

3 May 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,  
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,  
on World Press Freedom Day**

On 3 May 2003 we observe World Press Freedom Day. Almost ten years ago, on 20 December 1993, the United Nations proclaimed the World Press Freedom Day to remember and celebrate the fundamental principle of freedom of the press that is so closely related to the freedom of expression. It is also the day we pay tribute to those who have lost their lives trying to inform us on what was going on in almost every corner of the world, and particularly in zones of conflict.

The special theme for this year's observation is Press Freedom and Armed Conflicts. Our actions should serve to support and protect the journalist from being targeted in armed conflicts throughout the world.

We should remind ourselves that press freedom must be exercised professionally and without bias. As such, it has enormous power and potential to build democracy and understanding among people and to promote the life sustaining values and principles. It is the media that helps to build understanding of basic freedoms and human rights. However, press can also be used to misinform and therefore manipulate public opinion. As an instrument of power, it has been sometimes used for inciting hatred and prejudice.

This day should also serve as a reminder to governments to respect their commitments to freedom of expression and press freedom. We should specifically be conscious that curbing press freedom can only generate mistrust in our actions and even sympathy for the enemies.

Finally, let us remember and pay homage today to the journalists who fell victim to measures of regimes that restrain freedom of the press, journalists who risked their personal freedom and even their lives in the fight for freedom to report the facts and history in an unbiased and transparent way as they saw it.