

**Keynote Speech by Oscar Cantú**  
**Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the *El Norte* newspaper**  
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Good morning, Selamat Pagi,  
UNESCO Directors, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
It is an honour to be here, my gratitude to UNESCO and those who made this possible.

*Introduction*

Hello my name is Oscar Cantú, I'm a lawyer and a publisher/editor in Ciudad Juarez. I founded Norte newspaper 27 years ago. As Norte newspaper CEO, I have experienced all kinds of emotions, but nothing like what brought me here. The tragic murder of our journalist Miroslava Breach.

*Context*

Ciudad Juarez is located in the northern region of Mexico, in the State of Chihuahua, the largest in the country. Demographically, the Rio Bravo borders with the United States. Ciudad Juarez, besides being border with El Paso, Texas, is the most important border of Mexico.

The biggest economy at the border is the manufacturing industry, which generates about 300 thousand direct jobs and twice as many indirectly. It's the main economic activity for a city with a population of 1 million 300 thousand people.

*Norte newspaper inception*

The inception of Norte newspaper began 27 years ago, but this journey started 40 years ago when I co founded the newspaper El Universal, in my hometown, which was part the most senior newspaper in Mexico City.

There were several factors that led to its creation. At the beginning of my first year at law school, my father and I experienced a tragedy at the hands of corruption, political power and abuses. My father, a hardworking and honest man who made his estate on a basis of work and effort was extorted by the governor, who used the entire judicial apparatus to strip him of property near to the border that with time acquired surplus value.

Since then I have understood how far public power can reach to achieve its objectives. I experienced in my own flesh, how our freedom was violated when arrested without order or reason. We were coerced and extorted, stripped of property, and threatened to kill me, if he did not comply.

“Such traumatic experiences, so unjust, a violation of human rights and of witnessing how the power that must protect its citizens through the impartation of justice, can become a factual power capable of killing. I realized the necessity to seek better living conditions, not only for my first unborn daughter, but to seek justice and equity for the community”.

*Important Norte newspaper moral values*

Norte Newspaper grew out of the need for a voice that told the truth. As a tool that counterbalanced the abuses, able to defend public opinion.

Norte newspaper was born with the promise of truth, fairness, critical journalism and counterweight, capable of exposing abuses and excess of power.

Since 1990, our publication has sought to open awareness and give voice to those who do not

have it, promoting transparency, accountability, rule of law.

Norte went through extreme situations where it had to face political power and fight to bring information to its readers.

Some examples:

Our building has been shoot at, our journalists have been threatened and some were kidnapped, constantly harassed and audited by governments intimidating our advertisers, tried to put us in jail for denouncing corruption, abuse of power, injustice etc.

Love has been to me the motivation. Love for freedom, justice, rule of law, and a peaceful and a better way of life, in journalism love goes beyond fear.

#### *Contribution from research journalism to society*

The premise of information, which must be true and accurate/fair, the most important contribution of Norte, has been to inform the community in depth. To seek to open the conscience of people, so that they have the possibility to discern and choose, to reinforce the democratic system that Mexico boasts. Norte has become a counterweight, evidencing the corruption in different situations, not only of public power, but also of the private power. It has fought and joined the cause for human rights of people accused of crimes they did not commit.

#### *Miroslava murder; break point*

An example of exercising what she loved, exposing how organized crime was infiltrating our political party system. MB was a professional woman in journalism, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a woman with very close family ties. A woman with a lot of vision, analytical and who always sought to expose the truth and courageous. Our work relationship generated closeness with her; she was a woman with spark, witty, spontaneous and kind. One night we talked on the phone, next morning I learned that she had been killed, shot eight times as she took her son and daughter to school in front of her house. Her family was and is still broken up, she did not deserve that. Her two children have now been orphaned.

The circumstance of her departure caused me a strong emotional impact; I felt regret and a grief. I still feel it. Her cowardly murder made me aware of the risks we take with those who exercise or publish stories of high impact.

#### *Why shutting down — an option*

“I was ashamed of myself, because it made me reflect on the terrible mistakes the media owners have made that we did not initially demand justice for the deaths of journalists who have been killed, for many years in the past. It is our co-responsibility, to care and watch over their safety; I felt I had gone wrong. As an interminable synergy, the great corruption league of politics linked to drug trafficking and great impunity continue as it did when I started this trip.”

*The result of doing the same thing that has been done, has not generated any result. Enough is enough.*

The closure of Norte newspaper is an act of protest to the government for not guaranteeing the security and respect that we, journalists and the media deserve. It is a cry to the society so that it is also conscious and demands better journalism. I decided to lower the curtain, because if we cannot be loyal to our integrity, giving the reader, what we consider must be of his or her knowledge, I cannot put at risk my collaborators, their families or my own.

It is a statement of love of freedom to pressure for the necessary conditions to exercise our right without impunity.

### *Current State of journalism in Mexico/International ranking*

Journalism in Mexico is worse now than ever. The absence of rule of law and ungovernability keeps journalism in a constantly dangerous scenario. The association Reporters Without Borders, places Mexico as one of the countries with the greatest risks for journalists, last year, just behind Syria and Afghanistan. According to “Reporters without borders”, Mexico is the most insecure country to practice journalism, in Latin America. In addition, in the last 15 years, the danger and risk for journalists in the country has doubled. According to the Special Prosecutor’s Office for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) 97.1% of the cases of assault and murder of journalists have not been resolved.

In 51 months of the current government of President Enrique Peña Nieto, more than 92 000 homicides related to organized crime have been reported in the country. As you can see, Mexico is under a climate of total impunity. The worst thing is that nothing is being done. Neither resolves nor protects journalists. 43 students disappeared at the same time, nothing happened. Another fact is that our government has been incapable to repress or contain a “factic power” of the drug trafficking organization; — Mexico apparently is not at war, but reality shows us that in certain regions of our country it is a failed state. Organized crime controls. Corruption is out of control, as impunity.

Mexico has 32 states out of which 16 governors or ex-governors today are in jail, being prosecuted or fugitives, most of the from President Peña Nieto’s political party.

### *Proposed message*

The closure is an invitation to the population to join efforts and reconsider the importance and legacy of professional journalism, which promotes and guarantees a democratic system of government. The free press is undoubtedly a pillar for the development of any country, regardless of the continent, since freedom of expression is a value and a right of citizens. There is a need and a pending issue for media, civil organizations, journalists and governments to develop strategies to ensure the exercise of journalism and information around the world. A free press will always bring a healthier and more democratic government.

### *We need to think of our future generations - the challenge*

According to PISA test (an international metric) Mexico’s average education level is of 8th grade, equivalent to second year of middle school, 43 percent of the population is less than 15 years old, and do not have basic education complete, nor the skills to deal with global challenges.

How can we expect a population with such level of education to stand up for democracy, rule of law, and accountability?

We need to promote international public policies, to promote ethical, moral values and rules of law in basic education levels.

We need to create international observatories to eradicate impunity on crimes committed against journalists.

We need mechanisms to fund investigative critical journalism. To be free of manipulation and control by governments. Independent local news organizations are most vulnerable.

In Mexico, investigative, critical and counterweight journalism is in danger of extinction.

Crime and government are its main threat.

Journalists increasingly have little or no tools to deal with this reality. We want justice for Miroslava and all journalists that have lost their lives.

Today our call to world nations is not to leave us alone, but to help us to preserve peace, freedom, democracy and life.

Thank you - Terima Kasi - May peace be with you.