



Concept Paper

World Press Freedom Day 2011

21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers

Washington, DC, United States

Consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.

– **The Declaration of Windhoek, 3 May 1991**

21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers

World Press Freedom Day was established by the United Nations (UN) two years after a joint conference between UNESCO and the United Nations Department of Public Information in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. The conference called upon the UN to establish a day dedicated to celebrating the fundamental principles of press freedom and to honoring journalists who have lost their lives in pursuit of their profession. In 2011, World Press Freedom Day marks the twentieth anniversary of that Declaration.

Recalling Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and which states that the fundamental right of freedom of expression encompasses the freedom “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers,” World Press Freedom Day is celebrated across the globe every 3 May.

This year’s three-day celebration of World Press Freedom Day, whose theme is **21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers**, will culminate with the award of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize on 3 May in Washington, DC, United States. In 2011, the focus of the celebration is the potential of the Internet and digital platforms as well as more established forms of journalism to contributing to freedom of expression, democratic governance, and sustainable development. The occasion will also serve to call on Member States to reaffirm and implement their international commitments to guarantee and promote freedom of expression on the Internet and to remind civil society organizations, individuals, and other relevant stakeholders of their central part in furthering the Internet as a global public resource.

Twenty years after the call for the establishment of World Press Freedom Day, the arrival of the digital revolution—the evolution of the Internet, the emergence of new forms of media, and the rise of online social networks—has reshaped the media landscape and made “the press” of 2011 something that those gathered in Windhoek in 1991 could not have imagined.

It is well recognized that the growth of the Internet has greatly expanded the ability of individuals, groups, and others to enhance their freedom of expression and their rights to seek, receive and impart

information, as recognized by international human rights standards. New media platforms have made it possible for almost any citizen to communicate to a large audience. For example, bloggers around the world are challenging authorities, exposing corruption, and expressing their opinions via the Internet. These new frontiers of media have enriched news and information resources and reshaped what has traditionally been the realm of print press, broadcasters, and news agencies.

Even as new frontiers are being forged by these 21st Century media, however new barriers and new attempts to block, filter, and censor information are being created. Yet, proliferation of the Internet, social networks, and new-generation mobile telephony raises new concerns for privacy and security of users.

UNESCO, as the UN Agency with the mandate to promote freedom of expression, recognizes that this right is central to building strong democracies, contributing to good governance, promoting civic participation and the rule of law, and encouraging human development and security. The right to freedom of expression applies as much to the Internet as to the more traditional forms of media—press, radio, and television. The challenge is to optimize fully the potential of the Internet and digital media without compromising civil liberties.

New Frontiers of News Media: New Forms of Expression, Journalism, and Participation

Internet-based applications, particularly the emergence of social networks, user-generated content, and micro-blogging, have enabled nearly every Internet user to be a potential broadcaster with the ability to rapidly create, modify, and share digital content and knowledge with millions of other users, both locally and globally. These changes introduce new patterns of communication, break down country borders, and create new forms of creative expression, journalism, and participation.

This unprecedented decentralization of information brought about by the Internet has empowered citizens more than ever to access information, express themselves, and participate in public debate. Even in areas where Internet penetration is low, citizens are using mobile phones to send information via text messages to local radio stations, still the dominant news media in many parts of the world. Using micro-blogging via cellphones and other such Internet tools, political dissidents under repressive regimes have been able to let the outside world know what is actually happening in their countries.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that how individuals can be empowered to produce quality content and acquire the necessary media and information literacy in this more complex information environment remains a challenge.

Food for Thought:

- How to promote Internet and social networks as platforms for democratic discussion and civic participation?
- How to empower bloggers and individual users in content production and meaningful participation to enrich citizens' access to information and exchange of ideas?
- How to enhance media and information literacy of audiences; how to help them learn to find the information they need and critically evaluate that information?

- What is the role of traditional media in authenticating or verifying information carried by social networks?
- How to empower marginalized communities to access information through digital communications tools, including mobile phones?
- Would more traditional media and information literacy suffice in the digital age to empower users adequately?

A Legal and Regulatory Perspective: Better Protection for Freedom of Expression in the Age of Digital Communications.

Historically, telecommunication, broadcasting, and other media were distinct industries; they used different technologies and were governed by different regulations. Convergence of communications is dissolving established barriers, not only between professional journalists and citizens using the new tools, but also in the legal and regulatory environment. The legal system has been slow, however, to adjust to the changes caused by the convergence of telecommunications and broadcasting (including public service broadcasting) and the merger of broadband operators and Internet service providers.

There are various national policies and approaches on privacy and freedom of expression, including industrial policy and regulation such as copyright, user-centric approaches related to child protection policy, fraud, defamation and hate speech, net-centric policies linking to domain names, and security policy on privacy and freedom of expression. How do we employ these existing mechanisms the better to protect freedom of expression in the age of digital communications? If existing mechanisms are inadequate, what should be done?

The human rights organization, Article 19, has pointed out that Internet intermediaries play a key role in facilitating the connections between the providers of information and users. Today, they are the new postal service, telephone network, local newspaper, and broadcast station. How they are addressed by civil society and governments is not yet clearly established. Consequently freedom of expression is often unduly limited.

“[The] Internet is not tidy. It is complex. Everyone is both a data subject and a data controller,” said Richard Allan of the online social portal, Facebook, at the most recent Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2010. This new relationship set by social networks can raise critical legal challenges: for governments to enforce laws, which can risk limiting freedom of speech; for Internet companies to protect privacy and develop standards in an online environment; for users, and especially for young people, to know how to protect their privacy and free speech.

Food for Thought:

- What are the legal and human rights implications of social networks for freedom of expression, privacy, and personal data protection?
- How to protect bloggers and users right to freedom of expression on the Internet and social networks?
- How to find applicable standards and legislation and share good practices on privacy protection?

- What is the role of Internet service providers/web hosting companies? Are they neutral bystanders? And how to treat conflicts of legal jurisdiction created by the trans-border nature of the web and social networks?
- What effect does the convergence of media have on the enabling environment for freedom of expression?

New Barriers: Online Blocking, Censorship, Surveillance, Safety of Journalists and Bloggers

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), nearly 2 billion people—over one-quarter of the world’s population—use the Internet. Its advent has substantially changed the media landscape and information flows. With its participatory capabilities, the Internet has opened new horizons for freedom of expression.

One of the most widespread uses of the Internet is blogging. The number of blogs worldwide increased from 22 million in 2005 to more than 100 million by 2010. Among the most distinct features of blogs are their decentralized nature and the speed at which information is disseminated. While lacking established forms of gate-keeping, such as editors or pre-determined professional standards, bloggers can publish information quickly. Furthermore, being decentralized, bloggers are sometimes better positioned to report first-hand on local events than larger news agencies.

Bloggers also face some of the same risks and threats as professional journalists, as arrests of bloggers, filtering of content and disconnecting of users has made clear. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that in 2008, for the first time, more “online reporters,” such as bloggers, were in jail than traditional media journalists. As individual or freelancing bloggers continue to become more important, there is a need to provide protection for bloggers who undertake the same functions and face the same risks as professional journalists.

Yet, the growth of the Internet has also notably increased governmental surveillance power, creating new threats to professional news media and citizens and raising concerns over the difficulty of guaranteeing free and unhindered flow of information. Popular social networking and micro-blogging sites, while giving ordinary users a voice, can also be used by governments to identify and locate or even arrest citizens. As a 2010 UNESCO-commissioned report, *Freedom of Connection—Freedom of Expression: The Changing Legal and Regulatory Ecology Shaping the Internet*, has shown, with growing access to information in cyberspace, the rise of censorship and filtering can be carried out not only by governments but also by private entities.

The ability of powerful entities, both governmental and non-governmental, to use digital media platforms to the disadvantage of free press also has implications for investigative journalism. Investigative journalism, long held to be the epitome of the watchdog function of the press, has normally enjoyed strong protection especially in mature societies. It is a powerful instrument to counter any attempt to hide truths either concealed deliberately by those in power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances. Will investigative journalism prosper or be weakened by the profusion of digital media?

Food for Thought:

- How are governments using digital tools to track down and arrest or silence bloggers?
- How can citizen reporters protect themselves and evade censorship and surveillance?
- How are organizations dedicated to the defense and protection of journalists and freedom of expression affected by the rise of digital media? Do they operate differently now than they did 20 years ago?
- Journalists continue to be subjected worldwide to physical attack, murder, and imprisonment. What are the trends?
- Many countries have criminal libel and insult laws. Are they used against professional and citizen reporters? Do they lead to self-censorship by news organizations?

New Trends of Journalism: New Business Models, Media Ownership, and Preserving Editorial Independence

The rise of the Internet and other digital media pose a particular challenge for traditional news outlets. In many regions, newspaper sales have declined since the early 2000s. Some have opted to have only electronic versions of their publications. While digital technology and its myriad applications offer traditional publishers new channels to distribute content to a wider audience, increased revenues have not followed. The three most common revenue models for online news remain subscriptions, advertising, and donations. Each comes with its own benefits and drawbacks.

Journalism is a public good, but who will pay for it in the future? In the past, media markets in many countries have had both private and public funding. The big media houses, generally run by private companies, are the outlets that offer general international and national news, but these are the very ones facing economic pressures from the rise of digital media. Today, targeted niche markets, such as science, business, and sports, often deliver the profits that media owners seek—as do sensationalist, populist, and biased news. What are the new business models going forward? The use of the Internet as a major information source raises important questions on the future funding of media, on the need for journalists' unions to examine their strategies for organizing new work forces in journalism, and on ways to create new partnerships with citizens to defend press freedom. It is no secret that journalism is undergoing a shift: “We don't own the media anymore,” said the director of the BBC World Service and Global News division back in 2005. Media owners and managers face great challenges adjusting to the new digital world: to continue to fund newsrooms staffed by professional journalists or to rely on blogs and other user-generated content. One of the challenges includes continuity of funding of investigative journalism which has been traditionally supported by well-established media companies. Will this approach be affected by increased reliance on individual digital media users?

Finding the balance between generating profits in a new business environment—while holding on to well-established journalistic standards and maintaining editorial independence—has emerged as one of the most pressing and urgent issues for journalism in the digital age.

Food for Thought:

- Will technological development hurt journalistic integrity? Will news quality and reliability suffer, if anyone can act as a reporter?
- How to ensure that journalism remains independent of political and commercial interference and influence in the face of changing revenue models?
- Are there possible alternative funding models in addition to advertising, subscriptions, and donations?
- Do digital media and traditional news media have competing or mutually complementary relationships? What is needed for an enabling environment for synergy between the two?
- How will traditional forms of media continue to be relevant in the Internet era?
- How will journalists in traditional print and broadcast media use new tools in their reporting and in distribution of news content?

Conclusion

The rise of digital media platforms presents enormous opportunities to better inform citizens: exponentially better access to more information; a greater diversity of information sources; convergence of video, audio, and text on a single screen; access to primary documents; direct communications between the governors and the governed.

With these opportunities have come new barriers to the free flow of information: filtering, blocking of content, digital surveillance, and restrictive digital media laws as well as already existing media laws.

World Press Freedom Day 2011 will explore these new frontiers and barriers while celebrating the fundamental principles of freedom of expression, press freedom and right to information in the digital age and the courage of those who practice journalism and press freedom.