



Ghanaian students at World Press Freedom Day 2018 Accra, Ghana.  
Photo credit: © Ghana Ministry of Information



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



World Press  
Freedom Day

# A CELEBRATION OF PRESS FREEDOM

World Press Freedom Day  
UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize

A large-scale event for World Press Freedom Day 2017 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The background features a large blue screen with the text 'WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY' and a graphic of a hand holding a green olive branch. Several people are standing on a stage in front of the screen, and there are white armchairs and a table on the stage.

# WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

An overview

Speakers at World Press Freedom Day 2017 in Jakarta, Indonesia  
Photo credit: ©Voice of Millennials

Every year, 3 May is a date which celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom. It serves as an occasion to evaluate press freedom around the world, defend the media from attacks on their independence and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

World Press Freedom Day (WPF) is a flagship awareness-raising event on freedom of expression, and in particular press freedom and the safety of journalists. Since 1993, UNESCO leads the global celebration with a main event in a different country every year, organized together with the host government and various partners working in the field of freedom of expression.

This main event offers a rare opportunity for hundreds of representatives of the media, civil society, law and policy makers, human rights defenders, UN agencies and academics to network and explore new ideas and issues. It serves as a platform to discuss latest developments and challenges regarding freedom of expression and press freedom. Globally, some 100 national events complement the main celebration each year.

In 2019, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia will host the main global event, which will be jointly organized in Addis

Ababa on 2-3 May with UNESCO and the African Union Commission. The global theme for the 2019 celebration is *Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation*. This conference will focus on the contemporary challenges faced by media in elections, including false information, anti-media rhetoric and attempts to discredit truthful news reports. The debates will also highlight the distinctiveness of journalism in helping to ensure the integrity of elections, as well as media's potential in supporting peace and reconciliation.

In the last two editions, World Press Freedom Day has focused on some of the most pressing issues and challenges faced by the media, including the role of the media in political processes, media independence and media, justice and the rule of law (WPF 2018, Accra, Ghana) and the media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies - SDG 16 (WPF 2017, Jakarta, Indonesia).

The global celebration also serves as an opportunity for the Organization to award the annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and promotion of press freedom. This Prize is one of the most prestigious international awards in this area.

# ABOUT THE DAY

UNESCO's mandate to promote the free flow of ideas



Young man reading newspaper in Dili, Timor-Leste. Photo credit: © Martine Perret

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the United Nations specialized agency with the mandate to promote and defend freedom of expression as well as its corollary, freedom of the press. UNESCO's Constitution adopted in 1945 calls on the organization to foster "the free exchange of ideas and knowledge" and the "free flow of ideas by word and image."

Today, this imperative remains as relevant as ever. UNESCO is committed to raising awareness among Member States, civil society and other partners on issues of freedom of expression both online and offline; to promoting the safety of journalists; and to supporting governments to act on attacks against journalists to prevent a culture of impunity from taking root. The Organization also promotes quality journalism through the strengthening of professional and ethical standards, as well as providing advisory services on media legislation including freedom of information laws.

For UNESCO, press freedom concerns not only the media. Today, it is also the right of each individual to impart information to the public. It also impacts on each individual's right to freedom of information and their ability to both access information and express themselves, whether through journalism, art or other genres without fear for their safety in doing so.

## Origins of the Day

World Press Freedom Day, celebrated every 3 May, is UNESCO's flagship programme to draw

attention to freedom of expression and press freedom as fundamental human rights for all. The annual date was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a Recommendation adopted at the twenty-sixth session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991.

The origins of the Day lie in the Windhoek Declaration signed by a group of African journalists who gathered at a UNESCO seminar titled "Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Media" that was held in Windhoek, Namibia from 29 April to 3 May 1991.

**"We journalists are the pillars of reform, of freedom, of democracy and we are the champions of people who have no voice."**

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**Christiane Amanpour**

CNN Chief International Correspondent and  
UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Freedom of  
Expression and Journalist Safety

# Key Functions of World Press Freedom Day

■ To serve as an occasion to inform citizens of violations of press freedom - a reminder that around the world, media, including online media, are censored, suspended, blocked, and closed down, while journalists, editors and media workers are harassed, fined, attacked, jailed, and even murdered.

■ To encourage and develop initiatives in favour of press freedom, and to assess the state of press freedom worldwide.

■ To serve as a reminder to governments of the need to respect the right to freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information. This is key if societies want to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 - Public access to information and fundamental freedoms

■ To be a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics.

■ To be a day of support for journalists who are targets of attacks, harassment or arbitrary detention for exercising press freedom.

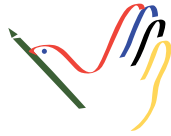
■ It is also a day of remembrance for those journalists who lost their lives in the exercise of their profession.

■ The celebration of World Press Freedom Day further affirms the idea of freedom of expression and freedom of information as fundamental human rights, as stated in Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." It is a right elaborated in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as in the three regional human rights treaties that are Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.





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# FLAGSHIP CONFERENCES ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY AROUND THE WORLD





# OVER THE YEARS:

## World Press Freedom Day themes (1994-2019)

Ghanaian students at World Press Freedom Day 2018 in Accra, Ghana.  
Photo credit: © Ghana Ministry of Information

In the past 25 years UNESCO has used WPF as an opportunity to spotlight the role of the press and freedom of expression in the promotion of dialogue, development, and democracy. The themes were selected usually in response to current world developments, including changes in the media landscape such as the rise of the Internet and of user generated content via social media, or shifting political landscapes such as the so-called “Arab Spring”. The theme sets the focus for the many commemorations of the Day worldwide. The following are examples of the themes that UNESCO has chosen to highlight over the years:

- **Media in Violent Conflict and Countries in Transition (2000, 2002, 2004)**
- **Media and Good Governance (2005)**
- **Media, Development and Poverty Eradication (2006)**
- **Freedom of Information and Empowerment of People (2008, 2011, 2016)**
- **Media, Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (2009)**
- **21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers, New Voices (2011, 2012)**
- **Safety of Journalists and Impunity (2003, 2007, 2013, 2015, 2016)**
- **Gender and Media (2015)**
- **Media and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2014, 2016, 2017, 2018)**
- **Media, Disinformation and Elections (2019)**

The issue of safety of journalists, media workers, and social media producers has been a recurring theme at World Press Freedom Day bearing in mind that more than 1000 journalists have lost their lives in the last twelve years. On average, every four days a journalist is killed for bringing information to the public.

While constituting the most serious attack on press freedom, the killing of journalists is just the tip of an iceberg. Media professionals regularly face numerous other threats including intimidation, kidnappings, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, harassment and physical assault. Furthermore, in nine out of ten cases of killings of journalists the perpetrators of the crimes go unprosecuted.

With a special focus on *Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation*, the 26th edition of World Press Freedom Day 2019 will discuss the contribution of free, pluralistic, independent and safe journalism to democracy, in particular when the integrity of elections and press freedom is jeopardized with fabricated information, attempts to discredit truthful news reports and blocking and filtering of online content.

**“If opinions are right or wrong is not the issue; the issue is whether or not we are free to express them.”**

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**Cheng Yhizong**

2005 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize

# WPF 2018 IN NUMBERS

**900**

participants from  
over 90 countries



**130**  
speakers

**45**

media partner  
organizations



**40**  
young journalists from  
all corners of the world  
collaborated in Youth  
Newsroom

**20**

events organized at WPF  
main event, including pre-  
events, plenary and parallel  
sessions, a Policy-Lab and an  
Academic Conference on the  
Safety of Journalists



**80**

national  
celebrations  
organized  
around the  
world

**724 M**

Media impressions  
garnered by an  
unprecedented campaign  
from a coalition of  
international media to  
celebrate 25 years of World  
Press Freedom Day



Over  
**10 K**

media articles mentioning  
World Press Freedom Day



# ROLE OF UNESCO & PARTNERS

Speaker at World Press Freedom Day 2018 in Accra, Ghana.  
Photo credit: © Ghana Ministry of Information

## UNESCO

**W**ithin the UN family, UNESCO has a long-standing tradition of monitoring and raising awareness about the status of freedom of expression, freedom of information, and press freedom worldwide. UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector implements the Organization's 1945 constitutional mandate to promote the "free flow of ideas by word and image." Its rights-based foundations provide context to UNESCO's approach to media development as being inseparable from the universal right to freedom of expression. They further underpin the UNESCO perspective that this bundle of rights applies to all media and across all frontiers.

As part of the "One UN" philosophy, UNESCO also has a strong record of working in tandem with other UN agencies and mechanisms. UNESCO has spearheaded and coordinates the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which was endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board in April 2012. The UN Plan of Action is now a global reference point in the areas of the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity for crimes committed against them. It has been referenced in resolutions of the UN General Assembly, UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council.

UNESCO has a proven track record in fostering dialogue on media, freedom of expression and freedom of information legislative reform between policymakers, civil society organizations, media development groups, media, and other key actors worldwide as well as in supporting the development of the institutional and human capacities necessary for legislation's effective implementation. UNESCO

coordinates World Press Freedom Day based on close cooperation with its partners.

## PARTNERS

UNESCO collaborates with a wide range of committed partners to maximize the impact of WPFDF.

By organizing the 26th edition of WPFDF jointly with the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union Commission this celebration will further resonate with stakeholders throughout the region, contributing to the objectives of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

UNESCO invites interested parties to join this year's celebration as official partners. Partnering with WPFDF offers a unique opportunity to connect and meet with the leading experts in the field of journalism, freedom of expression and freedom of information as well as high-level representatives from governments, intergovernmental organizations, media houses, and civil society.

As the largest celebration of press freedom in the world, WPFDF has a global reach and next to the main event, around 100 national festivities take place every year. The logo of partners is prominently featured in all publicity materials for WPFDF as well as in social media outreach efforts and on the official event website. Official partners can also use the World Press Freedom Day logo for all related activities.



# UNESCO/ Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize



2018 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, Mahmoud Abu Zeid "Shawkan"  
Photo credit: © Twitter/ Mahmoud Abu Zeid

**T**he UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, whose twentieth anniversary was celebrated in 2017, has been awarded to courageous journalists who have stood up for press freedom and freedom of expression, despite the risks they faced.

It is considered as one of the leading recognitions worldwide in the field of press freedom and is the only one in existence within the United Nations system. Given the international visibility of the award, it highlights the commitment and resolution of individuals towards freedom of expression and the challenges they encounter.

The Prize has facilitated the release of several laureates and has allowed their work to continue. From 2013 to 2018, five out of six laureates were imprisoned at the time of their respective award ceremony. Three of them were later released, a testament to the impact of the Prize and its potential in contributing to a free and independent media all over the globe.

In 2013, the independent international jury recommended Ethiopian journalist Reeyot Alemu as the winner. At the time, she was serving a five-year prison sentence for her reporting. Alemu was released in 2015, serving only three years of her sentence. Investigative reporter Ahmet Şik from Turkey received the Prize in 2014 and was one of the few laureates not imprisoned at the time the award was conferred. The 2015 Prize was awarded to Syrian press freedom advocate Mazen Darwish, who had endured torture, travel bans, numerous detentions and harassment for his work. He had been arrested in 2012 and was released from jail in August 2015, three

months after receiving the Prize. The following year, Azerbaijani investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was chosen by the jury. On 25 May 2016, only three weeks after receiving the prestigious Prize, she was released from prison.

The 2017 laureate, Dawit Isaak, an Eritrean-Swedish journalist, has been imprisoned for more than 15 years since 2001. His current whereabouts are unknown.

The latest 2018 award was given to Mahmoud Abu Zeid "Shawkan", an Egyptian photojournalist imprisoned for more than five years after being arrested for covering a demonstration in Cairo.

The UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize will continue to honour the work of courageous journalists who strive for press freedom around the world.

**"My father knew that without the basic establishment of human rights, freedom of speech, access to education and healthcare, no society could flourish, no nation could achieve stability, and no people could prosper."**

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**Betlehem Isaak**

Daughter of Dawit Isaak, Laureate of the 2017 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize



*No prison is big enough  
to contain free speech.*

**MAZEN DARWISH**

2015 UNESCO/GUILLERMO CANO WORLD PRESS FREEDOM PRIZE

UNESCO's campaign "20 quotes for Press Freedom"

## BACKGROUND of the prize

**C**reated in 1997, the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize honours a person, organisation or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, and especially when this has been achieved in the face of danger. It was established on the initiative of UNESCO's Executive Board and is formally conferred by the UNESCO Director-General, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May.

Awarded annually, the \$25,000 Prize is named in honour of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist who was assassinated in front of the offices of his newspaper *El Espectador* in Bogotá, Colombia on 17 December 1986.

The Prize is currently funded by the Guillermo Cano Isaza Foundation (Colombia), the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation (Finland) and the Namibia Media Trust (Namibia).



FUNDACION  
GUILLERMO  
CANO ISAZA



HELSINGIN  
SANOMAT  
FOUNDATION





# LAUREATES

Laureates of the Prize have made significant contributions to media freedom worldwide, often in the face of danger and in times of crisis. The Prize is awarded on the recommendation of an international and independent jury, consisting of six members who represent all types of media, including digital media, and all regions. Jury members are well-known for their work in the area of news gathering, journalism, press freedom, and freedom of expression. The Prize winner is selected by the Director-General of UNESCO on the basis of the assessments and recommendations made to him/her by the jury.

The Prize has been awarded to journalists and activists, in some cases posthumously.

1997 – *Gao Yu, China*

1998 – *Christina Anyanwu, Nigeria*

1999 – *Jesus Blancornelas, Mexico*

2000 – *Nizar Nayyuf, Syria*

2001 – *U Win Tin, Myanmar*

2002 – *Geoffrey Nyarota, Zimbabwe*

2003 – *Amira Hass, Israel*

2004 – *Raúl Rivero, Cuba*

2005 – *Cheng Yizhong, China*

2006 – *May Chidiac, Lebanon*

2007 – *Anna Politkovskaya, Russia*

2008 – *Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, Mexico*

2009 – *Lasantha Wickrematunge, Sri Lanka*

2010 – *Mónica González Mujica, Chile*

2011 – *Ahmad Zeidabadi, Iran*

2012 – *Eynulla Fatullayev, Azerbaijan*

2013 – *Reeyot Alemu, Ethiopia*

2014 – *Ahmet Sik, Turkey*

2015 – *Mazen Darwish, Syria*

2016 – *Khadija Ismayilova, Azerbaijan*

2017 – *Dawit Isaak, Eritrea/Sweden*

2018 – *Mahmoud Abu Zeid, "Shawkan", Egypt*

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**#PRESSFREEDOM**

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