

**Opening Remarks**  
**3 May 2014**  
**World Press Freedom Day**  
***Safety of Journalists in Cambodia: Rule of Law in Ensuring the Safety of Journalists and Combating Impunity***  
**Ms. Anne Lemaistre, UNESCO Representative in Cambodia**  
**Intercontinental Hotel, Phnom Penh**

Excellency, Mr. Thach Pen, Secretary of State, Ministry of Information,  
Ms. Anna Maj Hultgård, Ambassador to Sweden,  
Mr. Jean-Francois Cautain, Ambassador to the EU,  
Mr. Ratana Som, Director, Cambodia Communication Institute,  
(Ms. Claire van der Vaeren, UN Resident Coordinator),  
Distinguished guests, journalists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to be among distinguished participants on this special day to celebrate the World Press Freedom Day 2014.

I would like to first of all acknowledge the great cooperation of the Ministry of Information, UNOHCHR, Cambodia Communication Institute (CCI), the Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ), the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), the Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPJ), and the Department of Media and Communication at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (DMC-RUPP) in making today's event possible.

This year, we celebrate under the theme of *Safety of Journalists in Cambodia: Rule of Law in Ensuring the Safety of Journalists and Combating Impunity*. In recent years, around the world, there have been increasing attacks on media professionals. In many countries, journalists and media workers face obstacles to reporting the truth through arrest, imprisonment, intimidation, and violence. The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon and the UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, state in their Joint Message on the World Press Freedom Day that “these outrageous abuses show that press freedom and the human rights it underpins are extremely fragile and must be actively defended.”

Worldwide, more than 600 journalists and media workers have been killed in the last ten years, and this past year has been one of the worst years for jailed journalists. In Cambodia, journalists covering recent protests and strikes by unionists, have been working in dangerous situations and have been subject to beatings and violence. In February this year, Suon Chan, a journalist reporting on illegal fishing in Kampong Chhnang, was beaten to death by a group of local fishermen. Suon Chan is the twelfth journalist to be murdered in Cambodia since 1994 and is now the twelfth journalist whose murder has been met with impunity. Also, just this week, the body of a Canadian journalist has been found dead in Siem Reap. UNESCO urges the Royal Government of Cambodia to implement an independent and impartial investigation to these journalists' death to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. Decisive action is needed to ensure that the media can carry out their work and the public can remain informed.

Now, on this day of celebration, and following the UNESCO Director-General's invitation, I would like to call on all of us here to observe a moment of silence to remember the journalists and media professionals who had paid with their lives for our right to know.

[Minute of Silence]

UNESCO is acting as the leading UN agency to implement the *UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*. The Action Plan is UN-wide initiative to provide an overarching framework for the UN system to work together with all stakeholders including the national authorities and international and national organizations to improve the safety of journalists and media workers and to combat impunity.

Promoting the safety of journalists and fighting impunity requires prevention mechanisms and actions to address the root causes of violence against journalists. In Cambodia, there is a need to look at the legislations such as the Press Law and Penal Code to produce a more conducive environment for press freedom to ensure that journalists are not prosecuted or physically harmed for their expression, and to address other issues such as the rule of law, wages of media workers and opportunities for training journalists.

Further, journalists who can access official information can work in a safer environment as they do not have to base their reporting on speculations or rumours, which ultimately leaves them vulnerable to confrontation or legal and physical attacks. It is important, therefore, for Cambodian journalists to have the protection and safety offered by an Access to Information Law.

In addition, Access to quality information also allows for an informed, active, and engaged citizenry. In a climate where journalists are safe, citizens find it easier to access quality information and many objectives become possible as a result: Democratic governance and poverty reduction; conservation of the environment; gender equality and the empowerment of women; justice and a culture of human rights. We hope that the Ministry of Information, with the support of the Embassy of Sweden, and UNESCO will make the Access to Information Law a reality in Cambodia. We believe that the legislation will be indispensable for the country's democratization process, and will support its citizens' efforts towards building a more accountable and transparent government.

Today, we hope to give journalists, media professionals and media students the floor to discuss, challenge and to address the issues in promoting safety of journalists in Cambodia. Media workers are the eyes and ears of the people, whose work is essential in any attempt to develop a society. There can be no reason for the targeting the journalists, who are the watchdogs of our societies and often risk their lives to bring information to us.

I am confident that the exchange of opinions and ideas today will contribute to the promotion of press freedom, safety of journalists and access to information in Cambodia, and help us to develop more initiatives in favor of these basic human rights.

I wish you a very fruitful conference.

Thank you for your kind attention.