



# The Washington Declaration

## 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY MEDIA: NEW FRONTIERS, NEW BARRIERS

We, the participants at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference in Washington DC, 1-3 May 2011:

**Commemorating** World Press Freedom Day and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which emphasized the importance of freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive or impart information, as a fundamental right for the fulfilment of human aspirations;

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

**Taking note of** the principles and recommendations of the Brisbane Declaration of 2010 on Freedom of Information: the Right to Know, and of the Doha Declaration of 2009 on the Potential of Media for Dialogue, Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation, and of the Maputo Declaration of 2008 on Fostering Freedom of Expression, Access to Information, and Empowerment of People;

**Taking note of** the report to the Human Rights Council of April 2010 by the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (A/HRC/14/23).

**Underscoring** the principles set forth in the Declarations of Windhoek, Alma-Ata, Sana'a, Santiago and Sofia, that identify free, pluralistic and independent media as a cornerstone of democratic societies in all parts of the world, good governance and development;

**Noting** that new information and communication technologies present individuals with unprecedented access to news and information, that has the potential to promote democracy and good governance and to combat corruption and wrong-doing, and to promote the equality of opportunity among all groups;

**Recognizing** that this access has been illegitimately and abusively restricted by some governments and that information and communication technologies can be manipulated to curtail the exercise of civil liberties by citizens;

**Emphasizing** that access to information through all forms of media and digital platforms is critical for an informed electorate and thus for healthy participation in democratic life, and transparent governance;

**Welcoming** growing global recognition of the positive potential represented by new media, especially highlighted in the recent and ongoing movements for democracy and social justice;

**Honouring** the journalists and media personnel who contribute to press freedom through their work, often bravely risking their lives in the process;

**Condemning** the intimidation and attacks, including arrests and murders inflicted upon journalists, media personnel and bloggers whenever they undermine their rights and the right of all persons to seek, receive and impart information and ideas;

**Call on UNESCO Member States:**

To reaffirm and implement their commitment under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

To recognize and ensure that the same principles of freedom of expression apply equally to the Internet and other new information technologies, as they apply to traditional forms of media;

To use fully the potential of the Internet and digital media while fully respecting civil liberties, including the rights of freedom of expression and privacy;

To ensure an environment in which media are pluralistic and editorially independent of political interference;

To seek to leverage advances in technology and communication tools to promote affordable access to the Internet and other digital information infrastructure for everyone;

To refrain from imposing illegitimate or abusive limits on free expression, including the ability to seek information on the Internet - be it on blogs, e-mail, or social media networks - taking into account, to be legitimate, any restrictions on freedom of expression must be strictly proportional; narrowly defined; necessary in a democratic society and soundly based in law, provided they would not be contrary to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They should be implemented by an instance independent of political, commercial or other outside influences ; enforced in non-arbitrary and non-discriminatory manners ; and surrounded by guarantees against abuse, to include access to independent courts;

To ensure a legal environment in which free speech is encouraged, and penalized neither by onerous defamation laws, nor excessive monetary penalties.

To enact and enforce freedom of information laws, and provide adequate resources that permit everyone ways to access information held by governments and guarantee transparency of governmental activities;

To take prompt and effective action to assure the safety of journalists, bloggers, and all those, including students and youth, who express themselves on digital media platforms from intimidation, threats, physical attacks, and attempts against their lives;

To bridge the digital and knowledge divides by improving literacy and increasing access to the Internet, including through media literacy in school curricula, and by making information available in local languages;

To refrain from licensing as a requirement for the professional practice of journalism;

To give renewed emphasis to public debate on the role of journalism and independent media in the creation of a culture of democratic pluralism, and to promote actions to build public trust in journalism and independent media;

To endeavor to prevent non-state actors from taking actions that would undermine the enjoyment of freedom of expression;

To examine, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, new forms of assistance to media, including support for innovation in the development of media, encouraging investigative journalism, and promoting public service values in journalism, while ensuring that the providing of assistance does not compromise editorial independence and journalistic freedom;

To refrain from using advertising or business practices as a tool to unduly influence media editorial independence;

### **Call on Professional Associations, Media Outlets and Industry:**

To recognize that professional journalistic values and practices must be applied to information distributed via social networks and other emerging forms of media;

To promote the access to information of marginalized groups through digital communications tools, including mobile phones;

To promote the sharing of best practices on the respect of freedom of expression and privacy protection;

To refrain from using compulsory membership in professional bodies as a means to restrict access to the profession;

To promote and support investigative journalism through professional training and to raise awareness about the role of new media platforms for journalism;

To encourage high standards of journalism and ethical behaviour by media professionals, new media users, and practitioners, bearing in mind that news media are a public trust;

To promote the plurality of voices in news coverage and across all media outlets, especially those of the disadvantaged and marginalized, including women and youth;

To provide journalists with fair living wages so as to ensure that the integrity of their work is not compromised;

To respect principles of freedom of association and other universal rights, to work toward improving the safety and working conditions of journalists and other media personnel, and to provide adequate professional and safety training opportunities;

To promote and strengthen forms of independent and voluntary self-regulation that enhance and support high-quality ethical journalism and build public trust;

To resist pressure from states and other actors to block, deny or limit access to the Internet and new media;

### **Call on UNESCO:**

To encourage the production of quality content, and to foster media literacy as a necessary skill in the new, more complex information environment, including through its promotion at different levels of educational and training systems;

To promote Internet and social networks as platforms for democratic discussion and civic participation;

To continue to promote and coordinate dialogue among Member States to ascertain the legal and human rights implications of social networks for freedom of expression, privacy, and personal data protection;

To sensitize Member States, public authorities, civil society and individuals about exercising freedom of expression through new media, and the importance of such media in democratic societies;

To provide assistance and to promote synergies among relevant actors, such as parliamentarians, for the development and implementation of legal environments and policies fostering freedom of expression and taking advantage of technological developments that facilitate public discourse everywhere in the world;

To support the promotion of best practices, both by professional journalists and through new forms of expression via social networks and other digital platforms, including through research, documentation and knowledge-sharing;

To support an open and unrestricted Internet;

To gauge the interest among Member States to commission a study for the UNESCO Director General's attention on the best way to foster access to information on the Internet and through mobile technology for the world's under-served populations;

To condemn, whenever they occur anywhere in the world, violations of freedom of expression through censorship, content filtering, cyber surveillance, arrests, intimidations, physical attacks – including attempts to life – on journalists, bloggers, and all those who express themselves;

To ensure the inclusion of freedom of expression, press freedom and the new frontiers represented by new media, and the related issues addressed in this Declaration, as key topics for the development agenda, especially for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and to facilitate discussion and a coordinated approach on these matters among UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders;

To communicate this Declaration to Member States and to other international and regional organizations;

To endorse and use this Declaration as a reference for UNESCO's activities in the field of freedom of expression and to use it to promote development of a free and independent press -- print, broadcast, and digital – everywhere around the world.