

**Opening remarks by Mr Juha Sipilä
Prime Minister of Finland
Finlandia Hall, 3 May 2016**

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Madam Director-General,
Mr Mayor,
Madam Lister,
President Halonen,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to the international World Press Freedom Day in Helsinki.

When I look around, I see a record number of participants – an impressive array of media, academia, governmental and civil society representatives. I also know that this event is being followed around the world over the internet.

I want to thank you all for the determination, courage and professionalism that you show in defending freedom of expression and freedom of the press on all continents, every day of the year.

Madam Director-General,

It is a great honour for Finland to co-host this event with UNESCO. This is the first time that the main event is being held in a Nordic country. The celebrations of the World Press Freedom Day are also part of Finland's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers this year.

Hosting this event in 2016 has a very special meaning for us Finns. This year, we – together with Sweden – are celebrating the 250th anniversary of our Freedom of the Press Act. Issued in 1766, on the initiative of the Finnish parliamentarian Chydenius, it was the first-ever act on freedom of information in the world.

This freedom of information act was also the most liberal one of its time, and it abolished political censorship and made it permissible to engage in political debate, including criticism of ruling groups. It also guaranteed public access to official documents.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Because of the strong linkage between freedom of expression, freedom of the press and democracy, this event is also connected to the celebration of Finland's 100 years of independence in the coming year.

Freedom of expression lies at the heart of democratic societies. It is a prerequisite to democracy and an open, transparent, just and well-functioning society based on trust.

And let me say: transparency and freedom of expression are the best means to fight corruption. Finland is one of the least corrupt countries in the world and this correlates – I believe – with the high level of freedom of the press in our society.

Good governance means openness and transparency, and citizens must demand it. Citizens, politicians and public authorities alike have an interest in an independent and professional media. We need good journalism that is based on facts and accuracy.

We are all aware that both traditional media and social media are being used today to spread disinformation as well. The best way to fight against this is to ensure that the conditions under which media professionals operate allow for diverse and independent high-quality communications. It is also important to enhance media literacy skills.

Distinguished guests,

For the past five years, Finland has been ranked first in the World Press Freedom Index released by 'Reporters without Borders'. According to the index, freedom of the press in Finland is based on strong legal foundations that are supported by a genuine culture of the rights of the individual.

We believe this is the result of our long traditions as an open society. It also has to do with access to public information, a high-level of source protection, fast internet connections, as well as world-class education and a public library network that together promote media literacy.

I'm convinced that the high international rankings of Finland are also strongly linked with the prominent position of women and gender equality in the society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of today's event is 'Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms – This Is Your Right'. And indeed it is. Journalists are key actors when it comes to protecting and promoting these rights.

Let us celebrate the 25th World Press Freedom Day and bring forward the legacy and spirit of the Windhoek seminar in 1991. It was a true landmark in the field of media pluralism and independence.

I would like to thank all the organizers for their tireless work in making this three-day event a reality.

May your very important work continue, and let this event inspire us all.