

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

3 May 2016

Human rights, democratic societies and sustainable development depend on the free flow of information. And the right to information depends on press freedom. Each year, we observe World Press Freedom Day to emphasize these fundamental principles, to protect the independence of the media and to honour media workers who risk and have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

This year, World Press Freedom Day coincides with three important milestones. It is the 250th anniversary of the world's first freedom of information law, covering both modern-day Sweden and Finland, and it is the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration of press freedom principles. Finally, 2016 is also the first year of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Press freedom and the free flow of information are necessary not only to inform citizens about the Goals, but to enable them to hold their leaders accountable for fulfilling the pledges they have made. The media – including, and increasingly, new online media -- serve as our eyes and ears. We all benefit from the information they provide.

A free, independent and safe media environment is essential. Yet, all too often, journalists are threatened, harassed, obstructed or even killed in the pursuit of information. Many languish in detention, some in appalling conditions, for shedding light on governance failures, corporate malfeasance or societal problems.

I am very concerned about the increasingly restrictive environment for media workers in many countries. Constraints on freedom of expression place shackles on progress itself. On this World Press Freedom Day, I urge all Governments, politicians, businesses and citizens to commit to nurturing and protecting an independent, free media. Without this fundamental right, people are less free and less empowered. With it, we can work together for a world of dignity and opportunity for all.