Dear Ambassador McCarney,

I am writing on behalf of Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), a non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect press freedom and freedom of expression around the world.

We urge the General Assembly to appoint a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the Safety of Journalists as soon as possible. Around the world, journalists are being targeted in unprecedented ways, from kidnappings to cyber-attacks and even public killings. A press vest or a camera that once offered a semblance of protection for reporters often now serve more as targets.

There has never been a more dangerous time for journalists. They are being killed and imprisoned worldwide in record numbers. They face daily threats, attacks and intimidation from private individuals, non-state actors, and government officials who seek to silence them. The overwhelming majority of these crimes are committed with impunity. According to CJFE’s research, 787 journalists and media personnel were killed while exercising their profession over the last 10 years, including 77 in 2015 alone. With their loss, the right to information for hundreds of millions of citizens is shattered.

There have been various resolutions adopted in the past decade, including by the Security Council and the General Assembly, dedicated to this issue. Despite this, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in his August 2015 report on the safety of journalists, acknowledges the world’s “failure to reduce the frequency and scale of targeted violence that journalists face and the near absolute impunity for such crimes.”

These strong resolutions will continue to be little more than empty words without a concrete mechanism to assure the compliance of member states with their obligations.

Only a Special Representative, working closely with the UN Secretary General, will have the political weight, the capacity to act quickly, and the legitimacy to coordinate with all UN bodies to implement change.

Giving the Special Representative a central and permanent position under the UN Secretary General aegis would significantly empower the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and all UN efforts lead by UNESCO, the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, as well as reinforce the regional actions of the Council of Europe or the Office of the Special Rapporteur.

Progress has been made, but more needs to be done. We call on you to appoint a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the safety of journalists as soon as possible.

Please accept, Ambassador, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Klein, CJFE President