EMPHNET Emergency Bulletin

July 28, 2024
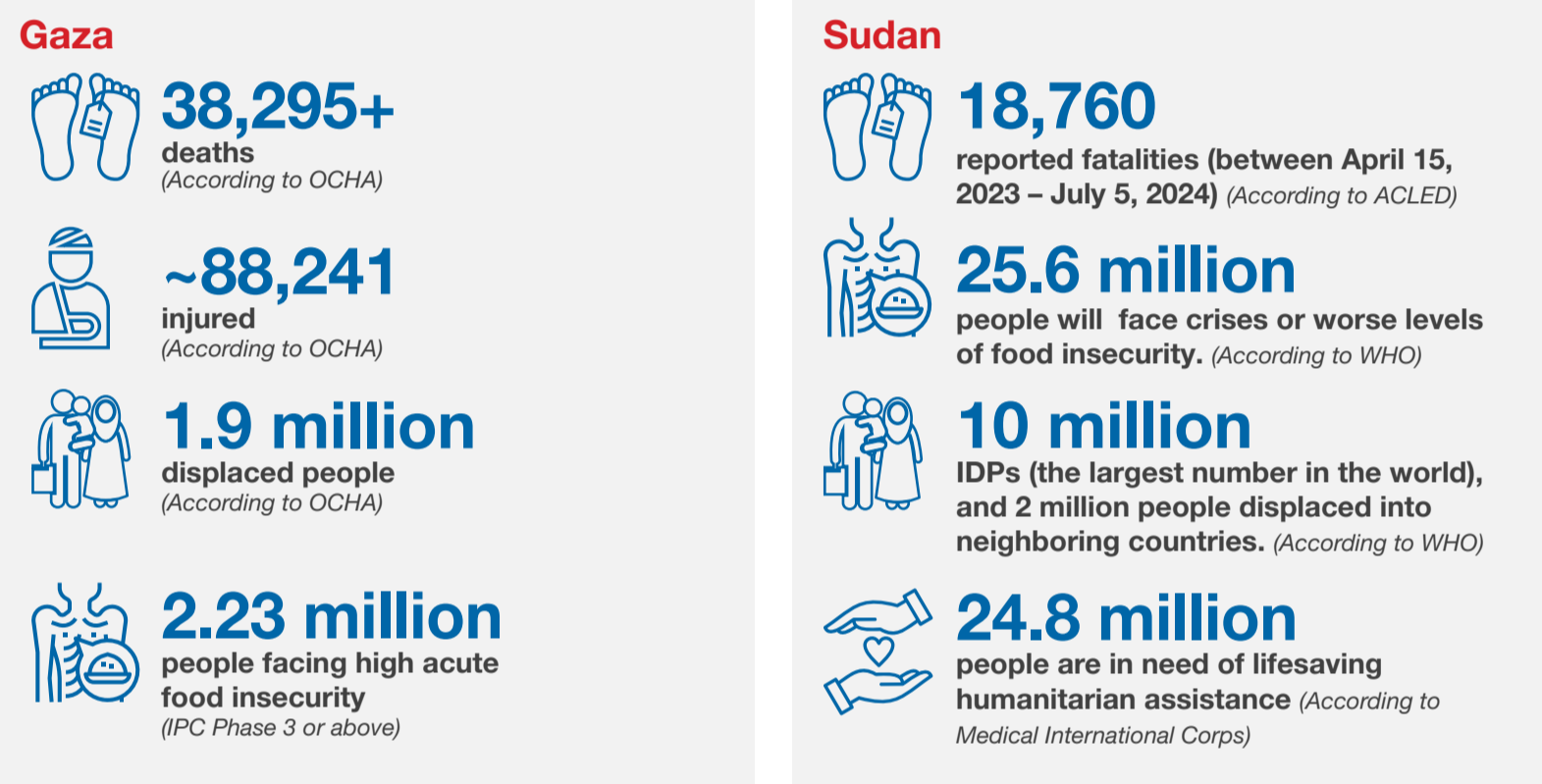
The Role of Media in Humanitarian Crises in Gaza & Sudan

Situation Overview

The ongoing humanitarian crises in Gaza and Sudan are leading to further widespread destruction, loss of life, and the displacement of civilians. On the one hand, thousands of homes and critical infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, have been destroyed in Gaza. On the other hand, millions of Sudanese are living in dire conditions in refugee camps and are relying on humanitarian aid for survival. Amidst these crises, the local and international media played a critical role in documenting the crises by providing real-time updates, and by mobilizing global support. However, the narrative in the media often varies, with different perspectives influencing public opinion and policy responses.

The media encompasses all forms of communication and serves as the essential bridge for delivering crisis information to the public. Therefore, addressing its role in crises is crucial, given its controversial nature and diverse impact. What pivotal roles does the media play? How can we effectively manage its influence? What challenges, like bias and misinformation, must be navigated? These questions will be explored in this bulletin, considering the complexities of crisis communication and response.
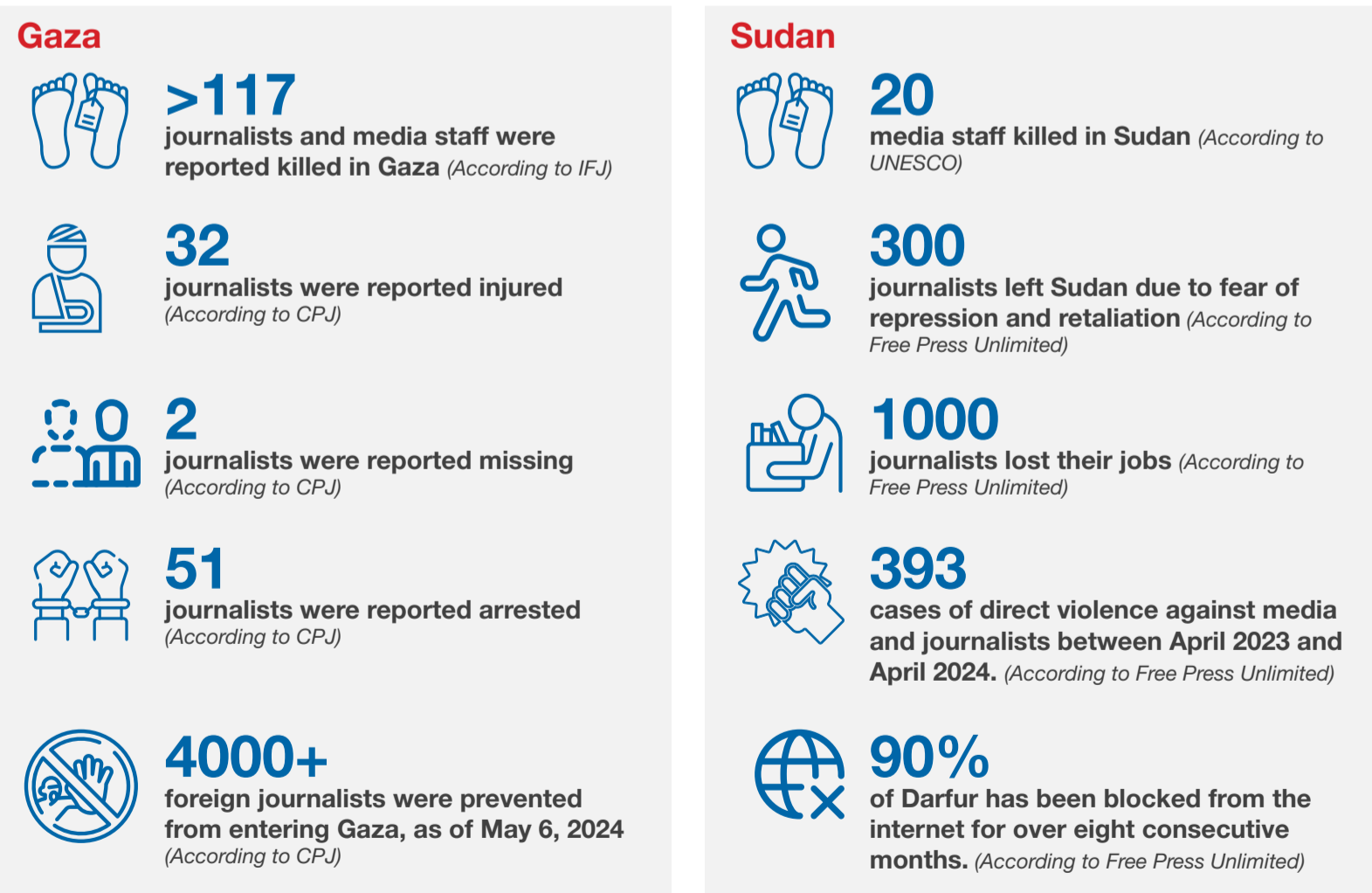
The Impact of War in Numbers

Gaza

38,295+
deaths
(According to OCHA)

~88,241
injured
(According to OCHA)

1.9 million
displaced people
(According to OCHA)

2.23 million
people facing high acute food insecurity
(IPC Phase 3 or above)

Sudan

18,760
reported fatalities (between April 15, 2023 – July 5, 2024) *(According to ACLED)*

25.6 million
people will face crises or worse levels of food insecurity. *(According to WHO)*

10 million
IDPs (the largest number in the world), and 2 million people displaced into neighboring countries. *(According to WHO)*

24.8 million
people are in need of lifesaving humanitarian assistance *(According to Medical International Corps)*

The Impact of Flash Floods in Afghanistan in Numbers

58
fatalities
(According to OCHA)

38
injured
(According to OCHA)

1,925
affected families across different provinces
(According to OCHA)

The Media in Numbers

Gaza

>117
journalists and media staff were reported killed in Gaza *(According to IFJ)*

32
journalists were reported injured *(According to CPJ)*

2
journalists were reported missing *(According to CPJ)*

51
journalists were reported arrested *(According to CPJ)*

4000+
foreign journalists were prevented from entering Gaza, as of May 6, 2024 *(According to CPJ)*

Sudan

20
media staff killed in Sudan *(According to UNESCO)*

300
journalists left Sudan due to fear of repression and retaliation *(According to Free Press Unlimited)*

1000
journalists lost their jobs *(According to Free Press Unlimited)*

393
cases of direct violence against media and journalists between April 2023 and April 2024. *(According to Free Press Unlimited)*

90%
of Darfur has been blocked from the internet for over eight consecutive months. *(According to Free Press Unlimited)*

Watch the first episode of "Gaza Health Chronicles: Inside the Crisis," *produced by EMPHNET*

سجلات غزة الصحية:
من داخل الأزمة

Gaza Health Chronicles:
Inside the Crisis

Implications and Reflections

The media is a significant tool for raising awareness about humanitarian crises by providing accurate, comprehensive, and high-quality information. This can influence public opinion, leading to increased donations, voluntary work, and political pressure for action. By highlighting the urgency and human impact of crises, media outlets can also draw international attention and foster a sense of global solidarity. Furthermore, the media significantly influences how crises are perceived by framing narratives and highlighting specific aspects of the situation. For instance, the extensive media coverage of the crisis in Gaza led to a significant international response. The continuous reporting on the dire conditions in Gaza highlighted the urgent need for humanitarian intervention, prompting international organizations to advocate more forcefully for the health and safety of the affected populations. This media attention brought the severe impact of the conflict into the global spotlight, prompting demands for increased medical aid, humanitarian relief, and protection for civilians. Thus, many international bodies, civil society organizations, and non-profit organizations (NGOs) were mobilized to address the crisis. Their interventions included the distribution of medical supplies, provision of emergency healthcare services, and implementation of programs to support displaced populations and vulnerable communities. However, the Sudan crisis has received minimal attention and remains largely neglected, which highlights the crucial role media plays in shaping public awareness and responses to humanitarian issues. This shortage of media coverage in Sudan has led to a lack of international attention and understanding of the ongoing crisis. The limited reporting has contributed to the neglect of critical humanitarian needs and the struggles faced by the Sudanese people. This underreporting has implications for international response and intervention, highlighting the need for increased media attention to ensure that crises like those in Sudan receive the global awareness and support they require.

According to UNESCO: "Since April 2023, almost all the Sudanese media outlets have been unable to operate from within the country. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate presented a report stating that 90% of the Sudanese media outlets have been forced to close down due to their dangerous locations near conflict zones."

Challenges

Infodemics and Bias in Humanitarian Crises

The role of media in humanitarian crises is characterized by challenges that can limit its effectiveness. One significant challenge is the rapid and widespread dissemination of both accurate and inaccurate information during a humanitarian crisis, known as infodemics. This can create confusion and mistrust among the public, making it hard to implement effective actions and solutions.

Amidst the conflict in Gaza, the digital revolution has expanded the reach of infodemics and propaganda, making it increasingly difficult for the public to determine what is true and what is not. Also, the spread of false information complicates crisis management efforts. Humanitarian organizations and responders may need to spend additional resources and time correcting misinformation and addressing public concerns, shifting attention from essential relief activities. In addition, social media platforms play a significant role in amplifying infodemics. Algorithms that prioritize sensational or emotionally charged content can increase the spread of misinformation, making it harder for accurate information to reach the public.

Another challenge is bias, which occurs when news outlets favor specific perspectives, agendas, or narratives and often shaping how information is presented and perceived. This can be evident in several ways. For example, selective reporting may lead media outlets to focus on certain aspects of a crisis while neglecting others, leading to an incomplete understanding of the situation. The framing of a story can also influence public perception and policy responses, as the way information is presented can shape how the audience interprets events. Reporters and news organizations may bring their own cultural or political biases into their coverage, affecting the neutrality of their reports.

The coverage of the war on Gaza highlights these issues clearly. In many Western media outlets, there is a tendency to use emotive language that frames Israelis as victims, which can overshadow the experiences and suffering of Palestinians. This selective emphasis can affect public perception. In contrast, Eastern media may provide a different perspective by emphasizing the struggles of vulnerable populations and portraying the conflict in a way that highlights the power imbalance and its humanitarian impact on civilian populations. This divergence in reporting demonstrates how media bias can influence the global understanding of the conflict and shape international reactions and interventions.

Challenges Facing Journalists

Journalists working in conflict zones like Gaza and Sudan confront numerous challenges that affect their ability to report accurately and freely. The dangerous environment, marked by ongoing conflict and instability, poses significant risks to their safety and well-being. Access restrictions further complicate the work of journalists, as movement and access to crucial areas are frequently limited. These restrictions hinder journalists' ability to cover events comprehensively and to provide a complete picture of the situation, as they also face pressure and censorship from different authorities. The psychological impact of reporting from a conflict zone is another significant challenge. Constant exposure to violence and suffering impacts journalists' mental health and overall well-being, adding another layer of difficulty to their already challenging work.

Recommendations

- Media organizations should invest in comprehensive fact-checking and verification processes to ensure that information disseminated during crises is accurate and reliable.
- The media should ensure that reporting includes multiple perspectives, especially those of local communities and affected populations. This can help counteract bias and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the crisis.
- Provide support for local journalists who have intimate knowledge of the crises but may lack resources.

Within its role as a public health network serving the EMR and beyond, EMPHNET contributes to educating the public on media literacy and helping them to identify credible information from misinformation. This role can be strengthened by conducting online training sessions and awareness campaigns through its communication channels. EMPHNET also amplifies the voices of those affected through webinars and collaborative efforts to highlight the humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

- Provide financial aid and institutional support to media outlets affected by the conflict. This can help sustain operations and ensure continuous coverage.
- Utilizing social media platforms can help address the limitations and challenges of traditional media. By creating high-quality, engaging content and actively interacting with audiences, media organizations can build trust and broaden their reach. Also, collaborating with Influencers can amplify their message and increase visibility.

Additionally, EMPHNET can leverage its on-the-ground resources in Gaza and Sudan to provide valuable reports on health conditions in these regions. The aim of these activities would be to contribute significantly to global response efforts, and to the improvement of health status in these areas, in line with its mandate to achieve better health and well-being for the people in the EMR.

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This report is compiled by EMPHNET's Public Health Emergency Management Center (PHEMC)