



Accra Declaration

World Press Freedom Day 2018

“Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and the Rule of Law”

We, the participants at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day International Conference, held in Accra, Ghana, 2-3 May 2018,

1. **Recalling** Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”;
2. **Noting** that the preamble to the *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa* reaffirms the “fundamental importance of freedom of expression as an individual human right, as a cornerstone of democracy and as a means of ensuring respect for all human rights and freedoms”;
3. **Celebrating** the historical and enduring importance of the *Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media* which reaffirmed the key principles for the existence of a free media;
4. **Recognising** that freedom of expression, including media freedom, is a fundamental underpinning for the successful operation of all democratic mechanisms which keep power in check and hold it to account, as well as for sustainable development;
5. **Emphasising** States’ obligations to create an enabling legal and policy environment so as to foster an independent and diverse media sector and to promote respect for freedom of expression;
6. **Aware** that respect for freedom of expression depends on the rule of law and, in turn, an independent judiciary which is aware of and upholds international, constitutional and regional standards governing human rights and freedom of expression;

7. **Acknowledging** the widespread need for judicial reform, which has contributed to impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers;
8. **Noting** with concern global backsliding in terms of respect for freedom of expression, media diversity, and journalistic safety and independence, as highlighted in UNESCO's report on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2017/2018*;
9. **Recalling** that in 2019 the United Nations will review progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, including target 16.10 on "public access to information and fundamental freedoms" and its indicators on safety of journalists and guarantees of the right to information;
10. **Reaffirming** the importance of highlighting these issues, including on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day; 28 September, International Day for Universal Access to Information; and 2 November, International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists;
11. **Acknowledging** that most States still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in and through the media;
12. **Recognising** the essential role played by a free, independent and diverse media during elections and the particular need for States to respect freedom of expression during election periods;
13. **Highlighting** the threat posed to the free flow of information and ideas in society, as guaranteed by international law, by the proliferation of falsified information and the growing phenomenon of information silos or "social media bubbles";
14. **Concerned** about the continuing challenges to meaningful access to and use of the Internet, and the impact on freedom of expression of disproportionate regulatory responses regarding the Internet;
15. **Disturbed** by the growing number of intentional disruptions of communications networks and platforms, which violates the right to freedom of expression and hampers sustainable development;
16. **Convinced** that professional, independent journalism, based on independently verifiable facts, and in particular investigative journalism, play an essential role in terms of holding the government and other powerful actors to account, keeping the public informed, exposing wrongdoing, creating spaces for healthy public debate and enabling public participation in decision-making;

17. **Stressing** the increasing economic difficulties facing media outlets, especially those that are committed to professional and investigative journalism, and the obligation on States to take measures to mitigate this challenge, while respecting media and editorial independence;
18. **Emphasising** that media freedom and independence cannot exist where journalists live in poverty and fear;
19. **Welcoming** the growing number of States which have adopted laws giving effect to the right to access information held by public authorities (right to information), while also calling on all States which have not yet done so to adopt such laws and on all States to ensure proper implementation of those laws;
20. **Mindful** of the particular difficulties of protecting, in the digital era, confidential journalistic sources, which is a pre-requisite for independent journalism;
21. **Alarmed** at the proliferation of laws restricting freedom of expression in the name of protecting national security and combating extremism and terrorism which fail to respect relevant international standards;
22. **Concerned** that journalists in many countries are denied their rights freely to join or form organisations to defend themselves and/or protect their rights;
23. **Deploring** the fact that the rate of attacks on journalists, including digital attacks on female journalists, remains unacceptably high and that the rate of impunity for these crimes also remains unacceptably high;
24. **Honouring** the journalists and media workers who contribute to media freedom through their work and commitment, often at the risk of their safety and personal security;

We therefore:

Call on each UNESCO Member State to:

25. **Create, strengthen and/or implement**, as needed, an enabling legal and policy framework in line with international standards to ensure respect for freedom of expression and privacy, and **foster** a diverse, independent media sector, and **ensure** that relevant officials are properly trained so as to respect that framework in practice;
26. **Embrace** an inclusive, participatory approach to developing laws and policies to ensure respect for freedom of expression;

27. **Enhance** judicial independence and the capacity of administration of justice actors – including the police, prosecutors and judges – to respect freedom of expression themselves, to ensure that those responsible for threats or attacks against journalists, media outlets and others for exercising their right to freedom of expression are brought to justice via fair and impartial proceedings, and otherwise to decide cases that raise freedom of expression issues in line with international standards;
28. **Adopt** strong and appropriate anti-discrimination rules, including in relation to gender, with a view, among other things, to ensuring that everyone in society can enjoy equally the right to freedom of expression;
29. **Align** their rules on the right to information with international standards, where necessary by adopting or amending right to information legislation, **ensure** that these rules are implemented properly, and **monitor** progress on achieving indicator SDG 16.10.2 on guarantees for the right to information;
30. **Put in place**, where the context warrants, dedicated national safety mechanisms to: monitor progress on SDG indicator 16.10.1 on safety of journalists and respond to annual requests by the UNESCO Director General for information on impunity; **provide** protection for journalists and others who are attacked for exercising their right to freedom of expression; and **combat** impunity when such attacks do occur;
31. **Consider** reporting to relevant United Nations bodies on the measures they have taken to advance progress on SDG indicators 16.0.1 and 16.10.2;
32. **Review**, as necessary, restrictions on freedom of expression which purport to protect national security or to support the fight against terrorism so as to ensure that they fully respect international freedom of expression standards;
33. **Respect** judicial decisions of regional human rights courts, including on freedom of expression issues;
34. **Refrain** from prohibiting or criminalising the use of encryption and anonymity tools;
35. **Recognise** in law the right of journalists to protect the secrecy of their confidential sources of information and ensure that such protection extends to cover digital surveillance and other ways in which sources might be exposed;
36. **Review** cases of journalists who are in prison for their work, with a view to ensuring the release of anyone whose prosecution was not in line with constitutional and international standards;

37. **Protect** digital intermediaries against liability for illegal third party content unless they specifically intervene in or promote that content or refuse to obey an order adopted by an independent oversight body to remove it;
38. **Abstain** from delegating, legally or through political pressure, the regulation of online content to platforms (privatising censorship);
39. **Refrain** from adopting laws which create broad offences or impose special penalties simply because activities are committed online, and limit the scope of any cybercrime laws to activities which may legitimately be restricted under international law and which are not already covered by existing laws;
40. **Avoid** adopting regulatory responses to the problems of disinformation and misinformation which are broadly or vaguely worded, fail to respect international standards of necessity, proportionality and legitimate purpose, and/or which risk infringing on freedom of expression;
41. **Develop** a framework for the protection of communications systems against cyber attacks and for providing protection as needed to those whose face a risk of cyber attack in retaliation for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
42. **Refrain** from conducting untargeted or indiscriminate surveillance, which is inherently disproportionate and is a violation of the rights to privacy and freedom of expression.
43. **Avoid** imposing Internet or other general communications shutdowns, or other measures that unduly or disproportionately limit the digital exchange of information, including via filtering or blocking techniques;
44. **Foster** media and information literacy among the general public, with a particular focus on the youth, in various ways, including by incorporating it into the school curriculum;
45. **Respect**, through law and practice, judicial independence and the rule of law, including where judges interpret international or constitutional human rights guarantees in a way that overrides national legislation;
46. **Promote** media diversity, including by preventing excessive concentration of media ownership, by requiring media outlets to be transparent about their ownership, by fostering a three tier broadcasting system comprising public service, commercial and community broadcasters, by promoting fair representation in the media of different groups in society, by creating equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and by converting, where they exist, government or State broadcasters into public service broadcasters;
47. **Recognise**, in law and in practice, the right to freedom of association for media workers;

48. **Encourage and support** artists and other creative thinkers, including by providing training on using digital communications tools and online platforms to create robust business models for disseminating their work and connecting with their audiences;
49. **Consider** putting in place measures to strengthen the economic environment for quality journalism, investigative journalism and independent, professional media;
50. **Promote** universal access to the Internet at affordable prices, including through the establishment of free public access points in both urban and rural areas;

Call on UNESCO to:

51. **Continue** to provide leadership on the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and strengthen networks of focal points within the UN system and within Member States where appropriate;
52. **Continue** to support efforts to monitor and promote safety of journalists, including through capacity building of administration of justice actors, civil society and researchers, by promoting academic networks, and through assisting with the establishment and operation of national safety mechanisms;
53. **Continue** to monitor the implementation by States of SDG 16.10 on public access to information and fundamental freedoms, using the agreed indicators on the safety of journalists and access to information;
54. **Support**, where they do not already exist, official regional bodies and mechanisms with a mandate to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression;
55. **Share** good practices on the media's role in elections, including by supporting the work of the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for UN Electoral Assistance (ICMEA);
56. **Support** further training of judges, judicial officials, administration of justice actors and security forces on freedom of expression, including in different regions of the world;
57. **Foster** initiatives to address the problem of gender inequality in and through the media;
58. **Continue** to support the creation of enabling environments for the development of community radio, including the ability of such radios to take full advantage of digital technologies;
59. **Promote** Internet Universality and related indicators for an Internet that is characterised by human Rights, Openness, Accessibility and Multi-stakeholder participation (the ROAM principles);
60. **Support** training and capacity building to journalists in the area of digital safety and security, including the use of open and other technologies enabling such benefits as anonymity, encryption

and material (content) security with a view, among other things, to preventing digital surveillance of their work and digital attacks on their devices, and protecting their confidential sources of information;

61. **Support** the provision of capacity building for journalists in the area of legal awareness;
62. **Foster** research and public debate about ways to counter the deliberate proliferation of inaccurate content and the phenomenon of “social media bubbles” and work with intermediaries to counter these problems and to promote debate about them;
63. **Further reinforce** its Media and Information Literacy programme initiatives;
64. **Seek out** ways to engage and inspire children and young people to defend democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression;

Call on journalists, media outlets, social media practitioners and Internet intermediaries to:

65. **Disseminate** verifiable information to the public with a view to monitoring and holding powerful public and social actors to account and to exposing illegality and other forms of wrongdoing;
66. **Make** a particular effort during elections to ensure that the public is provided with independently verifiable information about parties, candidates and issues, and about any efforts to manipulate or influence the election, so that voters can make informed electoral choices;
67. **Be transparent** about their policies and business practices, especially where these lead to the dissemination or prioritisation of information which supports a particular political party or point of view on a matter of public debate, including by drafting policies in clear and understandable terms and by translating them into relevant languages;
68. **Put in place** systems for public redress or complaints, based on clear standards or codes of conduct, which ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly both procedurally (due process) and substantively (decisions are based objectively on the code);
69. **Respect** social rights including by providing fair payment, working conditions and insurance for media workers;
70. **Support**, as appropriate, efforts to expose inaccurate or misleading information, including by reporting on it and by putting in place appropriate technical measures, which have been developed in a transparent and consultative manner, to help identify and expose it;
71. **Provide**, as needed, safety equipment and training to staff who are at risk of attack for the information they disseminate, including specialised training for women;

72. **Take** seriously their own responsibilities to respect human rights, including privacy and freedom of expression, especially insofar as they play a role in mediating the expressive activities of their users or potentially exposing private information;
73. **Adopt** policies and practices to address inequalities based on gender and vulnerable group status in both media content and media operations, including by ensuring equitable coverage and voice opportunities for these groups and avoiding reporting based on stereotypes or prejudice;

Call on civil society, academia and the technical community to consider:

74. **Advocating** for reform of the legal and policy framework, as needed, to bring it into line with international standards regarding freedom of expression, especially in relation to laws affecting the dissemination of information via digital communications tools;
75. **Promoting** Internet Universality and related indicators for an Internet that is characterised by human Rights, Openness, Accessibility and Multi-stakeholder participation (the ROAM principles);
76. **Supporting** research and monitoring efforts in the area of safety of journalists with a view to ensuring that rapid and accurate information about threats, risks and attacks is provided to the relevant authorities so that protection and impunity measures can be delivered quickly and effectively, and that official actors are held to account for any failures in this regard, and with a view to building the knowledge base needed for greater understanding of the issues and for underpinning the design of safety mechanisms;
77. **Collaborating** with other stakeholders to support media and information literacy programmes and research;
78. **Researching, developing and sharing** technical and other solutions to the problems regarding the free flow of information and ideas in society that have been created or exacerbated by digital communications technologies;
79. **Working with** online platforms and other intermediaries to improve their respect for human rights;
80. **Denouncing** attacks on freedom of expression and media freedom in whatever form they take and whoever perpetrates them, whether public authorities, political actors, Internet intermediaries, or others.