



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

***40th General Assembly of the International Association of
Broadcasting (IAB)***

**COMMEMORATION OF THE BICENTENARY OF THE DECREE
ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

**Address by
Jānis Kārklīņš
Assistant Director-General for
Communication and Information**

Cadiz, Spain
10 November 2010

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, who could not be here due to her prior commitments, I am gratified to be present on the occasion of both the 40th General Assembly of the International Association of Broadcasting (IAB) and the commemoration of the Bicentenary of the Royal Decree of 10 November, 1810 that serves as a basis for Spain's promotion of freedom of the press. I am awed by the deep sense of solemnity that has characterised this celebration, particularly considering the fact that the commemoration is taking place here at the Theatre of San Fernando, where the decree was issued 200 years ago. In itself, this particular event is an equivocal testimony of Spain's high regard for freedom of the press – a freedom that is fundamental to the enjoyment of many other freedoms.

Indeed, it is a freedom that is universally acknowledged as foundational to democratic politics and citizenship. Its life-blood is derived from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which calls on all its Member States to respect and uphold “the right to freedom of opinion and expression”, including the “freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

In this vein, it is worth remembering that UNESCO is the only UN agency with a clear and internationally recognised role in the field of mass communication and media. This role is expressly provided for by the UNESCO Constitution which enjoins upon the

agency to “collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image”. Against this background, I am pleased to note that the main goal of the IAB – that of promoting and defending freedom of expression and thought as well as free and independent broadcasting – coincides with UNESCO’s own global mandate to pursue a free, independent and pluralistic media system. I am further gratified to observe that the IAB is a member of the Coordinating Committee of World Press Freedom Organisations, making it a natural ally of UNESCO’s. Indeed, I am glad to note that the IAB already has formal relations with UNESCO. Furthermore, the broad membership of the IAB – which includes over 17,000 radio and television stations in the Americas, Asia and Europe – is commendable. It would be even more commendable to, if I may suggest, extend IAB’s membership to other parts of the globe, including Africa – which happens to be one of UNESCO’s global priorities. Such a geographical outreach in membership would ensure the kind of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue that could enhance global respect for freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

As we commemorate the Royal Decree, it is important to recognise that freedom of the press does not only apply to the professional practice of journalism. It is also related to freedom of *expression*, to the extent that it guarantees citizens a public platform for *expressing* their views and opinions. It is for this

reason that freedom of expression and freedom of the press are inseparable in enabling citizens to exercise their civic rights and obligations. For UNESCO, then, the “free flow of ideas by word and image” can only be effectively realised in the presence of a free, independent and pluralistic media system as well as an engaged citizenry. To put it differently, freedom of the press enables the media institution to *supply* the crucial information required for democratic societies to function successfully. For its part, freedom of expression enables citizens to put *demands* on their social institutions, including the news media, and to hold them accountable.

It is based on this understanding that at UNESCO we view freedom of expression and freedom of the press as critical for what we call the three D’s: Development, Democracy and Dialogue.

To put it more clearly, and in regards to the first D, press freedom and freedom of expression can be seen as closely linked to a path toward **development** designed upon the basis of peoples’ real needs. A free press provides citizens not only with the information they require to take an active part in a democratic society, but also with a channel to materialise such participation, the expression of their concerns and opinions on decisions that have a crucial bearing upon their lives. In turn, and now turning to the second D... these interconnected rights are at the cornerstone of **democratic governance** by strengthening political transparency and accountability, connecting informed, critical and participatory citizens with more responsive elected officials. Finally, pluralistic media can facilitate **dialogue**, the third D, enabling the expression

of cultural and linguistically diverse people, helping challenge misconceptions about the “other”, facilitating the building of relationships and the improvement of communication between government officials and the public, thereby fostering tolerance, acceptance, social and political stability.

Let me now illustrate a number of ways by which UNESCO seeks to realise freedom of the press on the one hand and freedom of expression on the other.

Firstly, in approaching freedom of the press as a *supply* side of media operations, UNESCO is involved, among other things, in fostering professional and ethical standards by facilitating journalism education, and by promoting self-regulation as a core element to ensure media accountability. Further, UNESCO also supports media development activities.

In terms of journalism education, UNESCO attempts to set standards for what a quality journalism education should look like. Our standard-setting role is evident in the publication of the *UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education*, validated in June 2007 at the 1st World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) in Singapore. Fifty-three journalism training institutions in 45 developing countries have since adapted the UNESCO model curricula. The main challenge is to build institutional capacities for more effective delivery of journalism education. Partly to address that challenge, UNESCO supports efforts at human resource development in order to develop premier journalism education institutions, especially in the developing world.

Another example of UNESCO's standard-setting role in journalism education involves the UNESCO-sponsored consultation which South Africa's Rhodes University and France's Ecole Supérieure du Journalisme in Lille (ESJ) conducted to determine criteria and indicators for quality journalism training institutions. The study led to the identification of 20 potential centres of excellence in journalism training in Africa. These institutions are being supported by UNESCO to become true centres of excellence and reference in journalism education through staff development, curricula renewal, equipment, networks and management skills, among other things.

You will be happy to know that the idea of designating centres of excellence in journalism education is set to be replicated in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Asia, demonstrating the universal appeal of the idea.

UNESCO has also actively supported media self-regulation, in conjunction with media organisations, professional associations and journalism educators, and based on the conviction that ethical and professional standards, codes of ethics, editorial guidelines and media accountability mechanisms are critical for ensuring good journalism. They can guide media professionals, helping them handle difficult issues emerging in the course of their work and providing them with an instrument conducive to self-assessment and self-improvement. For a media self-regulation framework to be effective, however, I cannot stress enough how

critical it is for it to be developed and followed voluntarily by media professionals themselves.

When we address these issues, it is important to also highlight, nevertheless, that quality journalism should never be requested by governments as a condition for guaranteeing the full enjoyment of press freedom and freedom of expression in a country. It is only if these freedoms are guaranteed that professional and ethical journalism will truly flourish, which in turn will restrict the instances where state intervention in the media sector may be justified.

One of the focus areas of UNESCO's work on media self-regulation has been South East Europe, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo (as understood in resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council), as well as Turkey. We have supported actions to speed up their alignment with international standards by building awareness of self-regulation among media professionals and organisations, promoting the development and effective implementation of self-regulation tools and mechanisms. In particular, we have supported the provision of training, facilitated networking, linked local press councils with the movement toward self-regulation at the broader European level, developing an online reference portal on media accountability, and promoting alternative, newsroom-based forms of accountability and self-regulation.

In terms of media development, UNESCO has, through a highly consultative process, developed the widely cited Media Development Indicators (MDIs), which were endorsed in February 2010 by the 27th Intergovernmental Bureau of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). The IPDC mobilises international support for media development in developing countries. The MDIs can be used to assess national or regional media development landscapes in terms of their system of media regulation for free, independent and pluralistic media; extent of media plurality and diversity, level economic playing field and transparency of media ownership; democratic discourse in media content; professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpin freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity; and infrastructural capacity to support independent and pluralistic media.

In Croatia, for example, the Centre for Media and Communication of the University of Zagreb piloted the MDIs and found them suitable enough for possible replication on a regional scale.

Other activities which demonstrate our preoccupation with freedom of the press as a supply side of media performance include:

- Providing advisory services on media legislation, including public sector broadcasting frameworks, and building awareness on the need to guarantee freedom of expression among governments, parliamentarians and other decision-makers;

- Supporting the development of an enabling legal and regulatory environment for the free flow of government-held information in diverse countries, as well as international-standard setting in this regard. Freedom of information laws, regulations and policies can represent a crucial instrument for the media in the performance of their watchdog role, besides directly allowing individuals to demand accountability and responsiveness from governments.
- Facilitating discussion on the challenges, opportunities and other implications for press freedom emerging from the Internet and the fast paced technological development we have seen in the past decades, promoting freedom of expression while addressing the new dilemmas posed by the digital era.
- The proclamation in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly of a World Press Freedom Day, celebrated on May 3rd;
- The establishment of an advisory group on press freedom which includes media professionals from all parts of the world;
- The establishment in 1997 of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize; and
- Supporting independent media in zones of conflict to enable them to play an active role in conflict prevention and

resolution and the transition towards a culture of peace. A related aspect of this type of intervention includes efforts to secure the safety of journalists globally by undertaking advocacy work in cooperation with professional organisations and specialised NGOs, mapping and criticising impunity in regards to crimes against journalists, calling governments to investigate any actions that jeopardise the practice of journalism. UNESCO also provides training to media professionals, army and police personnel and government authorities to ensure journalists may undertake their job safely. It is relevant to note that these actions are not only crucial in conflict or post-conflict areas, as illustrated by the fact that the majority of journalists' killings in the past years occurred not as a result of conflict, but their targets were local reporters addressing sensitive topics during peace-time.

Secondly, to illustrate the fact that freedom of expression affords citizens an opportunity to *demand* that media institutions operate according to the functions expected of them, UNESCO encourages a critical interrogation into how news media production can be more effectively and meaningfully appropriated in the daily lives of citizens as they seek to realise their civic duties and responsibilities. This can be seen in our efforts aimed at cultivating a more engaged and probing citizenry through the

development of resources on media and information literacy for teachers in schools.

In other words, UNESCO recognises the power that citizens have – or should have – over media and other information brokers in society, particularly news media. It is important for citizens to critically evaluate their information sources in terms of the messages they churn out, and in terms of the context in which they produce those messages. This is particularly applicable to news media. Through its media and information literacy activities, we think that UNESCO will contribute towards cultivating vibrant knowledge societies in which news media become a subject of life-long knowledge and learning, as well as of democratic discourse.

I would like to conclude by affirming UNESCO's support for the IAB's mission to promote and defend freedom of expression and thought as well as free and independent broadcasting. We are encouraged by the association's commemoration of the Royal Decree on freedom of the press, and we urge you to continue expanding your influence globally. We believe that as more and more countries become part of your network, our organisations' work will become much easier, both globally and nationally.

Thank you.