



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

World Press Freedom Day

New York

1 May 2014

Please check against delivery

H.E. Ambassador Lyutha Al-Mughairy, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman and Chairperson of the General Assembly Committee on Information,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Under-Secretary-General Launsky-Tieffenthal,
Ms. Vibeke Jensen, Director, UNESCO Liaison Office in New York
Ms. Pamela Falk, President, United Nations Correspondents Association,
Distinguished Guests and Members of the Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today as we collectively commemorate World Press Freedom Day and highlight the numerous contributions of journalists and media in building democratic, peaceful and sustainable societies. The theme of this year's celebration "Media Freedom for a Better Future: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda" comes at a critical juncture in the elaboration of the new development framework that will usher in the post-2015 era.

As was highlighted in the recent thematic debate of the General Assembly on peaceful and stable societies, good governance, sound institutions and rule of law are essential drivers of sustainable development and in this regard, the role of a free press is critical.

Freedom of expression and freedom of press are first and foremost fundamental rights and they form an essential pillar of democratic societies. When journalists are able to report freely, they support informed citizen participation in political and social processes and promote civic engagement.

Distinguished Guests,

Journalists and the media have a collective responsibility to independently ensure that the acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public adhere to the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability. By fostering transparency and government

accountability, the voices of free, pluralistic and independent media contribute to public debate and good governance.

In addition, the reach and influence of the media, both traditional and new, can be instrumental in bringing about social change. The global challenges we face today are of such magnitude and scope, they will require all of us, men and women, young and old, from North and South, to change the way we think, relate to each other, engage in recreation, consume and do business. Being well-informed is the beginning of making good choices. When journalists give a voice to marginalized populations or raise public awareness on issues such as health, discrimination, corruption or sustainable modes of consumption, they contribute to shaping public opinion and behaviours and can help bring about the profound changes needed to achieve our development goals.

Excellencies,

As we celebrate the numerous contributions of the media in building stronger and better societies, we must also pay tribute to the many journalists and media workers who every day risk their lives to inform us. Just last year alone, ninety-two (92) of them were killed and many more were victims of kidnappings, hostage-taking, intimidations, harassments and arbitrary imprisonments. In the face of such violence, authorities have a responsibility to uphold the rule of law and bring perpetrators to justice.

In December last year, the General Assembly adopted for the first time a resolution condemning all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers and proclaimed November 2 as the International Day to end Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. Our Assembly called upon Member States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference. In this regard, the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is an important multi-stakeholder mechanism.

Ensuring that journalists can work safely and without fear is critical to fostering a free, independent and pluralistic media. Only then can journalists give a voice to those

who do not have one, tell the stories that have remained untold and contribute to open and transparent societies.

I thank members of the press for their dedication and many contributions, and encourage all journalists around the world to sharpen their proverbial pencils and continue fighting the good fight.

Thank you.
