**Who says the U.N. Security Council's decisions have no teeth?**

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The world's premier security body acted decisively today, banning reporters from roaming in the vicinity of diplomats as they enter and exit the U.N. delegates' entrance. The new policy will be enforced by armed U.N. security guards.

A memo issued today by Japan, which is serving as this month's Security Council president, laid out the terms of new arrangements for press covering the U.N. Security Council. The terms would essentially end a decades-long tradition of allowing press to freely mingle with diplomats outside the council's inner sanctum.

Under the new arrangements, reporters will be largely restricted to two cordoned areas. But if a reporter happens to catch the eye of a friendly council diplomat he or she can request an invitation to a restricted diplomatic stairway that leads to their diplomatic limousines. "When the conversation is over the press will go back down the stairs and go into the closed area," the memo states.

"The press will not be allowed to roam around on the 1st floor or the top of the stairs (Delegates Entrance area), nor will they be allowed to accompany someone coming down the stairs," the memo goes on. "These restriction are all for safety reasons."

The press restriction policy emerged last week after the U.N. Security Council's chambers were transferred from their traditional location -- to make way for a renovation of U.N.'s landmark headquarters -- to a suite of offices and conference halls in the building's basement. It has triggered an angry reaction from the U.N. press corps. The Committee to Protect Journalists, which usually monitors press repression, issued a statement criticizing the new restrictions.

"The public will see straight though the argument that delegates' safety is enhanced by keeping them shielded from the press. Both diplomats and reporters are already inside a secure zone with them shielded from the press," wrote Robert Mahoney, deputy director of the press advocate. "The United Nations should be a beacon for the human rights it was established to uphold. Those include freedom of expression and a free media. To deny reporters access to public officials would be hypocritical."

Earlier this month, Japan's U.N. ambassador Yukio Taksu said that the cramped basement quarters for the 15-nation council would require some restrictions on reporters' movement. But he assured reporters that he would try to negotiate a compromise that would restore some of the press' lost access.

But the new regulations did little to satisfy the U.N. Correspondent's Association, which led talks on U.N. access.

In a response, the press group's president, Giampaolo Pioli of Italy, said that restricting access under the guise of "safety" measures is "preposterous." He said the "proposed rules are unacceptable, demeaning" and an impediment to press freedom. "We find it highly offensive that the new rules talk about journalists as if they are unruly children who need to be restrained and prevented from 'roaming around.'"

Like most council decisions, today's action was shrouded in secrecy. Virtually all Security Council decisions are taken on the basis of consensus, but the United States, Britain and France sought to distance themselves from the decision. Even the memo was passed on to the press through the U.N. media liaison office, not directly from the Japanese mission.

"The United States does not support the proposal and we are working to find a better solution that give reporters the equivalent access to the old Security Council chambers," said a U.S. official, who declined to speak publicly.

Some U.N. diplomats blamed the decision to restrict access on the U.N. security office, which is headed by a former State Department head of security, Gregory Starr. Starr's office has insisted that allowing journalists to walk freely up a stairwell leading from the council to the diplomats' limousines is a safety threat. But behind the scenes, Security Council have privately complained about having to pass a gauntlet of inquisitive reporters as they enter and exit the Security Council chamber.