

2 May 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Press Freedom Day**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Under-Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to join you in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the General Assembly's proclamation of World Press Freedom Day.

It is traditionally commemorated on May 3rd which marks the date the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press was adopted in 1991 at a UNESCO-sponsored event in the Namibian capital, and endorsed later that year by the 26th session of its General Conference.

Its origins, however, harken back to the early days of the United Nations, and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 19 of that historic document affirms that “seek[ing], receiv[ing] and impart[ing] information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” is an integral part of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Excellencies,
Decades ago, one of the greatest American newsmen of the 20th century, Walter Cronkite, stated that a journalist should be “non-doctrinaire, non-dogmatic, [and] non-committed to a cause.”

In our digital, globalized world, such a definition assumes heightened importance, for it has become all too simple to transform gossip or speculation into supposed truth.

What is nowadays communicated through the wire, practical becomes a first draft of history.

Excellencies,
World Press Freedom Day serves to remind us that a ‘free, pluralistic and independent press’ is critical to our efforts to promote human rights and good governance.

Journalism is a noble calling. In every society, the press has the potential to act as a bulwark against abuses of power, helping to uncover uncomfortable truths. It can present an objective and inclusive

picture of the state of a nation, holding governments, companies and individuals to account. It not only enlightens the public about events close to home, but also halfway around the world, expanding the horizons of its audience whilst challenging conventional wisdom and overcoming prejudices.

In their quest to advance the common good of society, reporters often put themselves in harm's way, and in doing so, deserve our full solidarity, support, and protection.

The theme of this year's observance 'Safe to Speak: Ensuring the Safety of Journalists' is intended to focus our attention on the dangers reporters continue to face in the course of their activities.

According to UNESCO, over 200 members of the press were killed in the line of duty last year including 41 in Syria and 18 in Somalia.

Today, we pay tribute to their sacrifice honoring the brave men and women who gave their lives to advance a basic tenet of any free society: the right to have full and unimpeded access to information which affects the destiny of those who belong to it.

Let us therefore commit ourselves to putting a stop to violence against journalists to their harassment, persecution and illegal detainment and mobilize support for their right to practice their profession without fear, coercion or hindrance.

On this occasion, allow me to remind you of the Recommendations of the International Conference to Protect Journalists in Dangerous Situations held last year in Qatar, under the auspices of the National Human Rights Committee.

I also support the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General's leadership in promoting the rights of the media. I place the General Assembly at the disposal of any initiative to follow up on its conclusions.

Excellencies,

As we celebrate World Press Freedom Day and reflect on the role of reporters in an increasingly complex world, we could draw inspiration from the words of the late Arthur Sulzberger, a former Publisher of the New York Times.

"Journalism's ultimate purpose," he said, "[is] to inform the reader, to bring him each day a letter from home, and never to permit the serving of special interests."

As our world pivots towards greater empowerment of both citizens and nations, and the General Assembly comes to be seen as the ultimate source of democratic legitimacy in our century, standing up in the valiant defense of every person's right to freedom of speech and expression is a prerequisite to staying on the right side of history.

Thank you for your attention.