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Joint Message by

UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon and UNESCO Director-General Ms Irina Bokova on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day

3 May 2012

Freedom of expression is one of our most precious rights. It underpins every other freedom and provides a foundation for human dignity. Free, pluralistic and independent media is essential for its exercise.

This is the message of *World Press Freedom Day*. Media freedom entails the freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, as stated in Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This freedom is essential for healthy and vibrant societies.

Change in the Arab world has shown the power of aspirations for rights when combined with new and old media. Newfound media freedom is promising to transform societies through greater transparency and accountability. It is opening new ways to communicate and to share information and knowledge. Powerful new voices are rising – especially from young people – where they were silent before. This is why this year's World Press Freedom Day is centred on the theme of *New Voices: Media Freedom Helping to Transform Societies*.

Media freedom also faces severe pressures across the world. Last year, UNESCO condemned the killing of 62 journalists who died as a result of their work. These journalists must not be forgotten and these crimes should not remain unpunished. As media moves online, more online journalists, including bloggers, are being harassed, attacked, and killed for their work. They must receive the same protection as traditional media workers.

The first *UN Inter-Agency Meeting on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity* met at UNESCO on the 13 and 14 September 2011. We produced a Plan of Action for the UN to build a more free and safe environment for journalists and media workers everywhere. At the same time, we will continue to strengthen the legal foundations for free, pluralistic and independent media, especially in countries undergoing transformation or rebuilding after conflict. At a time of information overload, we must help young people especially to develop critical skills and greater media literacy.

World Press Freedom Day is our opportunity to raise the flag in the fight to advance media freedom. We call on States, professional media and non-governmental organisations everywhere to join forces with the United Nations to promote online and offline freedom of expression in accordance with internationally accepted principles. This is a pillar of individual rights, a foundation for healthy societies and a force for social transformation.

Ban Ki-moon

Irina Bokova