



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Press
Freedom Day

Finlandia Declaration (World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2016)
Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms - This Is Your Right!

Recalling that press freedom and the right to information are integral components of the right to freedom of expression, and are fundamental to democracy and to other rights and freedoms;

Noting the new United Nations (UN) 2030 Development Agenda, and in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, which includes key points relevant to press freedom, access to information, safety of journalists and the rule of law.

Further noting SDG target 16.10, which is to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”, and *recognising* this as relevant to achieving all SDG goals and in particular SDG 5 on gender equality;

Welcoming the increasing number of countries who enable the right to information in national law, including in their constitutions, while also *noting* that legal guarantees for the right still do not exist, or face significant implementation challenges, in a number of UNESCO’s Member States;

Underscoring that universal access to information and to knowledge is central to the UN’s World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process, which reaffirmed freedom of expression and universal access to information as part of the ambition of achieving inclusive Knowledge Societies.

Recognising that the right to information and its effective implementation can be strongly supported by UNESCO’s concept of Internet Universality and the principles of Rights, Openness, Accessibility and Multi-stakeholder participation;

Recalling that as per the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), artistic freedom is an integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms of expression, information and communication;

Further recalling the initiatives of the Freedom of Information Advocates Network, the African Platform on Access to Information, and UNESCO’s 2015 Resolution declaring 28 September as International Day for Universal Access to Information; and *encouraging* all actors to ensure annual celebrations of this day;

Recognizing the importance of acknowledging the role of women journalists and the specific threats they face, including sexualized violence and online and offline harassment;

Emphasizing that the right to information encompasses access to information held by or on behalf of public authorities, or which public authorities are entitled to access by law, as well as access to information that is held by private bodies in respect of the exercise of public functions.

Understanding that the right to information is critical for informed decision-making, for the right to participation in the conduct of public affairs, for monitoring of public actions, for reducing corruption, and for enhancing transparency and accountability;

Recalling the concern in the 2010 Tenth Anniversary Joint Declaration of the UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression that historically disadvantaged groups continue to struggle to have their voices heard and to access information of relevance to them;

Recognizing that the right to information is also vital to developing a free, independent and pluralistic media and essential to strengthening its capacity to counter hate speech, promote intercultural understanding, and fight radicalization and violent extremism;

Acknowledging that violations of the right to press freedom also have an adverse impact on the right to information, including by the arbitrary blocking of access to online information, restricting expression online, and arbitrarily intruding on digital privacy, as well as the killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, deportations and other violations of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates.

Welcoming initiatives such as the February 2016 UNESCO conference “News organisations standing up for the safety of media professionals”, as well as the call for a Special Representative on Safety in the Office of the UN Secretary General, the International Declaration on the Protection of Journalists, and the Global Safety Principles and Practices.

Call on each UNESCO Member State:

To reaffirm that press freedom and the right to information are essential for a free, independent and pluralistic media, and crucial to the advancement of human rights and sustainable development;

To create a legal, policy and institutional environment which ensures that people can receive public information, including through a constitutional right to information and through statutory and institutional mechanisms for implementation;

To ensure that exceptions to the right to information, including secrecy rules, adhere to principles of international human rights such as legality, a legitimate purpose and necessity; and to ensure that there is transparency around the application of such limitations;

To put in place strong systems for proactive disclosure of information, taking full advantage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and promoting, as far as possible, universal access to the Internet and respect for open data principles;

To direct the necessary attention and political will to ensuring full implementation of the right to information, including by addressing the culture of secrecy within government institutions;

To ensure that legal frameworks are in place to protect the identity of confidential sources of journalism against direct and indirect exposure, and to protect whistleblowers;

To protect in law and in practice the right of individuals to protect the privacy of their digital communications by using encryption technology and tools that facilitate anonymity online;

To ensure that any bans on publication, including blocking of Internet content, are in fully line with international standards in this area which require legality, necessity, proportionality and legitimate purpose;

To enhance the information environment by putting in place positive measures to promote media diversity, including the availability of a broad range of cultural expressions through the media, and the inclusion of minority groups in the media landscape;

To adopt and support gender equality policies and programmes in implementing the right to information, and to use the UNESCO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media to advance press freedom;

To put in place effective safety programmes to monitor, prevent, investigate and punish attacks against journalists and others exercising their right to freedom of expression, and to protect those at risk of attack, in line with the universally applicable target of SDG 16, and the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

To promote the right to information through Media and Information Literacy programmes to support people to develop their capabilities to use the Internet as informed creators and users of information and knowledge, and to encourage a political culture that can isolate, expose and eliminate all forms of incitement to hostility, discrimination and violence;

To foster an enabling communications environment which supports the principle of self-regulation at all levels; and to preserve independence of public service broadcasting as one of the essential pillars of pluralism and access to information;

Call on civil society, journalistic actors and internet intermediaries:

To raise awareness and build capacity among policy-makers, journalistic actors, citizens at large and vulnerable groups in particular, about the right to information as a fundamental human right and how it can serve democracy and sustainable development;

To contribute to the dissemination of good practices and experiences showcasing the direct link between the right to information, ethical standards, quality journalism, accountable governance, media self-regulation, participation, limiting corruption and sustainable development;

To promote and support investigative journalism and to raise awareness about the value of journalism in the implementation of the right to information; and encourage dialogues between media professionals and civil society players to raise awareness of the role of ethical and pluralist journalism in building respect for human rights and democracy;

To promote the safety of newsrooms and journalists online and offline through training, ICT applications and safety protocols, as well the confidentiality of journalistic sources in the digital age;

For Internet intermediaries, to strengthen transparency about data retention and access policies;

To advocate for and monitor implementation of access to information laws, policies and practices;

Call on UNESCO:

To promote awareness about the right to information as an important human right, necessary for the enjoyment of other human rights, and essential for transparent and accountable governance and sustainable development;

To highlight that the right to information can only be effectively exercised and implemented on the basis of laws which regulate this right in accordance with international standards;

To call for a multi-stakeholder consultation process with the Member States aimed at strengthening this right, for example through a possible statutory instrument and an implementation mechanism, confirming that access to public information has been recognized within the framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

To contribute to the monitoring of the implementation of SDG 16.10, and to support innovative approaches to facilitate citizen involvement in this process;

To report to the UN General Assembly on progress towards SDG 16 in the setting up, worldwide, of safety programmes to monitor, prevent, investigate and punish attacks on freedom of expression, and to protect those at risk of such attacks

To continue highlighting the importance of the right to information for fostering universal, open, affordable and unfettered access to information and knowledge, and narrowing digital and knowledge divides, including gender gaps;

To advocate for ICT policies guided by openness, internet access, transparency, accountability, multilingualism, inclusiveness, and gender equality; and to promote net neutrality and civil participation including for youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized and vulnerable groups;

To promote the right to information through the use of ICTs and open solutions for sustainable development, inter-cultural understanding, and fostering inclusion, tolerance and cooperation.