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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of World Press Freedom Day
and the 70th Anniversary of UNESCO**

Riga, Latvia, 3 May 2015

Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia,

Excellency Ms Dace Melbārde, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Latvia,

Ms Mona Mishwami, Office of the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for
Human Rights,

Mr David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and
Expression,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Government of Latvia for co-hosting the 2015 *World Press Freedom Day*.

I believe this reflects the strength of Latvia's commitment to promoting freedom of expression.

This embodies values with deep roots in the society and history of this country, which celebrates this year the 25th anniversary of the restoration of independence, at a time when it holds the Presidency of the EU Council.

Just two weeks ago, UNESCO held an exhibition on Aspazija and Rainis, two celebrated Latvian poets, playwrights, political figures...and *journalists*.

This *World Press Freedom Day* takes place in a turning point year, when States are shaping a new global sustainable development agenda.

In these times of turbulence, freedom of expression has never been so important, for the rule of law and democracy, for dialogue and peace...

2015 is also a special year for UNESCO, when we celebrate the Organisation's 70th anniversary.

Written after a devastating war, our Constitution says political agreements between States are not enough for lasting peace.

This requires solidarity – it requires “*the free flow of ideas by word and image.*”

This was true in 1945, and it remains so now.

Opportunities for freedom of expression are vast today.

More and more people can access, produce and share information.

Developments in technology and business models are opening new avenues for freedom of expression.

At the same time, freedom of expression faces a horizon of challenges...

The challenge of censorship.

The challenge of weak pluralism.

The challenge, at worse, of violence.

The numbers are staggering.

Over the last ten years, 675 journalists have been killed.

Only one out of ten cases has been brought to justice.

This year opened with the horrendous terrorist attack in France, starting on 7 January, followed by the killing of a police officer on 8 January and the anti-Semitic attack on 9 January.

Violent extremism seeks to divide women and men against each other.

We see this underway in Iraq, in Syria, in a brutal campaign of cultural cleansing.

This campaign is being propagated across the world, using all media, especially social media, and targeting young minds.

In response, we must be clear and firm.

Human rights and dignity are our compass setting, and the measure of success for all our efforts.

We must do everything to let journalism thrive, to ensure the safety of journalists, to promote the voices of all men and women.

These issues, I know, were explored yesterday during the Side-Event, led by the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga.

This is why, as the United Nations agency mandated to protect freedom of expression and press freedom, I stand up every time a journalist is killed and call for justice.

This is the inspiration for the *United Nations Plan of Action for Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, spearheaded by UNESCO.

We are taking this forward across the world, working with Governments, with professional associations, with educational institutions, with justice ministries and security forces.

In Pakistan, we have supported the creation of a national coalition of local authorities, to implement the United Nations Plan.

In Guatemala, we are bolstering mechanisms for the safety of journalists, which I discussed with the Office of the President and the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights.

This is long-haul work – to succeed, we must reach beyond usual constituencies, for instance, by training security forces on freedom of the press in Tunisia, through the massive, open online course that reached 1000 judges and lawyers in Mexico.

We must also make the case at the global level, to place freedom of expression at the heart of the post-2015 agenda.

For peace to be lasting, for development to be sustainable, women and men must be free to create and share knowledge and information.

We need quality journalism to allow citizens to make informed decisions about their society's development, to check injustice and the abuse of power.

A free media is not a luxury that can wait until sustainable development has been achieved.

It is a condition for human dignity, good governance, the rule of law.

This is why we need every voice to be heard – especially those of women.

This message is especially important this year, as we mark the 20th anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

Women are still under-represented in news-making, decision-making, media ownership.

We need to redress the balance.

We must join together to empower women in and through all media – this is the importance of the *UNESCO Global Alliance on Media and Gender*.

We must also act online, to promote freedom of expression in the global public cyberspace.

People speak of a new generation of *digital natives* – I believe we need a new generation of *digital citizens*.

This is why UNESCO works to advance media literacy, to promote new media as platforms for dialogue, to strengthen respect for human rights, especially with young people, to bolster new forms of global citizenship – I know this is a priority for Latvia, and I thank the Government for its support to UNESCO.

This is the spirit of the social media campaign we are leading with Google to celebrate *World Press Freedom Day* – and the goal of UNESCO's **#Unite4heritage** campaign, launched at the University of Bagdad, to respond to violent extremism with messages of dialogue and shared values.

The same goals guide the *International Conference on Youth and Internet: Fighting Radicalisation and Extremism*, to be held next month at UNESCO.

The same spirit inspires two studies we are launching today – *Building Digital Safety for Journalism* and *The Role of Internet Intermediaries* – and similar goals guide my recent appointment of Ms Christiane Amanpour as *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Freedom of Expression and Journalist Safety*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times of change, we must remain true to the values we share and stand up for them everywhere they are challenged.

This is the message sent by UNESCO Member States two weeks ago in the powerful decision they adopted on the *Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

This is the message we send today, on *World Press Freedom Day*.

I thank each of you for your commitment.

I thank once again the Government of Latvia for its leadership.