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OPINION

How journalists are keeping Ukrainians safe

MARCUS KOLGA AND **RACHEL PULFER**
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An AFP journalist runs as smoke rises behind after a bombardment in Bakhmut, Eastern Ukraine, on July 31, 2022.

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Marcus Kolga is a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute and founder of DisinfoWatch.

Rachel Pulfer is the president of Journalists for Human Rights.

“For me, it’s a luxury simply to be Ukrainian in Ukraine.”

That’s Maryna Osipova, 42, digital editor of Visnyk CH, a newspaper in Chernihiv Oblast, near the front line with Russia. Ms. Osipova trains veteran print journalists to report using video. She is also a mother of two. The eldest is at boarding school 700 kilometres away; her youngest, aged 5, goes each morning to the local kindergarten/bomb shelter.

Shortly after the full-scale invasion in February, 2022, Ms. Osipova relocated to France. But life in exile didn’t feel right. After a year, she returned home. Her contribution to the war effort: keeping people safe by reporting reliable information.

Her journalists do this under round-the-clock Russian bombardment. All visitors to Ukraine quickly become familiar with the country’s air-raid app, which features a map that lights up yellow or red to indicate parts of the country facing impending or active attack. During our visit, Chernihiv Oblast constantly glowed yellow or red.

Russia and Ukraine reach energy ceasefire, Trump says

Ms. Osipova is one of 180 journalists who gathered from across Ukraine recently for the 15th Ukrainian Media Congress. It’s part of an initiative called Stronger Together, funded by Norway and implemented by partners – the World Association of News Publishers, Norwegian Media Businesses’

Association and the Association of Independent Regional Press Publishers of Ukraine (AIRPPU).

We in Canada hear a great deal about the resilience of Ukraine's people in the face of daily attacks. Less well understood is the staggering human cost of 4½ years of full-scale invasion.

While attending the Ukrainian Media Congress, we visited one of the largest hospitals in Ukraine, starkly named Unbroken. Since the war began, the hospital went from 20 beds to 700, and has performed 68,000 surgeries for 26,000 patients. We met a man whose remaining body consisted of a head and torso, balancing on prosthetics to walk. He now works as a mentor in the physiotherapy department; he gets his energy, he said, from helping others.

The gut punch, however, was the Field of Mars: rows upon rows of graves of beautiful young people. Families tended flowers growing on each grave; we saw a small boy, maybe five years old, struggling to carry a large water jug toward one of them. Oksana Brovko, the chief executive of AIRPPU, told us this was "just for this city: There are cemeteries like this in every town and city in Ukraine."

No moment was free from the war's impact. Midway through a walking tour, we saw two buses parked near the main square. Two soldiers had died, and a funeral procession made its way from the Garrison Church to the square. Everyone stopped, and a bugler played taps, as the city paid its respects, yet again, to the fallen.

In the Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, drones rule the skies and everything below

Back at the conference, we huddled in the hotel's basement bomb shelter. (In 2025, the conference was bombed; this year, Ms. Brovko was taking no chances). We heard from journalists living through daily attacks, talking about how to work with AI, or generate revenue from paying subscribers. Taras Prokopyshyn, editor and publisher of The Ukrainians, a multiplatform media house, shared how he'd converted the company's annual revenue from 80-per-

cent grants and 20-per-cent paid income in 2024 to 80-per-cent income, 20-per-cent grants in 2026.

Then there's the winter, which Russia weaponizes by attacking the civilian infrastructure that provides heat and electricity. Yet Yehven Kryupen of the Mehivsky Meridian, a paper that serves the front lines in Dnipro, said he was unconcerned. He'd survived the bombing of his own newsroom; he reports the news in flak jacket and armoured car. "We survived last winter," he said. "We'll survive this one."

The courage of these journalists is critical to Ukraine's ability both to win the war – and the peace. In providing access to reliable information, journalists help people keep themselves safe. In covering government budgets, they help keep the Ukrainian government honest, ensuring donor confidence and international support continues. Most crucial of all, these journalists' work ensures that, once peace comes, Ukraine remains a democracy.

Toward this end, Norway is leading the way. Norwegian newsrooms are learning critical techniques from Ukrainian counterparts to combat the information war that Russia is waging both in that country and our own. With active disinformation campaigns whipping up domestic support for separatist movements in Alberta and across the rest of Canada, it would be wise for Canada's newsrooms to do the same – while finding meaningful ways to support the Ukrainians' work.

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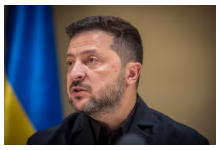

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