

**Statement by Kiyoko Akasaka
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“Media’s contribution to a culture of human rights”

**Latin America and Caribbean regional conference to commemorate the
60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

**Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
Tuesday, 9 September 2008**

Señor Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores,
Señor Director-General,
Excelencias,
Señoras y Señores,

Es un honor dirigirme a tan distinguida audiencia en esta hermosa ciudad de Cartagena de Indias. Estoy encantado de estar de vuelta en Colombia, un país que he tenido el placer de visitar en varias ocasiones.

Quiero agradecer al Gobierno de Colombia y a la UNESCO por la organización de esta conferencia en conmemoración del 60º Aniversario de la Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos.

No puede ser mas oportuno que esta conferencia tenga lugar en América Latina, región que tanto ha contribuido a la lucha por los Derechos Humanos para todos y que cuenta con una sociedad civil y unos medios de información tan diversos e interesantes. Me siento feliz de intercambiar

opiniones con tantos periodistas, estudiantes, maestros y líderes comunitarios.

Esta mañana, al despertarme, revisé algunos de los periódicos de hoy como El Universal, El Tiempo, El Espectador y encontré noticias que abordan una amplia gama de temas como la injusticia social y la desigualdad, la discriminación, la migración, denuncias sobre delincuencia y corrupción, así como sobre la lucha contra el terrorismo; temas, en definitiva, que de una u otra forma tienen que ver con los Derechos Humanos.

Este es un rápido y claro ejemplo de cómo los medios de comunicación justamente dan voz a quienes no pueden hacerlo, cubriendo a diario el tema de los Derechos Humanos. Y con canales de noticias de 24 horas y con el servicio de Internet, los medios de comunicación están aprovechando hoy las nuevas tecnologías para informar sobre las violaciones de los derechos humanos - así como sobre su promoción y protección. Y lo hacen con inmediatez, donde, cómo y cuando ocurren las noticias

This year, we mark the 60th anniversary of the adoption in 1948 by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is an opportunity for individuals, groups and States to reaffirm their commitment to all human rights for all.

For its part, the United Nations has been at the forefront of activities and advocacy campaigns whose aims are to inform peoples about the Universal Declaration and the full range of human rights to which they are

entitled. Our efforts have been complemented by thousands of initiatives by civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, human rights organizations, media organizations, community organizations, teachers, students and individuals to spread this same precious message.

Just last week, in Paris, my Department, the Department of Public Information, joined with our NGO partners from around the world to discuss pressing human rights issues of the day, and to find new ways to build awareness and practical support for human rights and their realization.

We were fortunate to have with us many NGOs from Latin America, who brought their expertise and experiences from this region to the discussions. We were also fortunate to hear from Ingrid Betancourt, among others, who spoke personally about the very denial of human rights and about the power of words.

What we heard from many NGO representatives in Paris was the grim and harsh reality of the lives of millions of people around the world deprived of their rights and freedoms.

Indeed, 60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, some important progress has been made. But we are still a long way from the realisation of each of the rights inscribed in the Declaration. Consider the facts.

At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime — with her abuser usually someone known to her.

Every year, between 500,000 to two million men, women and children become victims of human trafficking, deceived or coerced into slavery, prostitution or forced labour.

More than 850 million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. And every year, more than six million children die of starvation and related causes.

In all regions, massive human displacement continues, both within countries and across borders, as a result of conflict and persecution, extreme deprivation, and deepening inequality. Climate change, environmental degradation, food scarcity and rising prices add new misery to the lives of millions.

In Latin America, high levels of crime and violence, driven in part by perceived and real exclusion and the deprivation of basic rights and resources, devastate, or takes the lives of thousands of men and women each year.

And at a time when many are concerned with the “fight against terrorism” and national security, we have seen a rise in racism, xenophobia and discrimination, and ethnic, cultural and religious diversity come under attack.

All of these challenges to the universality of human rights require States, civil society and the UN human rights system to re-double and accelerate their efforts to provide the best possible protection of human rights.

We have a special responsibility to educate our children and young people.

I am thrilled that the United Nations Information Centre in Mexico will host the first ever Latin America regional student conference on human rights, from 3 to 5 December. The conference will involve students between the ages of 15 and 19 from throughout the region, and will connect them virtually with their counterparts at a parallel event at United Nations Headquarters in New York, on the subject of human rights and climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's 60th anniversary is also an important opportunity – as we are here today – to reaffirm our commitment to the right of freedom of opinion and expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration.

We have all seen the huge increase in information sources and ways that more and more people are reaching out to wider and wider audiences. Traditional media organizations have been joined by new media, including

political websites and bloggers, who also pursue investigations and stories and contribute to reporting on a broad range of civic issues.

But too often, they face attempts to restrict, deny or block the free flow of information and ideas. And still too often, for simply doing their job, journalists become targets and the victims of killings, while members of the press are injured, detained, harassed or held hostage.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, in 2007, 172 journalists and media staff were killed worldwide as a direct result of their work. The total number included 134 murders and violent deaths.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated explicitly that, “Attacks on freedom of the press are attacks against international law, against humanity, against freedom itself.” A free, secure and independent press is among the very foundations of democracy and peace.

In all parts of the world, journalists need protection so that they can do their job without running the risk of going to jail, or of being intimidated, threatened, or killed by those who would seek to silence the truths they are telling or injustices they are revealing.

Yet fighting impunity in crimes against media workers remains a huge challenge.

Recognizing this, in December 2006, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution [1738 (2006)] that condemns intentional

attacks against journalists and media professionals in situations of armed conflict, and called upon all parties to put an end to such practices.

The Security Council also emphasized the responsibility of States to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law.

And it urged all parties in situations of armed conflict to respect the professional independence and rights of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel as civilians.

Of course, there is a huge gap to be filled between the demands of the resolution and the challenge of developing a culture of respect for the lives of journalists.

And here, I would like to commend Eduardo Márquez González, President of the Colombian Federation of Journalists and Director of the International Federation of Journalists' Solidarity Centre in Colombia, who was awarded this year's Julio Anguita Parrado International Prize for Human Rights Journalism, for his work in defense of journalists in Colombia.

I should also like to pay tribute to Lydia Cacho Ribeiro of Mexico, who was awarded this year's UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize for her courage--despite threats against her--in exposing political corruption, organized crime and domestic violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we are to create a culture of human rights, then we need journalists and the media to tell the stories of people's struggle to claim those rights.

But we also need the media to be aware of their responsibility, and to think about how their work may be seen and felt by all. We have seen horrible cases of how the media can be used to humiliate or convey contempt of vulnerable or different groups of people. Who can forget the role *Radio Mille Colline* played in transmitting its message of hate in the months before and during the genocide in Rwanda? There is no justification for hate speech or incitement to violence.

But for every radio, television or Internet-based outlet that is communicating intolerance, there are those like Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and others, that are informing listeners about preparations for elections and how to vote, about how to avoid HIV/AIDS, and about where and how to report crimes or acts of violence.

There are also thousands of community radio stations throughout Latin America that provide essential services to indigenous and local populations. Many of these stations, however, are struggling to meet the requirements for licenses, or to fend off competition from larger and more commercial stations.

I would like to share some concrete examples with you of how journalists, civil society and the media are already using new technologies to help promote and protect human rights.

One example is called “**Witness**”. Using the slogan, “See it. Film it. Change it,” Witness works to call attention to human rights violations wherever they occur through the use of video. By uploading footage, including cell phone videos, individuals, organizations, networks and groups around the world can bring their human rights stories and campaigns to global attention and can mobilize action.

Sites like **YouTube**, which depend on individuals for their content, have been turned into effective campaign tools. Human rights organizations like Amnesty International have used YouTube for specific rights campaigns.

Citizen journalism is becoming more and more a part of mainstream media, too. For example, **CNN’s iReport** allows viewers to upload their own video clips to the website, some of which are then chosen for broadcast on the TV programme.

The **BBC** has conducted its own human rights campaign, called, “I have a right to...” which is available online and includes case studies, background information and archived radio and TV pieces on different human rights issues.

The Elders, a group led by Nelson Mandela, has teamed up with Internews Europe on a human rights media competition. Mainstream and

citizen journalists from around the world can submit stories that illustrate how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is relevant to the lives of ordinary people on issues of the day, like climate change and the global food crisis.

And the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** joined with **Google** last May to create an online mapping initiative aimed at furthering awareness and action in the Darfur region of Sudan. The initiative uses hi-tech satellite imagery, photos, and eyewitness accounts to help users visualize and better understand the tragedy in Darfur.

Finally, I would like to offer five simple, tried and true ways the media can contribute to creating a culture of human rights, linked to this anniversary year:

1. Enlist public personalities in media appearances to promote respect for human rights and to raise consciousness of human rights problems.
2. Establish an award for excellence in human rights reporting, at local, national and regional levels.
3. Establish a regular place in printed publications for information or opinions about the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Contributors could be students, human rights defenders and human rights heroes.

4. In the lead up to the 10 December anniversary, establish a regular time on radio and television for human rights programming, like about interesting examples of NGO or UN initiatives that support human rights, or plays based on national or local human rights heroes, or historical events.

5. Publish the Universal Declaration in all national and local papers on 10 December 2008, together with messages by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and local officials.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot forget what Elie Wiesel has stated so simply -- that “indifference is always the friend of the enemy.” The struggle for human rights requires vigilance, tenacity and courage. And it requires everyone to speak out, to be engaged, and to take even the smallest actions.

The media have a crucial role to play in connecting us to today’s realities, and in using its voice and means to expose human rights abuses and violations, and to helping individuals and groups both understand, and realize, their rights.

The United Nations has, and will continue, to work with traditional and new media toward these ends, and to expand public understanding and knowledge on the full range of issues relating to peace and development.

The Universal Declaration and the body of international human rights law and mechanisms that have been created in the past 60 years are one of the United Nations' greatest achievements.

Promoting and protecting human rights is also one of the United Nations' most profound mandates -- one that we look to all of you, particularly the younger generation, to continue to deepen and support.

I have no doubt that the results of this important gathering and the commitment of all those here will contribute to the mutual cooperation and respect that are required for the success of this singular goal.

Muchas gracias.