



**Statement on the occasion of
The 35th session of the Committee on Information (COI)**

April 23, 2013

Delivered by

Suzanne Bilello, Senior Public Information and Liaison Officer

UNESCO New York Office

Ms. Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates and Committee Members, Friends and Colleagues, thank you for this opportunity to present a brief overview of UNESCO programmes of relevance to work of the Committee on Information:

1. **The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity** (hereafter referred to as the *UN Plan*), is the result of a process that began in 2010 upon request of the Intergovernmental Council of the [International Programme for the Development of Communication](#). The *UN Plan* was endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board on 13 April 2012, having been presented to the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) earlier in the year.

The UN Plan aims toward the creation of a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers in both conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. Its action lines include the establishment of an *inter-agency mechanism* within the UN in order to co-ordinate issues related to the safety of journalists, as well as assisting countries to develop legislation and mechanisms favourable to freedom of expression and information and supporting their efforts to implement existing international standards. The Plan sets out the contributions and associated responsibilities of UN bodies for achieving its objectives. At the same time, it recognises that actors outside of the UN also have a major contribution to offer through joint and/or complementary activities.

A free, independent and pluralistic media environment, online and offline must be one in which journalists, media workers, and social media producers can work safely and independently without the fear of being threatened or even killed. It needs to be an environment where attacks, intimidations, harassments, abductions, arbitrary imprisonments, and threats are the exceptions and not the norm. Journalists (as well as citizen journalists), editors, publishers and online intermediaries alike should not be subjected to political or financial coercion and manipulation. They should especially be protected from threats to the security of themselves and their families.

Securing the safety of journalists and media workers is an urgent matter. More than 600 journalists and media workers had been killed in the last ten years. These statistics highlight the relevance of the *UN Plan*, and its specific goal of mobilizing the UN family of agencies as well as

other stakeholders including UN Member States, regional human rights bodies, NGO, and media houses to collaborate in creating a safer environment for journalists.

The UN Plan is premised on the recognition that the component institutions in the UN system share a common interest in creating conditions conducive to journalistic safety. This is because the safety of journalists is an important prerequisite for achieving freedom of expression, democracy, social development and peace – which are all central to UN bodies fulfilling their mandates. The work of many UN bodies is directly relevant to the safety of journalists, and the ethos of “Working as one” encourages harmonisation in this regard.

To date there have been two UN Inter-Agency meetings on the Plan of Action. The second meeting, convened in Vienna, Austria, on 22-23 November 2012 resulted in the **Implementation Strategy** and **Work-Plan** for putting the *UN Plan* into effect. This step forward had input from 19 UN bodies, 4 other intergovernmental organizations, 37 governmental delegates and 40 representatives from media and civil society. The result was the adoption of a concrete global, regional, and national level implementation strategy. Four countries (South Sudan, Iraq, Nepal and Pakistan) were identified to be amongst other interested countries where alignment of stakeholders could make a difference. Latin America was specifically acknowledged as a region where good work could be done under auspices of the *UN Plan*, and where lessons could be shared internationally.

As the *UN Plan* recognises, promoting the safety of journalists must not be constrained to after-the-fact action. Much more must be done for preventive mechanisms and for actions to address the root causes of violence against journalists and of impunity. This implies the need to deal with issues such as corruption, organized crime and an effective framework for the rule of law. In addition, the existence of laws that can criminalise legitimate journalism (e.g. overly restrictive defamation laws or overly broad national security laws) must be addressed. The challenge is to promote respect for international standards for freedom of expression as well as resolutions such as UN Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006).

Fundamental to the *UN Plan* is the insight that the experiences in one country or region can be useful for others trying to improve the safety of journalists. Compilation and sharing of up-to-date information and best practices and conducting international missions and investigations into particular cases can be highly beneficial. However, much work is still needed to achieve an optimum level of information exchange and joint learning, and in adapting good practices to different regional and national contexts.

The *UN Plan* aims to creating of a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. Its measures include, among other undertakings, the establishment of a coordinated inter-agency mechanism to handle issues related to the safety of journalists as well as assisting countries to develop legislation and mechanisms favourable to freedom of expression and information, and supporting their efforts to implement existing international rules and principles.

To further reinforce prevention, the Plan recommends working in cooperation with governments, media houses, professional associations and NGOs to conduct awareness raising campaigns on a wide range of issues such as existing international instruments and conventions, the growing dangers posed by emerging threats to media professionals, including non-state actors, as well as various existing practical guides on the safety of journalists.

2. Regarding collaboration between UNESCO and DPI, we welcome the strong partnership we have with DPI as evidenced by, most recently, DPI's ambitious and successful Commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. From the onset of planning, DPI sought and received the participation of UNESCO which resulted in cooperation with UNESCO on many of the Commemoration's activities, most notably, the inclusion of UNESCO's associated schools, (asp net) for access to UNESCO schools for the Commemoration's Student Briefing, the cross-promotion of educational messaging on our respective social networks, and the widely lauded performance of UNESCO nominated artist for peace, Marcus Miller. We look forward to further collaboration with the DPI's Education Outreach Unit and DPI as a whole.

3. Regarding the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Digital Development I would like to report the following:

Commissioners of the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Digital Development at its 7th meeting, held in Mexico City on 18 March, agreed on an ambitious new target designed to spur female access to the power of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The new target mandates '*gender equality in broadband access by the year 2020*'. At present, ITU figures confirm that in the developing world, women are much less likely to have access to technology than their male counterparts. While that disparity is lower in developed countries, a measurable gap nonetheless still exists, even in the rich world.

Women's access to ICTs and particularly broadband must be made a key pillar of the post-2015 global development agenda. The mobile miracle has clearly demonstrated how powerful information and communication technologies can be in driving economic growth. However, figures from ITU and its sister agencies like UNESCO and UNDP show a clear 'gender gap' in access to technology. We need to redress that imbalance to ensure that all people are empowered to take control of their own destinies through ICTs.

4. And lastly, I would like to come full circle from the progress of the Broadband Commission to **World Radio Day**.

13 February - the day the United Nations established United Nations Radio in 1946- was proclaimed by UNESCO's 36th General Conference in 2011 as **World Radio Day** (WRD), and endorsed by the General Assembly following the recommendation of this Committee in its 34th session.

WRD 2013 was a truly worldwide event with UNESCO and DPI partnering here in at the United Nations to raise awareness on the enduring power of radio in the 21st Century and the vital role it still has in many parts of the world.

As radio continues to evolve in the digital age, it remains the most cost-effective medium that reaches the widest audience worldwide. **World Radio Day** is a time to celebrate the enduring power and resilience of this media as a vital tool for communications and the free flow of ideas.

The overall worldwide partnership between UNESCO and UN Radio was excellent and resulted in scores of media interviews (over 75) on this important issue and celebrations in countries on every continent. **Thank you for your attention.**