

1 May 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
on World Press Freedom Day**

On this day every year we celebrate World Press Freedom Day to remind ourselves of the crucial importance freedom of the press and freedom of expression has played in our history and their significance as basic rights enshrined in the 60 year old Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Yet it is easy to forget this when every day we open our favorite newspaper, tune into broadcast news or hook on to the world wide web. It is precisely for this reason that not just on this Day but every day we must cherish these rights and do our utmost to uphold the universal freedom of the press.

Sadly it is also on this Day that we remind ourselves of the fact that press freedom still comes with a price. We pay tribute to all media professionals who have lost their lives in the daily struggle to bring the news to us. Their sacrifice should further strengthen our efforts in promoting press freedom, as well as, protecting journalists around the world from political interference and physical threat.

This year's theme, "Access to Information and the Empowerment of People" is especially fitting. As we struggle to deal with key global challenges, such as climate change, achieving the MDGs and financing for development or try to address immediate emergencies such as the global food or credit crisis we realize that governments can not do it alone.

Member States need not only partners such as civil society, private sector and the media of course but must ultimately draw on the support of empowered individuals, consumers and concerned global citizens. After all, the solutions to the challenges we face today are about the sustained well being of all of us on this planet.

It is precisely for this reason that as General Assembly President I have been arguing for institutional reforms that place the individual rather than states at the heart of our efforts and to facilitate equal access to rights and opportunities for each and every individual.

Besides rights and opportunities, it is access to information that truly empowers the individual to become more active and more responsible. In this free press is a crucial ally.

The media contributes to the process of democratization, to the strengthening of the rule of law and ultimately to institution building by asking the right and often difficult questions, providing access to information and representing all views impartially. It is also the media that facilitates

the individual to properly exercise its oversight role on political institutions be they on the local, national, regional or international level.

The media embodies both the necessity and the legal right of every single individual in society to be informed about what happens around him or her.

It is for this reason that press freedom today is of critical importance: both as a right but also as a responsibility.