

## Pakistan urged to prioritize Safety of Journalists, Access to Information

*World Press Freedom Day is celebrated every 3rd May across the world with the aim to advance the fundamental principles of press freedom and its evaluation, to defend the media from attacks and to pay tribute to journalists who lost their lives in their profession*

ISLAMABAD – A panel discussion held on World Press Freedom Day in Islamabad highlighted the dependency of human rights, democratic societies and sustainable development on the free flow of information and press freedom, stressing Pakistan government to prioritize safety of journalists and improve access to information for citizens.



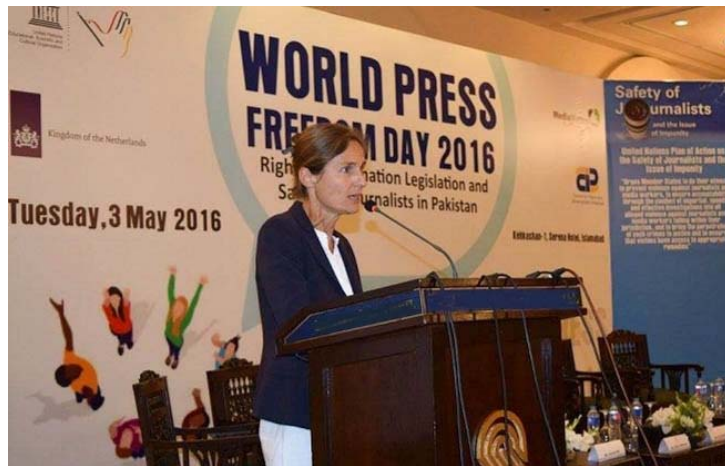
*Vibeke Jensen UNESCO Representative speaks on behalf of the Netherlands Embassy, Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives and Media Matters for Democracy held in Islamabad*

“Press freedom and access to information are essential for democracy, and there will be no sustainable development without strengthening the rule of law, and providing access to information for all citizens” said Ms. Vibeke Jensen, UNESCO Representative to Pakistan. She said that journalists help to put new questions on the development agenda, and they help empower citizens with information. Quality journalism provides a context in which the diversity of cultural expressions can flourish. She stressed that the newly agreed sustainable development goals recognize that access to information and fundamental freedoms are an integral part of the broader agenda.

[World Press Freedom Day 2016](#) panel discussion was organized by [UNESCO Pakistan](#) together with the [Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands](#), [Media Matters for Democracy](#), and Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives ([CPDI](#)) in Islamabad. The event was attended by Government officials, senior journalists and representatives of development aid agencies, civil society and media support organizations.

This year, the World Press Freedom Day in Pakistan focused on two major themes, Right to Information and the Safety of Journalists – Online and Offline. These themes are in line with three important global milestones: a) the 250th anniversary of the world’s first freedom of information laws adopted in Sweden and Finland, b) the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration of press freedom principles and c) the first year of implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Three milestones crucial for ensuring press freedom and safety of journalists.

Ms. Jeannette Seppen, Ambassador of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Islamabad reiterated that without freedom of expression, other freedoms cannot be properly exercised. Freedom of expression makes democracy more meaningful and institutions more accountable. It contributes to a free and better-balanced debate. It acts like a catalyst: freedom of expression allows people to demand other human rights, such as justice, equality before the law and freedom of religion or belief. In the Netherlands



*Ambassador of the Embassy of the Netherlands, Jeannette Seppen, addresses the audience on World Press Freedom Day 2016 in Islamabad*

we go to great lengths to defend this freedom and we would like to continue to engage with Pakistan to forge a consensus between the government and the media sector on a roadmap for media safety to engender a safer environment for journalism and to combat impunity.

The World Press Freedom Day (WPF) event kicked off with preliminary group work on Right to Access to Information with special focus on key lessons from the Right to Information Legislation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab Provinces and the Safety of Journalists- Online and Offline with special reference to the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and model draft of Journalists Protection and Welfare Bill.

Key recommendations from Right to Information working group included; 1) process of Right to Information law should be transparent and participatory, 2) laws, rules and procedures that have redundancies or are in conflict with the spirit of the Right to Information should be amended. Key recommendations from the Journalists Safety session included; 1) the Protection and Welfare Draft bill should not merge the security, protection and welfare parts but rather create a Journalist and Media Workers Safety Bill, 2) a centralized authority is needed to bring investigation and support to the provinces in prosecution. It was proposed to establish a commission which could be called “National Commission for Safety of Journalists.”

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr. Mohsin Shah Nawaz Ranjha, Parliamentary Secretary for Information, Broadcasting & National Heritage Ministry, Mr. Mohsin Shah Nawaz Ranjha stressed the work of the Government of Pakistan to improve the Safety of journalists through the adoption of a Safety and Welfare Bill. Concerning the role of media in Pakistan, he highlighted the importance to promote responsible journalism that stresses accuracy rather than speed. As for the access to information legislation, the Parliamentary Secretary praised the initiatives of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Legislations.

WPF serves as an occasion to inform citizens of violations of press freedom – a reminder that in dozens of countries around the world, publications are censored, fined, suspended and closed down, while journalists, editors and publishers are harassed, attacked, detained, and even murdered. It is a date to encourage and develop initiatives in favor of press freedom, and to assess the state of press freedom worldwide.

“Press freedom and the free flow of information are necessary not only to inform citizens about the [Sustainable Development] Goals, but to enable them to hold their leaders accountable for fulfilling the pledges they have made.”

UN [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon, in his [message](#) marking World Press Freedom Day, emphasized that human rights, democratic societies and sustainable development depend on the free flow of information, and that the right to information depends on press freedom. “The media – including, and increasingly, new online media – serve as our eyes and ears. We all benefit from the information they provide,” he said.

Source: <http://tvi.com.pk/pakistan-urged-to-prioritize-safety-of-journalists-access-to-information/>