

Press Freedom Day: Civil liberties linked with freedom of expression

ISLAMABAD:

Speakers said freedom of expression and the media's independence are central to other civil liberties and good governance.

They were speaking at a conference organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at a local hotel to mark World Press Freedom Day on Saturday

The discussion focused on the threats being faced by Pakistani journalists and their protection under the most difficult circumstances.



The day is observed on May 3 and the United Nations marked this year with the theme, "Media Freedom for a Better Future: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda".

UNESCO Country Director Dr Kozue Kay Nagata also read out a message by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

Bokova said World Press Freedom Day was a day of supporting freedom of expression, showing solidarity with journalists and increasing access to information for people.

"These rights are indispensable for human dignity and are important for all other rights such as good governance, democracy and rule of law and sustainable progress," Nagata said, while reading Bokova's message.

"On this day, I urge all governments and men and women to stand with us and support us in strengthening the freedom of expression for the present and future," said the message.

In a separate joint statement, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Bokova said, "Only when journalists are at liberty to monitor, investigate and criticise policies and actions can good governance exist."

National Police Bureau Director-General Ihsan Ghani said that journalists could register their complaints or concerns about their safety at a cell established by the interior ministry for public grievances.

Pakistan stands 158th out of 180 countries observed in the World Press Freedom Index 2014, published by Reporters without Borders (RWB).

An Amnesty International report released on Wednesday indicates that 34 Pakistani journalists may have been killed “as a direct consequence” of their journalistic work since March 2008.

The RWB index states that seven journalists were killed in Pakistan in 2013, four of them in Balochistan. It also notes that a “lack of interest in rendering justice is to be found in Pakistan where the government seems powerless against” enemies of free speech.

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