

World Press Freedom Day: UNESCO event discusses ways to improve quality of journalism

*UNESCO director emphasises media's role in promoting inclusive societies for sustainable development *
M Ziauddin says journalists will have to prove their integrity before their audience in broadcast media
To mark the celebrations of the World Press Freedom Day (WPF) 2015, UNESCO Islamabad in collaboration with Media House organised a debate on "Towards Better Reporting".*

The debate aimed to discuss the issues of freedom of expression and press freedom in Pakistan by highlighting media concentration impacts on media's role; hate-speech and self-regulations; challenges to investigative journalism; and media and information literacy.



Keeping in view the potential number of Urdu audience in Pakistan, UNESCO Islamabad organised the event with editors and producers of leading Urdu print and electronic media to discuss on how to improve the quality of journalism in the country for the benefit of all. The event was attended by officials and representatives of the government, media, civil society organisations and academia.

UNESCO Islamabad Representative/Director Vibeke Jensen in her opening remarks highlighted the importance of the World Press Freedom Day and this year's theme "Towards Better Reporting". She emphasised that media can play a significant role in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. She said the major function of media organisations is to provide quality information and access to a wide range of perspectives and opinions.

Jensen further added that the media has a very important role in promoting democracy and that the most important duty of the journalists is to report news fully and responsibly. She concluded that the debate with Urdu media editors and producers is to provide an opportunity to stakeholders to discuss the issue of freedom of expression and press freedom in Pakistan; enhancing quality of reporting; and media self regulations and editorial policies in order to provide the audience with reliable, quality and accurate information.

Renowned journalist and former Express Tribune chief editor Muhammad Ziauddin while speaking on the issue of ethical standards in digital age stated that journalists will have to prove their integrity before their audience in broadcast media. He said that they should not only follow the written codes of ethics but should also develop within their own personalities respect and consciousness for following the ethics of society. He pointed out that in print media there used to be gatekeepers who could check

the authenticity of the news items but in broadcasting it is aired immediately and thus such news could not be properly verified - thus more need for consciousness.

Dr Syed Abdul Siraj, Chairman of Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Allama Iqbal Open University, highlighted the importance of social media and pointed out that this is the age of information and knowledge to which easy access is made possible by digital media. He, however, stated in view of the increasing competition there is the need for specialisation as segmentation and fragmentation in the audience, and hence the society, is increasing. He also explained the digital divide within the perspective of postmodernism and the opportunities created by the rise of electronic mass media.

The Editor Daily Jang, Hanif Khalid, pointed out that almost all developed countries of the world, whether it is UK or USA, had in fact first of all ensured the freedom of mass media. He also stressed the importance of media persons' responsibilities. He pointed out that had there been no censorship during 1971, the dismemberment of Pakistan and the debacle of Dhaka could have been avoided. Senior anchor of News One, Nadia Mirza, pointed out that though anchorpersons are free with regard to the contents of their programmes but the audience is making their accountability through social media. Later on the event was opened for the panel discussion among leading editors and television anchors who actively participated in the debate. Senior anchorperson Anwarul Hassan moderated the discussion. In the end Mohammad Shafiq of Media House Islamabad thanked the participations.

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