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World Press
Freedom Day

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

World Press Freedom Day 2014

Concept Note

***Media Freedom for a Better Future:
Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda***

Overview

World Press Freedom Day in 2014 focuses on three inter-related themes: media's importance in development; safety of journalists and the rule of law; and the sustainability and integrity of journalism.

In 2015, the lofty Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will come to an end. Their influence in shaping flows of development aid, and national policies and practices, has been significant. In their place will likely be a new set of goals, which are being debated internationally under the label of "the post 2015 Development Agenda".

A High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP), co-chaired by the President of Liberia, President of Indonesia and Prime Minister of United Kingdom¹, has been assembled by the United Nations Secretary General to make recommendations on the issue². Their report makes detailed recommendations towards twelve universal goals for the decade after 2015. The 2014 World Press Freedom Day is envisaged as a further contribution to the shaping of the ongoing discussion around development after 2015.

Some of the goals listed by the HLP have a direct link to the current MDGs, while others are relatively new. Noteworthy amongst the new goals are those ensuring good governance and effective institutions, and in which freedom of speech and the media, openness, transparency and access to information are specifically highlighted.

A further contribution to the debate has been made by the United Nations Groups on the Information Society (UNGIS).³ It has proposed that ICTs as key enablers of development are fully recognized in the post-2015 development agenda, and has pointed out that "ICTs in general, and the Internet in particular, play an important part in ensuring rights-based development, especially enabling wider exercise of freedom of expression and press freedom, which in turn are critical to combating corruption, ensuring gender-sensitivity, deepening accountability, and promoting socially inclusive development".⁴

The observations of the High Level Panel and UNGIS coincide with the long-standing positions of UNESCO. Since its foundation UNESCO has placed freedom of expression

¹ The High Panel group was co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, and it includes leaders from civil society, private sector and government.

² *A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*
<http://www.beyond2015.org>

³³ Comprised of 29 members of the UN family, including UNESCO, ITU, UNDP, UNCTAD, UN Women, World Bank, World Trade Organisation and others, plus the OECD. See: www.ungis.org

⁴ Joint statement by United Nations Groups on the Information Society (UNGIS) on post-2015 development agenda
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/wsis/ungis_joint_statement_wsis_2013.pdf

and freedom of media at the core of its mission. Its Constitution, adopted in November 1945, states that UNESCO Member States will "collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of all peoples, through all means of mass communication" and "promotes the free flow of ideas by word and image". UNESCO further follows the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), whose Article 19 stipulates: "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." With the Windhoek Declaration of 1991, UNESCO defined press freedom as covering media freedom, pluralism and independence. In the years that followed, the importance of the safety of journalists and gender-sensitivity has become integral to this conceptualization.

At its recent 37th Session in November 2013, UNESCO's General Conference passed a resolution that highlights the importance of promoting, in the post-2015 Development Agenda, three key concerns: freedom of expression; universal access to knowledge and its preservation; and free, pluralistic and independent media, both offline and online. The resolution described these as indispensable elements for flourishing democracies and to foster citizen participation.

For UNESCO, freedom of expression and its corollary of press freedom and freedom of information are both fundamental rights as well as enablers of many goals relevant to the post-2015 Development Agenda.⁵ These include good governance, transparency and access to information, empowerment of women and youth, ending poverty, and ensuring stable and peaceful societies.

However, it is not a given that full recognition of media's significance will find its way into the final post-2015 Development Agenda. Supporters of press freedom worldwide need to understand and contribute to the debate if the insights are to be mainstreamed within the evolving conceptualisation of the meaning of development and the actions that taken to realize this objective.

The reason why free, pluralistic and independent media, covering print, broadcast and online, are crucial for a holistic development agenda is their facilitation of an inclusive public sphere for involving citizens in the processes of good governance and sustainable development. Media role is vital if cultural pluralism to play its part as a

⁵ Beyond 2015: Media as democracy and development
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/post2015/pdf/UNESCO_Media_Democracy_Development.pdf

driver of development, and if there is to be widespread informal education to underpin development.

In particular, within the broader media landscape, it is recognized that the news media – whether private, public or community-owned – are especially important. They help a society to define the meaning of development, including its relation to human rights and democratic values. They have impact as agenda-setters and as vehicles by which the public is informed. Further, the news media, and others who contribute journalism in the public sphere including on social media platforms, act as watchdogs of the people and scrutinize those in power, expose wrong doings and promote transparency.

From a development point of view, the safety of journalists is fundamental if these roles are to be fulfilled. By end of 2013, however, 91 journalists had been registered as killed over the year, according to UNESCO's list of assassinated journalists.⁶ In previous years, a small fraction of the killers have been brought to justice. The safety of journalists in a society is a symptom of the strength of the rule of law, which is vital for any government charged with advancing development. As such, journalistic safety constitutes a barometer of fragility or failure on the part of a state, which overall is one of the largest obstacles to development.

In this context, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted in 2012 by the UN Chief Executives Board, is a significant step on the road to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Plan brings together the UN family, other international organisations, national governments, media and civil society to combine forces to stop the killing of journalists and the accompanying impunity which serves to perpetuate the cycle. The UNESCO Work Plan on the safety of journalists, adopted in 2013, adds further impetus. Additionally, the UN General Assembly⁷ in 2013 and the Human Rights Council⁸ in 2012 have also adopted specific resolution on the safety of journalists. Progress on the safety of journalists has been made to date, and World Press Freedom Day provides an opportunity to strengthen and expand existing efforts.

Development not only needs journalists to be free, pluralistic independent and safe. It also rests on the sustainability and professionalism of journalism itself. As such, the state of journalism itself is a development issue. "Sustainability" in this context means a viable institutional basis that enables and protects the independence journalism; "professionalism" refers to the standards, such as verification and public interest, which

⁶ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/press-freedom/unesco-condemns-killing-of-journalists/lists-by-year/2013/>

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/68/propolist.shtml>

⁸ See http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/21/12

give journalism its integrity and distinguish it from other uses of freedom of expression. Professionalism also encompasses the ability of journalists to report on key development issues, not least those entailing issues of social marginalization, poverty, science and environment.

In the evolving mediascape today, online social media provides new opportunities, but also sets challenges to the traditional news media. Long-standing distinctions such as between editorial content and advertising are blurring. There are overlaps between community media and other media sectors as all increasingly articulate with social media and enable public voice. There are questions about the distinctive role of news media in the face of many new actors, both individuals and institutions, who generate or mediate news content outside of the traditional institutions. Electronic communications and big data raise important issues of how privacy and ethics impact on freedom of expression and the confidentiality of journalists' sources. Increased public access to means of communication raises other questions of accessibility such as linguistic, gender and other exclusions. Media and information literacy competencies are increasingly significant if the public is to find, assess and participate in the integrity of information flows that are relevant to development and its debates.

In summary, World Press Freedom Day 2014 examines the interrelated issues of the role of media in development, the correlative of the need for the safety of journalists, and matters related to the development of journalism itself.

More detail on the three sub-themes of World Press Freedom Day 2014 follows below:

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***Sub-theme 1: Free Media Contribute to Good Governance, Empowerment and Eradicating Poverty***

In the report of the High Level Panel on the post-2015 Development Agenda, good governance is understood as a society's ability to guarantee the rule of law, free speech and open and accountable government. In turn, freedom of expression is an essential pillar of governance more broadly, because this right enables as many citizens as possible to contribute to, as well as monitor and implement, public decisions on development. The importance of press freedom in promoting good governance is underlined by the increasing numbers of people who have access to an expanded realm of media platforms. As one study has noted: "Press freedom and good governance are not mutually exclusive. They support each other while promoting a country's economic and human development"<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Novel, A-S et al. 2008. *Press freedom and development*, Paris: UNESCO Publications 2008.

In particular, a free, pluralistic and independent news media, on all platforms, is important for facilitating good governance and transparency. Within the much-broadened media landscape, news media still remain central conduits for ongoing public assessments of the activities of government and other institutions that have developmental impact. Journalism is the act of bringing information and opinion into the public arena. It provides a platform for discussion across a range of issues pertaining to development, such as environment, science, gender, youth, peace, poverty and participation. Only when journalists are free to monitor, investigate and criticize a society's policies and actions can good governance take hold.

Transparency is an issue in governance of great relevance to development and the role of news media in this. A lack of transparency ultimately feeds corruption which is one of the hardest issues that states have to face in the development process. Independent investigative journalism is an ally of open government and thereby enhances the effectiveness, and thence the legitimacy, of development processes. It is also significant to note that studies have shown that high corruption rates, more often than not, correlate to the low level of press freedom.<sup>10</sup> In the words of Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics, Amartya Sen, "...in the terrible history of famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press."

A society that is guaranteed access to public documents and public decision-making processes is able to bring conflicts of interest to light and empower citizens with information about development processes. This is greatly supported with a strong right to information law that enables the citizenry, including the news media, to easily access information in the public domain speedily, freely and readily. Freedom of Information laws are increasing around the world, but need improved implementation if they are to contribute to development.

Regulatory reform of media and defamation laws is a necessary step in the direction of good governance and development. Insult laws and criminal libel laws remain disproportionate in terms of international standards on legitimate limits of freedom of expression. Such restrictive laws artificially protect officials from being scrutinized by media or the public. They have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and are crippling to good governance in the long run. A thorough decriminalization of defamation

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<sup>10</sup> Anne-Sophie Novel in her study on the relationship between press freedom and poverty shows that, with very few exceptions, a low level of press freedom usually indicates high level of corruption, lower level of rule of law. Novel, A-S et al. 2008. *Press Freedom and Development*. Paris: UNESCO Publications. See: [http://gem.sciences-po.fr/content/publications/pdf/novel\\_pressfreedom\\_poverty\\_150606.pdf](http://gem.sciences-po.fr/content/publications/pdf/novel_pressfreedom_poverty_150606.pdf); <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001618/161825e.pdf>

laws is necessary in any regulatory reform process that seeks to shape development through enabling critical debate. Similarly, many media laws based on archaic colonial or dictatorial era laws are incompatible with public participation in the coming development decade.

Free, pluralistic and independent news media also contribute to empowerment, understood as a social, economic and political process that is a natural outcome of the public's increased ability to access and contribute to credible information representing a plurality of opinions, facts and ideas. This is a people-centered approach of special relevance to women, youth, and the marginalized as actors in the development agenda. The High Level Panel report also advocates that people must be "central to a new global partnership". To do this, persons must be empowered with the freedom to voice their views and participate in the decisions that affect their lives without fear. They need access to pluralistic information and to an independent media, as well as enhanced capacity to participate social in media and crowd-sourcing. In this way, governments, businesses, civil society organizations and academia can understand, interact with, and respond to citizens' needs in new ways.

One of the objectives of the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the reduction of poverty, and while progress has been made, this goal will remain as a top priority in the post-2015 development agenda. Poverty is more than just a lack of resources; it is a lack of empowerment. An important step in achieving this development goal is making reliable and quality information available to the poor, and providing them with platforms for public voice. This applies especially to two groups that are generally disproportionately impacted on by poverty: women and youth.

Empower women. One of the recommendations by the HLP includes achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women. Considering the smaller number of women in the media in most societies and the special pressures they often face, much needs to be done to promote gender equity within the profession. UNESCO's Global Alliance for Media and Gender, launched in Bangkok in December 2013, is a significant step in this direction.

Empower youth. Youth are often the early adapter of technologies including information and communication technologies (ICTs). The use of ICTs by the youth has been a crucial element in the global political movement from the Reformasi movement in the late 1990s to the Arab Spring movement recently. There is a need to ensure that youth's voices, empowered by Media and Information Literacy, are heard in the development debates.

World Press Freedom Day 2014 is a timely moment to deepen understandings about media and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

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Sub-theme 2: Rule of Law to Ensure Safety of Journalists and Combating Impunity

The rule of law is a prerequisite for, as well as an outcome of, a successful development agenda. For the UN, the rule of law refers to: “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.”¹¹

The report of the High-Level Panel on the post-2015 development agenda noted that “the rule of law, freedom of speech and the media, open political choice and active citizen participation, access to justice, non-discriminatory and accountable governments and public institutions help drive development and have their own intrinsic value. They are both means to an end and an end in themselves”¹².

The rule of law is fundamental to the stability and smooth functioning of society. Only when the rule of law is respected can citizens have confidence in democratic process over the long term and invest in the sustainable development of their society. The news media have a crucial function as the sector of society most able to promote vigilance towards the rule of law, especially through fostering investigative journalism, promoting the openness of court, legislative and administrative proceedings, access to officials and to public documents. The government has a key role here in protecting the independence and pluralism of the news media, especially during critical moments of these processes.

The rule of law is especially important in regard to protecting the right to freedom of expression for everyone. Security must be especially guaranteed for those UNESCO describes as “journalists, media workers, and social media producers who generate a significant amount of public-interest journalism”. When these persons suffer crimes committed on account of their use of freedom of expression, the authorities must react swiftly and the perpetrators must be brought to justice in accordance with proper judicial process. This is recognized in other international instruments including the UN General

¹¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies. S/2004/616* available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/395/29/PDF/N0439529.pdf?OpenElement>

¹² <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

Assembly Resolution adopted on 18 December 2013 as well as the Human Rights Council Resolution HRC/RES/21/12 adopted in 2012.

Development is damaged when journalists (as well as citizen journalists), editors, publishers and online intermediaries alike are subjected to political or financial coercion and manipulation. Whistle-blowers as sources for journalists are also persecuted, even though corrupt practices they report on are by definition at odds with development. Journalists who investigate corruption often face severe reprisals as corrupt officials threaten their place of work, their families and their reputation. The greatest harm to development is the killings of journalists. More than 600 journalists have been killed in the last ten years. It is not possible to speak of good governance when some of the most visible members of society, those who are responsible for bringing information and news to the public, are being murdered on average at the rate of one each week.

A free, independent and pluralistic media environment, online and offline, must be one in which those doing journalism can work safely and independently without the fear of being threatened or even killed. Development needs to be an environment where attacks, intimidations, harassments, abductions, arbitrary imprisonments, threats and killings of journalists are rare exceptions and not the norm, and where any violations are properly dealt with under the rule of law.

The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is a relatively new factor on the international stage of high significance to the problems of journalism safety and impunity. The Plan was conceived in the UNESCO International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC) Council meeting in 2010 and was later endorsed by the United Nations Chief Executives Board in April 2012. It has the specific goal of mobilizing the UN family of agencies as well as other stakeholders including governments, regional organisations, NGOs and media houses to collaborate in creating a safer environment for journalists.

There is enormous potential in the UN Plan of Action in bringing the full weight of the UN to bear on the challenges, and in being a point of reference for others who share the concern to turn the tide. Already we are seeing the various UN mechanisms moving in a direction that contributes to the progress of the UN Plan of Action. Fundamental to the Plan is the insight that the experiences in one country or region can be useful for others trying to improve the safety of journalists. Compilation and sharing of up-to-date information and best practices and conducting international missions and investigations into particular cases can be highly beneficial. However, much work is still needed to achieve an optimum level of information exchange and joint learning, and in adapting

good practices to different regional and national contexts. World Press Freedom Day 2014 is an appropriate occasion to take stock of these issues.

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**Sub-theme 3: Sustainability and professionalism of journalism is part of development**

For free, pluralistic and independent media to play their full role in development, they need to provide a platform for sustainable, professional and credible journalism. Private media rely on growth in the market place to exist and expand, and this has been hindered in many places by the economic crisis following the financial crises that began in 2007. Public service media, which are more autonomous in regard to market-driven content, are finding that central governments more reluctant to fund them despite their role in development. Community media continues to be particularly important in empowering marginalized groups including indigenous or rural communities, enabling “grassroots participation”<sup>13</sup> which enables people to set up their own priorities and develop solutions which may be unique to local problems. However, the business basis of community media continues to be precarious in many places, in part due to inadequate regulatory regimes and insufficient recognition amongst donors of their value for development. UNESCO is aware that it is those communities most affected by poverty which are least able to impart and obtain information. As a result, they are excluded from public debate and unable to influence decisions that have a profound effect on their everyday lives. This is clear in relating to basic services: as an example, a healthy society depends on information related to clean water and sanitation, vaccines, environment etc. Without media sustainability across private, public and community media sectors, their marginalized status is likely to persist.

All news media today – whether public, private or community – are facing challenges about how to deal with new actors who generate news content for the public, such as bloggers, NGOs, private companies and state bodies. In many cases, the traditional media are wrestling with issues arising from their own entry into online media in general. Their engagement with the public through cellular telephony and online social media has meant overlaps between community media and private and commercial media, as all sectors increasingly enable public participation. Much of the news media also faces challenges to their production and circulation of journalism as they become affected by changes in advertising platforms. All these factors impact on sustainability and the quality and role of journalism in relating to development.

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<sup>13</sup> Rensburg, R in Community development: essential contribution or paternalistic communication? *Dialogus Online* 1(1). Available: at <http://www.unisa.ac.za/dept/kom/d11radio.html> [Date of access: 12 December 1998]

The professionalism of journalism is exhibited in the observance of standards such as verification of news content, confidentiality of sources, fairness, and public interest. This integrity has come into question in several ways. In many cases, the boundaries between editorial content and advertising are blurring. The widened ecosystem of contributors to news content includes some who do not understand or adhere to journalistic professionalism, but also where they are not always accorded the same protections as traditional journalists. The rise of Internet intermediaries with the potential to impact on freedom of expression has produced a new set of gatekeepers, many of which are unfamiliar with or unprepared to deal with this role. Balancing the right to free expression with other rights such as privacy, reputation and security, is an emergent and immature enterprise – particularly in regard to the internet. Debates around self-regulation versus privatisation of censorship by internet intermediaries are still embryonic. Legal standards for limits on freedom of expression, on all platforms, are still often not fully aligned to international principles which require transparency, proportionality and proper purpose to be legitimate. The relevance of journalistic ethics, such as verification and fairness, in this sphere is a question. Journalistic literacies in covering complex issues of development, ranging from gender-sensitive reporting through to coverage of climate change, are often inadequate.

Meanwhile, expanded access to media platforms raises questions of broader accessibility issues, such as the broadband divide, and gender, rural and language divides. In a context of expanding information, the integrity of journalism also relies on media and information literacy competencies. Participants in media increasingly need to be equipped to find, evaluate and participate in information about the development debates.

All this has a bearing on the development of media as part of broader development. In summary, the sustainability and professionalism of journalism, and the literacy of its producers and consumers merit attention on World Press Freedom Day 2014.

## **Conclusion**

World Press Freedom Day in 2014 comes at a juncture when the post-2015 Development Agenda is picking up momentum. The celebration of the day provides an opportunity to be forward looking and contribute to this debate. The sub-themes elaborated above will stimulate developing deeper understandings of the role that can be played by a free, pluralistic and independent media, and mainstreaming these into the development debate. Attention will also be directed to the changes needed to ensure that safety is guaranteed for those ensuring journalism's contribution to development. It is also relevant for the development focus to include the sustainability and professionalism of journalism and its users. This inter-linked agenda raises topics of

relevance to both global, regional and national commemorations during 2014, the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the occasion. Fittingly, it makes for World Press Freedom Day 2014 to be an important milestone in the fulfillment of UNESCO's mandate.