

## **The Secretary-General's message for World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2007**

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*Posted: Thursday, 3 May 2007, New York*

Dear friends,

Each year on World Press Freedom Day, we reaffirm our commitment to the right of freedom of opinion and expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In our time, more and more people are gaining the means to reach, and reach out to, a wider audience. But too often, they face attempts to restrict, deny or block the flow of information and ideas. In the face of such threats, it is the job of the United Nations to be an unflinching defender of press freedom, and of the women and men whose talent and dedication bring it to life.

Most alarmingly, in seeking to shed light on the plight of others, journalists themselves become targets. Over the past year, more than 150 media professionals have lost their lives in the line of duty. Other members of the press have been injured, detained, harassed or held hostage. This happens not just in the midst of armed conflict, but also in pursuit of stories on corruption, poverty and abuses of power.

Most recently, I have been following with dismay the abduction of BBC journalist Alan Johnston. Mr. Johnston's coverage of issues relating to the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has rightly earned worldwide respect. No cause is served, and any cause is undermined, by his continued captivity. I appeal again for Alan Johnston's immediate and safe release.

Attacks on freedom of press are attacks against international law, against humanity, against freedom itself – against everything the United Nations stands for. A free, secure and independent press is among the very foundations of democracy and peace. Governments, international organizations the media and civil society all have a role to play in upholding those foundations. On World Press Freedom Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to this mission.

Ban Ki-moon