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Organización
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para la Educación,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 UNESCO Colloquium “Journalism under fire:
challenges of our times”**

UNESCO, 23 March 2017

Excellency Chair of the Executive Board,

Mr Marcelo Rech, President of the *World Editors Forum*,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you all for coming to UNESCO today.

Allow me to start by expressing, on behalf of UNESCO, my deep condolences to the Government and the people of Great Britain for the tragic terrorist attack suffered yesterday.

This lays ever more emphasis on the values we share.

Human rights and dignity.

Democracy and fundamental freedoms.

As you know, UNESCO is the United Nations agency with the mandate to promote freedom of expression, to defend journalists and their safety.

This mission is written into the UNESCO Constitution -- to “*promote the free flow of ideas by word and image*” for mutual understanding, dialogue and peace.

To these ends, UNESCO is acting across the world.

As Director-General, I stand up every time a journalist is killed and call for justice.

UNESCO is spearheading the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*.

In Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, and South Sudan, UNESCO is working with Governments, professional associations, to create national mechanisms, to train journalists.

In South America, UNESCO is supporting the training of judges, to sharpen the work of law enforcement, to defend freedom of expression and press freedom.

Across the world, UNESCO supports journalism schools, through syllabi, modules, massive online courses.

In all this, the Organization is relentless and it is outspoken.

This is why I appointed Ms Christiane Amanpour, CNN Chief International Correspondent, as *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Freedom of Expression and Journalist Safety*.

This is why the Organization awards the *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize* every year to a courageous journalist on *World Press Freedom Day*.

This is why UNESCO is leading the fight against impunity – spearheading the *International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists*, every year on 2 November.

This is why UNESCO is promoting the Internet as rights-based, open, accessible and multi-stakeholder-driven, to bolster freedom of expression.

This is UNESCO's mandate -- it has never been so vital -- and we are taking it forward across the world.

This mandate includes acting as a laboratory of ideas.

It includes providing a forum for debate on difficult questions of the day.

This is the spirit of this Colloquium on *Journalism under Fire*.

For years, we have explored the crisis facing the media.

We meet today, because trends are accelerating, because old challenges are merging with new threats, to question the very nature of journalism.

The media business is undergoing a revolution with the rise of digital networks, online platforms and social media, that is shaking it to the core.

New actors are emerging, including citizen journalists, who are redrawing the boundaries of journalism.

In many countries, legal and regulatory mechanisms of control remain powerful, along with taxation and licensing procedures that deter freedom of expression.

Challenges are rising inside the media sector.

Professionalism could be strengthened everywhere.

The accountability and credibility of media is falling too often under question.

Online journalism is blurring the lines between advertising and editorial material, and we are seeing private actors emerge as key intermediaries, accompanied by new forms of 'private censorship.'

Far too often, violence against journalists remains the most serious danger to freedom of expression -- murder is the ultimate and most tragic form of censorship...

These challenges merge with deeper transformations affecting societies today.

The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2016 is "*post-truth*."

This is defined as "*denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.*"

Combined with the concept of “fake news,” we see the rise of new forms of propaganda, even disinformation, raising questions that go to the heart of free, independent and professional journalism.

...questions about credibility...

...questions about professionalism and responsibility...

...questions about hidden algorithms and misinformation...

...questions about the nature of audiences, ‘bubbles,’ confirmation biases...

...questions, indeed, about ethics -- the theme of today’s last panel.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

« *Sans la presse, nuit profonde...* » écrivait Victor Hugo.

Avec la Presse libre, les sociétés ont de la lumière au-dessus d’elles, pour éclairer leurs problèmes, mieux distinguer les issues et les chemins praticables.

Oui, les journalistes nous éclairent, mais ils sont eux-mêmes aujourd’hui sous le feu des projecteurs et cet examen fait lui-même partie de la vitalité démocratique, de l’état de droit, de la bonne gouvernance.

Ce travail est essentiel pour mener le Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement durable d’ici 2030, pour renforcer les fondements de la paix.

L’éducation représente un aspect décisif -- notamment l’éducation aux médias, la formation de l’esprit critique, apprendre à distinguer le vrai du faux, les rumeurs et les faits, pour agir en citoyen éclairé.

Les gouvernements doivent jouer un rôle de premier plan, créer des environnements propices à la liberté, au pluralisme et à l’indépendance des médias, à la sécurité des journalistes.

Pour sa part, l'UNESCO continuera d'agir de manière transversale, de soutenir les journalistes, de promouvoir la liberté d'expression hors ligne et en ligne.

C'est l'esprit de notre nouveau manuel pour les journalistes qui couvrent le terrorisme afin de les armer face aux dangers de la désinformation et du sensationnalisme.

Ce débat est essentiel, et la liberté de la presse, le développement des médias et le soutien aux journalistes représentent des piliers de l'action de l'UNESCO.

C'est un engagement irrévocable, que j'ai souhaité renforcer tout au long de mon mandat et je suis heureuse de la très haute qualité des intervenants et des activités prévues cette semaine.

Je pense notamment à l'exposition sur la Presse en Liberté, organisée par les Délégations permanentes de la Suisse et de la France auprès de l'UNESCO.

Et je remercie les Gouvernements de la Finlande, de la Lituanie, de la Lettonie et des Pays-Bas pour leur généreux soutien à ce colloque – ainsi que *l'Association mondiale des journaux et des Éditeurs de médias d'information*.

Merci à tous, et vive la presse libre et forte !