

Joint Message by UN Secretary-General, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNESCO Director-General on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day

The theme of World Press Freedom Day (3 May) this year is "21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers". A joint Message has been issued by the United Nations Secretary-General, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General. They note that the media landscape has changed in the two decades since the Windhoek Declaration on an independent and pluralistic media was issued, but that its objective remains relevant: "to promote freedom of expression as the foundation for human dignity and the cornerstone of democracy," and they call on all governments to "join forces with the United Nations to guarantee and to promote freedom of expression in print, on the airwaves, and online."

The Message is below:-

"World Press Freedom Day was born twenty years ago in the vision of a group of journalists gathered in Windhoek, Namibia. The Windhoek Declaration was a call to arms to protect the fundamental principles of the freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration Human Rights. It was also a bell ringing in change across the world.

Twenty years on, the media landscape has changed beyond recognition, but our objective remains the same: to promote freedom of expression as the foundation for human dignity and the cornerstone of democracy.

Our times feature great paradox. We enjoy unprecedented opportunities for expression thanks to new technologies and media. More and more people are able to share information and exchange views, within and across national borders. This is a blessing for creativity, for healthy societies, for including everyone in new forms of dialogue.

At the same time, new threats are arising. In a context of rapid change, these combine with older forms of restriction to pose formidable challenges to freedom of expression. New measures to block, filter and censor information emerge every day. Challenges take different

features, but they share the same face as violations of a fundamental human right.

The United Nations is dedicated to ensuring that the Internet becomes a truly global public resource, to which all have access and where all voices are heard. This underlines the importance of quality content. This calls for action to defend the integrity and safety of online reporters. All principles of freedom of expression must be brought to the on-line world.

And they must be protected. Over the last decade, more than 500 journalists lost their lives in the pursuit of their profession. Sixty killings were reported worldwide in 2010 alone. Every week brings more reports of journalists and bloggers suffering from intimidation and violence.

Violations of fundamental human rights cannot go unanswered. State authorities must do everything to counter impunity and to protect the safety of journalists. We will never forget the courage of journalists who paid with their lives for our right to know.

The media revolution is triggering new debates about freedom of expression, about the nature of regulation, about the balance between expression and responsibility. We must not shy away from exploring all angles of these questions. We must all rise to the occasion and accept the responsibility of change.

Twenty years after Windhoek, events every day show that promoting freedom of expression remains as important as ever. On this 2011 World Press Freedom Day, we call on all governments to join forces with the United Nations to guarantee and to promote freedom of expression in print, on the airwaves, and online.”

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General
Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General