
Address delivered by Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley, AO, Governor of Queensland

2nd May 2010

Director-General of UNESCO, Mrs Irina Bokova,

Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, The Honourable Cameron Dick MP, representing the Premier and Minister for the Arts, The Honourable Anna Bligh MP,

Acting Vice-Chancellor, University of Queensland (UQ), Major General Maurice McNarn AO (Ret'd),

Members of the University Senate,

Head of the UQ School of Journalism and Communication, Professor Michael Bromley,

Members of the University Senior Executive and Faculty,

Distinguished delegates and guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the spirit of reconciliation, I acknowledge Australia's indigenous peoples and the first, traditional owners of the lands and waters where this University now stands, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples, their elders and their descendants, and I thank the Nunukul Yuggera Group for their exuberant welcome and wonderful introduction to the richness of their culture, which is the world's oldest continuous living culture.

As Head of the State of Queensland and as Official Visitor to the University of Queensland, I am honoured to be part of this Opening Ceremony and to join others in extending a formal welcome to the international delegates and visitors attending this Global Conference to mark UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2010. We are very proud that on the first occasion that a World Press Day event has been held in the Pacific region that our State of Queensland is the chosen venue and also, the first time that a University is host to the event, that it is the University of Queensland that has won this honour - assisted, perhaps, by the fact that it is home to Australia's oldest, longest-established School of Journalism and Communication.

I am especially happy to welcome today our guest of honour, Madam Irina Bokova, my former colleague and friend, fellow Ambassador to France and Monaco and now the Director-General of
UNESCO. I was delighted to learn of her election in October last year as the 10th Secretary-General of this important international agency, making history as the first woman to occupy this prestigious post. Knowing her as a woman of conscience, compassion and commitment, of intellectual rigour and acuity, I am confident that during her four year tenure she will have an exceptional impact on the organisation, driving its highly diverse agenda forward with vigour and extending UNESCO's standing and influence worldwide.

I am also very pleased to welcome so many international visitors, journalists and media professionals from around the world to this Global Conference. Your presence in such numbers and from so many different countries and regions is very gratifying and underscores an ongoing strong level of interest internationally in the general subject of freedom of the press and more specifically in the issues raised by this year's conference theme of "Freedom of Information and the Right to Know", on which I trust there will be lively discussion over the next two days; discussion which will assist UNESCO in its role as both promoter and guardian of these rights and freedoms.

These rights and freedoms are enshrined in many texts, charters and declarations, to which most governments and member states of the UN have subscribed - but not all have honoured. The one I find particularly compelling is that in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which speaks of the freedom "...to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". It's hard to imagine a clearer or more straightforward statement - yet we all know the complexities and the obstacles that stand in the way of its realisation, and the sensitivities that surround the issue of press freedoms, enmeshed as they so often are with the wider issues of democracy and governance.

Having said that, I hasten to emphasise that the requirement to defend and promote press freedom is not limited to countries where press censorship is evident, linked to oppressive political systems, corrupt regimes, instability or poor governance, nor to locations where there are serious restrictions on information dissemination.

Guardianship of press freedom is no less an issue of concern in countries which may have stable governments, mature democratic systems and substantive safeguards for press freedom. In Australia, as in most other western democracies, we are acutely aware that there are ongoing and powerful economic and political changes which inevitably affect how information is gathered, delivered and received and that freedom of the press is therefore an issue which demands ongoing vigilance and attention, and it is not surprising to find a long list of issues concerning press freedom which are actively being scrutinised and debated and, in a number of cases, the subject of new legislation and regulation. Some, perhaps many, in this audience will be aware of these, but for the benefit of our international visitors, they include freedom of information laws, the law regarding confidentiality of journalists' information sources, protection of whistleblowers, seditious provisions in anti-terrorism legislation, the strength of libel laws, the use of suppression orders in legal proceedings, the Australian Law Reform Commission's review of secrecy laws and the powers of anti-corruption commissions to require journalists to give evidence.
To that long list we can add a number of wider issues. These include the rapidly changing structure of the media industry and in particular, the changing way in which information is being disseminated. As new digital means of communications flourish, other forms - and particularly some forms of the print media - struggle. In this environment it can mean blurring of the lines between populist entertainment and the erosion of the more serious responsibility to present balanced, well researched news and information. This, of course, is not a new problem. In 1931 George Bernard Shaw remarked "Newspapers are unable, seemingly, to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilisation."

There is also the question of the concentration of media ownership and whether this has - or will - lead to a bias in the way in which information is published, and the related question of how best to regulate the day-to-day activities of the media, and how strict the standards and enforcement should be. As American journalist Abbott Leibling once warned - perhaps with deliberate overstatement - in a *New Yorker* article: "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one". ("Do You Belong in Journalism?" *The New Yorker*, 4th May 1960).

I do not want the foregoing to suggest that I am placing all or even most of the blame on the employers of the fourth estate. The public - the consumers of information - need to play a far more active role than they do now in guaranteeing the freedom of the press. In particular we need to be actively involved in an ongoing way in that complex task of ensuring a proper balance between privacy and the public's right to know.

It is fitting therefore that this conference is being held in a State where that process is well developed: where there is a healthy and ongoing public debate over press freedom, encouraged by the Government, as you have just heard from the Attorney-General and fertilised by a number of initiatives and bodies outside government, including our universities. I referred earlier to this University's School of Journalism and Communication. In addition, it has an active involvement in the issue of press freedom through the Centre for Communication and Social Change; and the newly established Global Change Institute -which I had the pleasure of opening some weeks ago - offers, I believe, further scope for work in this area.

Another of our Universities, the Queensland University of Technology, has created an Open Access to Knowledge (OAK) Law Project designed to promote internationally laws giving right of access to knowledge.

These are all pleasing developments, about which you may be hearing more during the course of this conference, but if not, perhaps this list can serve as a pointer for future discussions, as the global debate on press freedom, freedom of information and the right to know continues on its complex course.

With UNESCO spurring the international community to greater effort (including through activities such as this annual World Press Freedom Day), I have little doubt that progress can be made, but, equally, those complexities and the continuing problems of a more basic kind in some parts of the world, where freedom of the press needs to be pursued as a vital, democratising force and a bulwark against corruption, leave me with little doubt that we will all have to continue to invest heavily in the issue of press freedom for a considerable time to come. And if governments
need to be further convinced of its significance, they might be reminded of the wise words of the famous late 18th century English nom de plume Junius, who said: "Let it be impressed upon your minds, let it be instilled into your children, that the liberty of the press is the palladium of all the civil, political, and religious rights."

And with those words I conclude my own remarks, so we may hear from Madam Bokova, whose presence today, together with this conference in recognition of World Press Freedom Day, is an essential part of impressing that truth firmly on our minds.

Again, on behalf of the State and people of Queensland, I extend to you all the warmest of welcomes and wish you a most successful and stimulating conference.

Thank You.