United Nations

World Press Freedom Day
3 May 2019

"No democracy is complete without access to transparent and reliable information. It is the cornerstone for building fair and impartial institutions, holding leaders accountable and speaking truth to power." — António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

Video message: https://youtu.be/e6vAnOinTWk

http://youtube.com/watch?v=QU5u9tbW3fU

"آزادی صحافت کا عالمی دن" 3 منی"
“A free press is essential for peace, justice, sustainable development and human rights. No democracy is complete without access to transparent and reliable information. It is the cornerstone for building fair and impartial institutions, holding leaders accountable and speaking truth to power. This is especially true during election seasons -- the focus of this year’s World Press Freedom Day. Facts, not falsehoods, should guide people as they choose their representatives. Yet while technology has transformed the ways in which we receive and share information, sometimes it is used to mislead public opinion or to fuel violence and hatred.

Civic space has been shrinking worldwide at an alarming rate. And with anti-media rhetoric on the rise, so too are violence and harassment against journalists, including women.

I am deeply troubled by the growing number of attacks and the culture of impunity. According to UNESCO, almost 100 journalists were killed in 2018. Hundreds are imprisoned. When media workers are targeted, societies as a whole pay a price.

On World Press Freedom Day, I call on all to defend the rights of journalists, whose efforts help us to build a better world for all.”

António Guterres

About the Day:

World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference. Since then, 3 May, the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek is celebrated worldwide as World Press Freedom Day. It is an opportunity to:

- celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom;
- assess the state of press freedom throughout the world;
- defend the media from attacks on their independence;
- and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

2019 Theme: This year's theme “Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation” discusses current challenges faced by media in elections, along with the media’s potential in supporting peace and reconciliation processes.
Background

Freedom of Expression, a Human Right

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Media freedom and access to information feed into the wider development objective of empowering people. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social and political process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This can only be achieved through access to accurate, fair and unbiased information, representing a plurality of opinions, and the means to actively communicate vertically and horizontally, thereby participating in the active life of the community.

However, in order to make freedom of expression a reality, there must be:

- a legal and regulatory environment that allows for an open and pluralistic media sector to emerge;
- a political will to support the sector and rule of law to protect it;
- laws ensuring access to information, especially information in the public domain; and
- the necessary media literacy skills among news consumers to critically analyze and synthesize the information they receive to use it in their daily lives and to hold the media accountable for its actions.

These elements, along with media professionals adhering to the highest ethical and professional standards designed by practitioners, serve as the fundamental infrastructure on which freedom of expression can prevail. On this basis media serves as a watchdog, civil society engages with authorities and decision-makers, information flows through and between communities.

Freedom of Information

The fuel that drives this engine is information and therefore access to information is critical. Freedom of information laws, which permit access to public information are essential, but so are the means by which information is made available, be it through ICTs or the simple sharing of documents.
Information can change the way we see the world around us, our place in it, and how to adjust our lives in order to maximize the benefits available through our local resources. Fact driven decision-making can significantly alter our political, social and economic perspectives. Therefore, open and pluralistic media are, perhaps, most precious when they simply provide the mirror for society to see itself. These moments of reflection are instrumental in defining community objectives, making course corrections when society or its leaders have lost touch with each other or gone astray.

The right to access information can be interpreted within the legal frameworks that support freedom of information as it applies to information held by public bodies, or in a wider sense to encompass both access and circulation of information held by other actors, where it becomes intrinsically linked to freedom of expression.

Freedom of information and the transparency it promotes, has a direct consequence on fighting corruption, which in turn has a tangible impact on development. Former World Bank president James Wolfensohn often identified government corruption as the primary hindrance to development and an independent media sector as the number one tool to fight public corruption.

**Press Freedom and Governance**

Ensuring freedom for the media around the world is a priority. Independent, free and pluralistic media are central to good governance in democracies that are young and old. Free media:

- can ensure transparency, accountability and the rule of law;
- promote participation in public and political discourse, and
- contribute to the fight against poverty.

An independent media sector draws its power from the community it serves and in return empowers that community to be full a partner in the democratic process.

Freedom of information and freedom of expression are the founding principles for open and informed debate. New technology will continue to evolve and allow citizens to further shape their media environments as well as access a plurality of sources. The combination of access to information
and citizen participation in media can only contribute to an increased sense of ownership and empowerment.

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, on the World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2019**

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367856

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