are the biggest violators?

A

Anthony Bellanger 09:13

The biggest prison in the world is Turkey for journalists. In Turkey we have 67 journalists in jail. In general, Europe is the worst region in the world. Europe has 91 journalists in prison, 67 in Turkey, but also in Belarus around 13 today. Azerbaijan, Russia and for us it's a real real problem and we are working with the European counsels in order to find a way for these journalists. I don't forget of course. Julian Assange in the United Kingdom. The second country is Egypt with 20 journalists in prison. And Africa in general, has 56, journalists in prison. Africa is the second region in the world just after Europe, just after Asia Pacific with 47 journalists in prison. And of course China is a third country in the world with 20 journalists in jail. And after Asia Pacific we have also the part of the Middle East and the little top of Middle East and the Arab world, with 63, journalist in prison. And of course, in Saudi Arabia with 14 journalists.

L

Lincoln Smith 10:44

In closing, Anthony, from your perspective, if it was possible to compare overall media

freedom of some 50 years ago, with that of today in 2021, which time might have a higher level of media freedom?

**A** Anthony Bellanger 11:03

To be honest, it is really difficult to compare two eras that have nothing to do with each other. I am an historian, and I know that the comparison search is meaningless. And you refuse to say that this was better before. The political and diplomatic message was totally different. But in the mean time we see is that the profession changes and evolves. We stick to the regime. But journalism remains the same. Because you have to go and do your reporting. You have to meet the people. You have to get your sources to talk. Working in teams in newsroom. And write of course, for TV, radio, internet, written press, and journalism does not change. But the media do. We are moving faster than 50 years ago. But how are we doing better than 50 years ago? I don't know and I'm not sure. What interests me is, is that journalists and media workers can continue to do the job in the 50 years time, under good conditions, good working conditions, and with real ethics. But we know that it is a combat sport, a real combat sport. And we have to remain optimistic for our young colleagues who are coming up and who want to continue their mission, our mission that we have today.

**L** Lincoln Smith 12:54

Mr. Anthony Bellanger, general secretary of the International Federation of journalists. Thank you for joining us on the National Press Club Update-1 podcast.

**L** Lincoln Smith 13:06

Thank you very much, Linc, for your invitation.

**O** Outro 13:20

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