

Declaration of Belgrade
3 May 2004
Media in areas of Violent Conflict and Countries in Transition

We the participants in the UNESCO Conference on Media in areas of Violent Conflict and Countries in Transition held in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, on World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2004

Recalling Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states “Everyone has the right to freedom of 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”;

Noting that the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, which set out international standards applicable to journalists on dangerous professional assignments in areas of armed conflict, classify such journalists as civilians, not as combatants, and stipulate that they should therefore benefit from all the protections afforded to civilians, including provisions against being deliberately targeted, detained or otherwise mistreated;

Aware that press freedom is a part of the new agenda for a human rights-based approach to development as elaborated in the Millennium Development Goals, the road map for the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration;

Recalling United Nations Resolution 1325 which urges the international community to include women’s groups and individual women in all post-conflict reconstruction, development and peace processes;

Welcoming the Charter for the Safety of Journalists Working in War Zones or Dangerous Areas, adopted by concerned organizations in Paris on 8 March 2002, and the Safety Charter, adopted in Montreal in 1992;

Recalling Resolution 4.3 adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 26th session in 1991, which recognizes that a free, pluralistic and independent press is an essential component of any democratic society and endorses the Declaration adopted by the participants in the United Nations/UNESCO Seminar on “Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press,” held in Windhoek, Namibia, from 29 April to 3 May 1991;

Condemning the killing of, attacks on, threats against and harassment of journalists reporting in conflicts;

Stressing the importance of access to a free flow of information from a range of sources about conflict situations to expose any abuses that may occur and to create a climate in which the conflicts may be resolved;

Emphasizing the need to involve the local news media as a principal actor in the development of any media strategies in conflict and post-conflict zones;

Taking note of UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura’s message for World Press Freedom Day 2004 that the “ personal safety and very survival” of populations in conflict zones may depend upon receiving “independent and trustworthy information”, and his view

that dialogue, “ even when it is heated...is crucial for laying the ground for reconciliation and reconstruction. ... A free press is not a luxury that can wait for better times; rather, it is part of the very process through which those better times are achieved”;

Unanimously declare that:

1. Achieving democracy and enduring peace will depend upon respect for international human rights and, in particular, the right to freedom of expression as set out in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
2. Freedom of expression requires there to be independent and pluralistic media, able to report independently of governmental, political or economic control;
3. Assuring the safety of both local and international journalists should be given the highest priority. There should be an end to a culture of impunity in cases of killings and other attacks on journalists and there should be independent investigations into such killings and attacks;
4. In conflict and post-conflict zones, it is necessary to ensure that credible and practical humanitarian information is made available both to the local population and to international assistance organizations. This may involve creating special information outlets for as long as they may be needed. It is also necessary to ensure that accurate information is provided about any peace negotiations or other reconciliation processes;
5. In violent conflicts public discourse is frequently dominated by armed parties to the conflict. The active participation of women’s groups, civil society and marginalized and vulnerable groups should be ensured by assistance to help them gain access to media outlets and/or to create their own outlets that voice their concerns;
6. When administering conflict or post-conflict zones, authorities mandated by the international community should promote and defend media freedom and other human rights – not restrict them;
7. While it may become necessary to deter direct and effective incitements to violence that may be disseminated, authorities should not confuse independent news and propaganda that calls for violence;
8. State or government broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters. A system for the allocation of broadcast licences and frequencies, insulated from political and commercial interference, should be established;
9. A pluralistic media requires the existence of a broad diversity of print, broadcast and other media, reflecting the widest range of opinion within the community. Measures should be taken to ensure fair competition and a level economic playing field;
10. Training efforts should develop and strengthen the capacity of local, national and regional training institutions, such as schools of journalism at university level, to promote training of journalists, the training of trainers, as well as development of research on media and communication. Training of journalists should include safety concerns and questions of economic sustainability of media. It should also include conflict management issues and

peace processes, to meet the demand for informed reporting on reconciliation processes, while ensuring that journalists are not cast in the role of peacemakers.

11. It is equally essential to promote awareness of human rights, particularly freedom of expression, press freedom and international humanitarian law amongst public officials and civil society;

12. Steps should be taken to improve the professionalism of journalists, including support for independent associations, organizations and unions, and voluntary, self-regulatory codes and bodies where appropriate;

13. We strongly urge government and non-government donors to include media development as part of their strategy for reconstruction and development in conflict and post-conflict zones, and donors should co-ordinate their responses for greatest effect;

14. We reaffirm UNESCO's status as lead agency for communication issues within the United Nations system. We call upon UNESCO to reinforce its coordinating role in supporting media initiatives in conflict and post-conflict zones;

15. We ask the Director General of UNESCO to bring this Declaration to the attention of Member States with the objective of developing a strategy for a concrete plan of action amongst the different actors within the United Nations system, governmental and non-governmental donors and civil society partners, following the principles of this Declaration.