

By Courtney Radsch

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UN official: Saudi Arabia responsible for Khashoggi's murder 02:49

Editor's Note: Dr. Courtney C. Radsch is the advocacy director at the Committee to Protect Journalists. The views expressed in this commentary are her own. View [more opinion](#) on CNN.

(CNN) — The road to justice in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi [got a lot clearer](#) with the release on Wednesday of a 101-page report outlining the findings and recommendations of an independent United Nations expert. Her months-long investigation [clarifies](#) that this was an international crime that compels the UN and the United States to take immediate action.



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Given these findings, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres should immediately launch a criminal investigation, as the Committee to Protect Journalists [requested](#) last November, and comply with the recommendations of its independent expert. Similarly, Congress should assert its oversight role in the face of resistance from the administration by demanding that intelligence related to the murder be publicly released and impose sanctions on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The [report](#) by the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, labels the hesitancy of Guterres to intervene without an official invitation from Turkey "absurd" and advises that he should be able to establish a criminal probe on his own volition. A criminal investigation would clarify culpability and legal liability in a way that a human rights inquiry like this one does not. Guterres has made tepid [comments](#) on the case but failed to strongly and consistently condemn the ongoing impunity or demand meaningful accountability.

Callamard conducted extensive interviews and reviewed intelligence information in Turkey -- which is the world's [leading jailer](#) of journalists, according to CPJ, but has leveraged international attention on Khashoggi's murder at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to burnish its image -- in the US and in Europe, though she [was not granted](#) access to Saudi Arabia.

The UN report [says](#) Saudi Arabia is responsible for the extrajudicial killing and that the Crown Prince should face sanctions, confirming what a 2018 [US intelligence assessment](#) already indicated. The [US](#) and the [EU](#) have already issued targeted

targets can be considered a senior official. The call for sanctions against the Crown Prince is reasonable given the [near-unanimous view](#) of Saudi experts that the murder could not have been carried out without his awareness, at the very least.

One of the primary challenges in securing justice for Khashoggi's murder has been obfuscation and secrecy by President Donald Trump's administration in the face of congressional pressure. Not only did the administration [fail to respond](#) to members of Congress after they [triggered](#) a provision of the Global Magnitsky Act -- sending a request from the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to the President -- it has avoided releasing intelligence files. This is why CPJ and the Knight First Amendment Institute filed a [freedom of information act request](#) to obtain information from US intelligence agencies indicating whether they knew of the threat to Khashoggi and what, if anything, they did to warn him of it.

The lack of leadership by the UN Secretary General and the President of the United States in forging a path for justice sends a chilling message to journalists and press freedom advocates around the world who brave the potential for deadly retaliation to report and opine on issues that often make those in power uncomfortable. Systematic reporting by CPJ over more than two decades bears this out: At least [862 of the 1,343](#) journalists killed since we began keeping [records](#) were murdered in direct retaliation for their work, with government or military officials implicated in at least 225 of these. Yet in nine out of 10 murders of journalists the killer goes free, a [stubborn statistic](#) that has barely changed over more than a decade. This rate of impunity serves to embolden perpetrators.

Nearly nine months after Khashoggi's murder, the Saudi regime is unscathed, continuing to [detain journalists](#), even as it carries out, behind closed doors, a trial of unknown alleged perpetrators who it claims went rogue. As long as the international community allows this behavior, it will continue -- and other repressive governments will take note. It is therefore imperative the UN and the US muster the political will to criminally investigate and hold those responsible for butchering Khashoggi to account.

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