

UNESCO Symposium and exhibition on freedom of expression mark 60th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights

News

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A symposium on Freedom of Expression: Development, Democracy and Dialogue will be held at UNESCO Headquarters on 29 October as part of celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose 19th article enshrines freedom of expression as a fundamental, inalienable human right.

The symposium will be opened at 9.30 a.m. by the Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura. The opening will feature two video messages specially recorded for the occasion by U Win Tin, the 2001 World Press Freedom Prize laureate recently released from detention in Myanmar, and by the Vice-President of Colombia, Francisco Santos Calderón.

A two-day photographic exhibition on the safety of journalists, organized in partnership with Reuters Thomson, will be inaugurated at 9 a.m. by the Director-General with the participation of David Schlesinger, Editor-in-Chief of Reuters, and the sponsors of the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize: Ana María Busquets de Cano, President of the Guillermo Cano Foundation; James Ottaway Jr., retired Chairman of Ottaway Newspapers, Director of Dow Jones & Company Chairman Emeritus of World Press Freedom Committee; Joergen Ejboel, Chairman of the Board Jyllands Posten/Politiken Newspaper (Denmark).

The Symposium, which will bring together some 400 participants including government officials, policymakers, World Press Freedom Prize laureates, and representatives of major non-governmental organizations and media professionals, will be divided into three sessions, focusing on freedom of expression and development, democracy and, finally, dialogue. Each of the three sessions, will end with a question and answer discussion.

Notable speakers will include Geoffrey Nyarota, the Zimbabwean newspaper editor and journalist who was awarded the 2002 World Press Freedom Prize; Amira Haas, the 2003 laureate (Israel); May Chidiac, the 2006 laureate (Lebanon); Lydia Cacho, the Mexican journalist who received the 2008 prize; alongside David Schlesinger, Editor-in-Chief of Reuters, and Frank La Rue Lewy, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression. Galina Sidorova, editor-in-chief of the Russian monthly magazine Sovershenno Sekretno (Top Secret), and Dariga Nazarbaeva, founder and chair of the Eurasian media Forum and the Congress of the Journalists of Kazakhstan will also speak at the Symposium.

UNESCO's programmes reflect the conviction that free and independent media are essential for the provision of unhindered access to information and knowledge which is fundamental to economic development, social participation, and democracy. Free and independent media also facilitate transparency and good governance and strengthen civil society. All these factors have proved crucial

for sustainable development and for the alleviation of poverty.

In promoting an enabling environment for freedom of expression and information, UNESCO works with governments, NGOs and civil society to foster universal access to information, including information and communication technologies, and help the development of “infostructures,” notably in developing countries. It also promotes free, independent and pluralistic media and community media and seeks to strengthen the role of communication and information for mutual understanding, notably in conflict and post-conflict situations.

UNESCO is committed to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which stipulates that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” The Organization is also committed to “collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image” (UNESCO's Constitution).