

3 May 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Press Freedom Day**

Remarks delivered by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani, Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly

Your Excellency, Mr. BAN Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Your Excellency Mr. Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland,
Your Excellency Eduardo Ulibarri-Bilbao, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN and
Chair of the Committee on Information,
Mr. Maher Nasser, Director, and Acting Head of the UN's Department of Public Information, DPI,
Mr. Mogens Schmidt, Director of Field Coordination for UNESCO,
Mr. Gianpaolo Pioli, President of the UN Correspondents Association,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to join you today, at this important event marking World Press Freedom Day 2012.

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, I have the honour to make the following remarks.

I wish, first of all, to thank UNESCO and the Department of Public Information, DPI, for organising this event.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now widely accepted that the historic events unfolding in the Arab World, as a result of what I would call the Arab Awakening, would not have been possible without the emergence of new voices that have been empowered by new media and new technologies.

We are witnessing the increasing use of new media platforms and new technological tools to mobilize millions of people in support of democracy, human rights and freedom of expression.

In front of our eyes, we are seeing nations, societies and entire regions of the world being transformed by these newly-empowered voices.

Democracy and development are some of the biggest beneficiaries of the work of the independent, pluralistic and free media.

In fact, freedom of information is a fundamental right inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also acknowledged and re-stated by the General Assembly in a number of resolutions.

But the independence, safety and freedom of the media are not always guaranteed. We have all seen some media practitioners, who go to great lengths to keep us informed, end up being attacked, jailed and tortured, or even killed. We condemn all forms of attack, persecution or killing of media practitioners – both in the new and in traditional media. Anyone who targets or kills people in the media simply because of their work must be investigated and be brought to justice.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that freedom for the media comes with its own set of responsibilities.

The speed at which information is getting shared, places extra burdens on the media, to ensure accuracy, balance and fairness in the dissemination of information. Considering the immediate impact of information in our digital world demands that media practitioners exercise greater responsibility in the work they do.

Journalists, reporters and all media practitioners – be they ordinary citizens or professionals – are not just reporting change in our societies but they, themselves, are agents of change. So, it is important that new and traditional media must not be used to disseminate hatred or conflict or be used to incite violence. Still, we must work to prevent any violence against the media.

Governments that try to suppress or shut-down new media platforms should rather embrace new media for the beneficial transformation of their societies. They need to create and promote a thriving environment for free media and free expression.

It is also important that we work more closely together to bridge the digital divide, in order to ensure that more people – especially in developing countries - gain access to the Information and Communication Technologies, ICTs.

The potential benefits of new media and the ICTs remain immense, especially for Sustainable Development and Global prosperity. We must do more, as Member States, as Governments, as the UN family, and as citizens of a fast-shrinking world, to make sure that the benefits of media freedom get to everyone around the world.

The General Assembly and the international community as a whole have a responsibility to encourage, protect, and support those who exercise their basic human right to free expression and freedom of the media.

I wish, on this World Press Freedom Day, to urge all Member States and Governments to do more in ensuring the security, independence and freedom of media practitioners, especially those using new media.

Let us re-commit ourselves today to the fundamental and universal rights of media freedom and freedom of expression for the better transformation of our societies, and for the greater good of humankind.

I thank you.