



World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 901 recorded 6 May 2003

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UNESCO's Assistant Director-General
for Communications and Information

JOURNALIST: Tony Jenkins, *Expresso*
Louis Hamann, *CBC*

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"PRESS FREEDOM/HATE MEDIA"

Promoting independent media is often vital to helping societies heal from conflict or recover from totalitarian rule. UNESCO -- the UN agency for education, science and culture -- is involved in a number of such projects across the globe, some of which include training reporters in journalistic standards and best practices. But how are such standards arrived at, and how can they be applied? Are the current journalistic practices of the media in industrialized countries necessarily a good example? And can press freedom be preserved even while combating "hate media"? In this edition of **World Chronicle**, these questions are discussed with Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Communications and Information.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:00
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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. We begin today's show with a quote:

"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." So reads article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- but is this right being honored? Now that so many societies are putting a premium on security – is freedom of expression being sacrificed? And what can be done about "hate media", which incite, prolong and exacerbate conflict between tribes and among nations? To discuss these questions our guest today is Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communications and Information. Joining me to talk to Mr. Khan are Tony Jenkins of Espresso, and Louis Hamann of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC. Mr. Khan, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

KHAN: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Khan, journalism is on the evidence becoming increasingly hazardous for one's health, the practice of journalism. What is UNESCO able to do to make the journalist's life safer.

KHAN: Well UNESCO has been running a programme for safety of journalists, for example together with NGOs we brought out a handbook on how to take precautions.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is the Practical Guide for Journalists.

KHAN: Yes indeed. Apart from that we have also been drawing people's attention to the violence that the journalists face in the line of their duty. As you know most recently so many journalists lost their lives in war. It is a common knowledge that the harassment, torture, imprisonment is not unusual for journalists to face as they perform their duties. UNESCO has worked with other NGOs to establish a network of alerts. For example whenever there is a violation of their rights, the journalist's right to report freely is violated, UNESCO Director General issues a press communiqué drawing people's attention to such violations of press freedom.

LITTLEJOHNS: In a number of countries it is a crime to write or broadcast or both criticism of the head of state, president or whoever it may be. What can UNESCO do to discourage that kind of law?

KHAN: Well we do have a programme on what we call the media legislation. We help the governments to have media legislations that ensure freedom of expression, ensure professional ethics for journalists. We help the governments to train planners and practitioners and particularly journalists on how to exercise their right to freedom of

expression. Obviously, UNESCO has no other powers to ensure that such media legislations are indeed enacted in each country. But we draw on best practices from countries that practice more progressive media legislations, particularly media legislations that promote pluralistic and independent media.

JENKINS: Do you keep a tally. I am wondering. We keep seeing these maps of the world and thinking of the old maps and the days of the British Empire, when half the world was coloured pink. These days we see maps where democracy is supposedly spreading around the world; more and more democratic, there are more and more countries moving toward democratic systems. Do you see the same thing reflected in terms of freedom of the press? Because for every example I can think of – of a country that has moved in the direction of freeing the press, I see another one moving backwards, I think for example in Africa, I think Ghana has been a big success story in recent years, particularly the radio stations there, which are cheap to run but provide the forum where the people can express their views and that has done a lot to help cement democracy in Ghana, and yet in somewhere like Zimbabwe which we thought went democratic some time ago, we see the press very much under attack there.

KHAN: I think you are right. You know there are differences, in fact, recently, when we organized the World Press Freedom Day in Kingdom, Jamaica, there was a very interesting case study linking press freedom with democracy and development. This study, an interesting one that was presented by the World Bank, and they have collected an enormous amount of data to establish a direct core relationship between the freedom of expression, presence of independent and pluralistic media in a particular society, and the democratic rights, and followed by development. Obviously, I am sure there will be exceptions to this general rule because we at UNESCO firmly believe that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy, and you extend that to peace and development. The example that you cited, yes in fact last year UNESCO awarded the Guillermo Cano prize to Jeffrey Nerota, one of the prominent journalists in Zimbabwe, and of course you know there were issues the government didn't seem very pleased with that award, and yet I think a point has to be made that if you are a democracy, that you claim to be a democracy, then you should also accept one of the pillars of democracy that is the freedom of expression.

HAMANN: Mr. Khan you mentioned drawing or UNESCO trying to draw from the best practices of journalism, where press and the press is rather free to try and institute those in places where it is not. When you look at the press and the media in general in places where there is a free press, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Western Europe, are you somewhat worried by what you see and what model do you go on?

Because more and more when you look at the media in those societies, the ownership is in the hands of very few players. We were talking before the show about how often times depending on what side you lean on whether you are right wing or left wing, you are going to have a paper that answers, that caters to your needs or to what you want to read. So are you worried about these so-called best practices in these models that you have to rely on in order to institute a free press in countries where that is not the case?

KHAN: Well my reference to the best practices was about media legislations, because, you know, having proper media legislation is a necessary if not a sufficient condition for a free press. Because if the country has not adopted, for example, a legislation that allows development of pluralistic and independent media -- to that extent I think there is a serious problem. Now what are the best practices that the journalists ought to practice? This has to be defined by the profession itself. And we work with a number of professional associations in this area, and it is they who draw the kind of, if you will, dos and don't of practicing. They don't have to necessarily draw all the practices from the countries that you just mentioned. Because these are not the only democratic countries. My own country India has a fiercely independent press. There is a lesson to be drawn. On the other hand this is also a country that has -- I mean the State broadcasting still practiced. There is a certain degree of autonomy that this broadcasting corporation has been given, and yet it is as long as it is funded and so what we are trying to do is to promote pluralistic and independent media.

LITTLEJOHNS: All these questions of practices, Tony, Louis, do you have any thoughts about how journalists should observe correct practices?

JENKINS: Well on World Press Freedom Day, as President of the UN Correspondents Association, I was invited to make some remarks here at the UN, which I think proved quite controversial because I didn't take the opportunity to criticize those countries that do intimidate the press in the dourest of ways, and perhaps I should have mentioned them because obviously many countries around the world, journalists are in danger of their lives just going about their ordinary every day business and here we are in the United States, which has one of the freest presses in the world, and yet I chose to criticize the American media because I thought that they had not utilized the freedom of the press that they have to the full extent of their responsibilities, and I didn't think that the American public had as wide a spectrum of views available to them in the popular media as they should have. And the one example I gave was that after the attacks of 9/11 three percent of the American public thought that Saddam Hussein was involved in those attacks and yet by the time the United States went to war, more than 50% of Americans thought that,

and yet in the intervening period we saw no evidence to prove that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks. All we had was the constant drip-drip-drip from the administration in this country saying that they thought that there was a connection and I didn't think that the press had done enough to examine that issue.

LITTLEJOHNS: Did you feel that the embedded reporters with the troops in Iraq, mainly American, although there were some British, and a few others I guess, nationalities, didn't do a good job, or were perhaps too gung ho on behalf of the coalition?

JENKINS: Well that is the danger wherever, and in fact I could have done just as strident criticism of the French media, which have been just as vociferous in defending their government's views, as I thought the Americans were. I think the first thing to say about the embedded journalists is that they are extremely courageous, and very professional in what they were doing. I think the problem was not necessarily with the fact that they were embedded, so much as the way it was used by the networks when those images came back here; after all what those people were giving us, what those journalists were giving us was just a very small slice of the action. We were seeing what they could see with that particular company of that particular battalion, they were not seeing the war as a whole. And we were getting many different slices, but all together I don't know that we were getting any more of a complete picture of what was happening than we did say in the last Gulf war.

LITTLEJOHNS: Louis what do you think about exportable practices from countries that have free media?

HAMANN: Well I don't know, I mean it seems to me, as Mr. Khan was saying earlier, that in order to have a free press you need to convince the people at the top, the governments, whether it be through legislation or anything else. And my question to Mr. Khan indeed would be, how do you convince those people where free press does not exist that it is to their benefit to have a free press and not a threat to have a free press?

KHAN: Well obviously you do through advocacy; that is the well-known method of talking to people. We get invited by different countries to help them with their media legislation. Clearly one of the ways to do it is to also have intensive training programmes, not only for the journalists, but also for the planners and policy makers in the area of communication and information. Because you see they are the people who are going to control how the media behave to a certain extent. I mean apart from of course the journalists exercising their professional right to report in the manner that they do report. But if you really want progressive policies to be adopted and accepted by a country, then I think advocacy and training, these are the two well-known methods of achieving that.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO Assistant-Director-General for Communications and Information. Mr. Khan, speaking of the UN's role in countering hate media and promoting independent media, I would like to show a video clip on what UN peacekeepers are doing to promote free national media in the Congo. Here it is:

NARRATION: In many regions of the world, radio remains the number one medium for information and entertainment. In the heart of Africa, the United Nations is supporting one of the most important mass media projects it has ever undertaken. It's called Radio Okapi, and its Director is David Smith.

SMITH: It's the biggest radio project ever set up by the United Nations' Department of Peacekeeping Operations in cooperation, in partnership with a Swiss NGO known as Foundation Hironnelle. In fact, I should not say that it is a radio operation. It's a radio network. It's ten radio stations and four relays set across the sub-continent, across the DRC, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

NARRATION The network's name is borrowed from an animal, the okapi, a rare giraffe-like mammal that inhabits the tropical forests of the Congo. Radio Okapi began broadcasting in February 2002. Nearly all the 100 journalists, announcers and technical personnel are Congolese. Its schedule consists of news, documentaries and entertainment. The Democratic Republic of Congo has been in a state of civil war for years and the station's output reflects the troubled political and military situation. Programmes deal with issues like efforts at peace, health, education and human rights. Reporter, Paul Kaboba, goes out into the streets of Kinshasa, the DRC's capital city, to produce a story about textile imports and their effects on local business. Street sellers complain that the cheap imports are killing the local industry and destroying their livelihoods. For the first time, the Congolese can now freely voice their feelings to their fellow citizens. And people are paying attention.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Khan, can this experience in the Congo be replicated in other parts of Africa, or anywhere when it comes to that?

KHAN: I think they can be. And UNESCO has worked for many years in different post-conflict situations; for example in Kosovo, in Sarajevo, in Somalia.

LITTLEJOHNS: UNESCO has had similar operations?

KHAN: Yes indeed and we continue to have; Afghanistan most recently. Because it is during the post conflict situation or indeed during the conflict situation that people need to have information, to make decisions, to move, to go, gather food, find water, or find the family members; all kinds of information is required. And yet, if this operation, or whatever means of communication that you put in place is not independent, people will, if it

comes from one side or the other side of the conflict, people to that extent, number one, the people will not believe it, it will not be credible, and number two, that by definition each side will present a very different picture. So that is why what UNESCO has been doing over a number of years is to move in as quickly as possible, and often we do it with the help of NGOs and there are some very very good NGOs that work in this area, and we try to develop, whether it is through radio or even small newspapers, for example in Afghanistan the first newspaper that came out in Afghanistan, Kabul weekly, was with the assistance of UNESCO. UNESCO is also helping, of course they are a number of other ways to give them capability for capacity building, for training of journalists, broadcasters. We obviously don't have the resources to go out and build the radio and television station, but we are helping in a number of other ways, establishing for example internet access points. Now clearly that cannot be the priority, but what has to be a priority is to see that they have a reliable, at least a broadcast system. And the same thing we have done in other conflict zones, including Africa.

HAMANN: That said, do you have any plans for Iraq? Or what are your plans for Iraq, if any?

KHAN: I think that is a very appropriate question, what it is that we are going to do as an organization. We have, I have personally submitted to the Director General a series of things, for example exactly the same thing that we have done perhaps in Afghanistan, to organize a media resource center. We were running a media resource center in Baghdad. First of all we have to find out if that media resource center still exists, and if some of the resources that we had created can be utilized to provide information to broadcasters, both print media and electronic media. We intend to help bring the media practitioners together in a seminar situation to first assess what it is that needs to be done. We will certainly try and help to train the journalists, help build a news agency. Because if there is no news agency, an Iraqi news agency.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well there was. I mean there was a Saddam agency, let's put it this way.

KHAN: Yes, well that means obviously, I think everybody would agree that that news agency will need to be revamped and a new agency has to emerge. Because the machinery that ...

LITTLEJOHNS: You are talking of a private agency, needn't necessarily be a government controlled agency.

KHAN: In fact our experience is that the private agencies certainly do a much better job.

HAMANN: It would seem to me that time is a very important factor here because it would seem to me, at least right now, when people need the media is right now in Iraq, because they need to find out how politically things are going to pan out and not get an independent media once all the cards had been dealt and there is a government in place, that you know, they might not have had much of a say in because they are not getting information they need, just when the political process is developed.

KHAN: Well I think you are absolutely right. Because tragically, whatever infrastructure is available, you have got to use it. Because providing information from – I emphasize the word again - independent sources is very vital at this point, because this is when people need to find their lost relatives, people need to find all kinds of information. And yet it will take time for a new infrastructure to be created. So it is important for an organization like UNESCO for example in the areas of cultural heritage. It is the same thing. We have to move in the media field to train people, to change their mind set, attitude, how to report more objectively rather than reporting in a manner that, you know, most of these journalists obviously practice - they are practitioners of propaganda, and publicity. Now for you to work as a propaganda agent, or for you to work as a professional communicator, there is a difference between the two, so the change in the role has to be, will come back only through professional training.

JENKINS: As always, this is a vast topic, and there are so many things I would like to ask. I would like to ask what you are doing to monitor the Internet for example. But I am also curious to know what you do with countries that are reputable members of the international community that repress freedom of the press. I could think of one great example. We have had the example of Cuba recently but also I am thinking of China, which is a permanent member of the Security Council, and certainly does not have a free press. How does UNESCO tackle China?

KHAN: Well, every time there has been a violation of freedom of expression, most recently you mentioned the case of Cuba, the Director General issued a communiqué drawing the attention not only of the government of Cuba, but the international community.

JENKINS: How about China, one of the key five?

KHAN: Same thing. I mean one of the journalists who was given a Guillermo Cano prize for...I mean by definition that prize is for a journalist who writes against all odds.

JENKINS: So the idea is to sort of shame China, to encourage them to slowly open their...

KHAN: I don't think one can say that it was the objective of that particular award. The award is given when an international jury, a reputable international jury, selects a person on the basis of his or her professional courage, and professionalism in reporting against the odds that may exist in their environment.

LITTLEJOHNS: This guy who received the award, is he in jail, or ?

KHAN: Well there was a protest obviously, why such a person, and in fact in many cases frankly our laureates are not able to receive their prize in person because they are, some of them are in jail. Even today some of those people have not been able to personally receive their Guillermo Cano prize.

LITTLEJOHNS: Tony mentioned Cuba and China. Turkey is an example of a country where the press has been having a hard time too I believe, isn't it?

KHAN: Well, we do have as I mentioned an alert network that is supported by, assisted by UNESCO. Over the years we have supported these alert networks. Whenever there is a violation of press freedom, and there has been unfortunately, I have to say that there is clear evidence that the situation has deteriorated...

LITTLEJOHNS: Where?

KHAN: Frankly, all over the world. You cannot have a map of the world and say...

JENKINS: Since 9/11?

KHAN: Well there has been, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Because of security concerns.

JENKINS: Or people were using the excuse of security concerns.

KHAN: Yes, that is clearly, I mean in many countries and you just have to go to these international alert networks to find out the - every day for example on my computer screen I receive a number of these alerts. The IPI for example has been, International Press Institute, has been prompt in drawing the attention of the government, writing to the head of the state saying that we have clear evidence, or we have received information that there has been a violation of press freedom in your country. I mean this is something that UNESCO does as a matter of principle. It is not a question of - we are not a political organization. Our business is as an organization that fundamentally believes that the press freedom is a fundamental part of human rights, fundamental aspect of development of democracy, fundamental part of building peace, and it is only on the basis of principle, to us it doesn't matter which state, which government, which agency, which paper, as long as there is a violation according to our judgment, according to the judgment of our partners, and these people are people of integrity. You know they will not write an alert people that there is

a violation of freedom of expression. If they didn't firmly believe that it is ...as professional journalists, they verify their sources and so on.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Khan, that is all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Abdul Waheed Khan, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communications and Information. He was interviewed by Tony Jenkins of Expresso and Louis Hamann of Canadian Broadcasting Corp, CBC. I am Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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