



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media**

**Fifth Central Asia Media Conference
“Media in Multi-Cultural and Multi-Lingual Societies”
Bishkek 17-18 September 2003**

The Fifth Central Asia Media Conference organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Freimut Duve and the OSCE Centre in Bishkek in co-operation with CIMERA was held on 17-18 September in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The 120 participants included journalists from four of the Central Asia countries, government officials, members of Parliament and the civil society among others. Unfortunately, no participants from Turkmenistan were able to attend the conference.

The importance of remaining critical towards negative developments in all countries rather than making comparisons between them was underlined during the discussions.

The participants noted that the issues and problems highlighted in the previous declarations from the conferences in Bishkek 1999, Dushanbe 2000, Almaty 2001 and Tashkent 2002 still remain valid and of utmost concern to the media professionals. Above all the current global fight against terrorist criminals should not be used as a pretext to hamper civil liberties.

These following conclusions were stressed during the debates:

Bishkek Declaration

1. The media should be able to exercise its corrective function towards the economic interests and activities of politicians and their families without any legal or other consequences. This is essential for the future success of the countries' economic development.
2. Governments should ensure that citizens as members of the different linguistic and cultural groups represented in the society have the right and the opportunity to freely express their views and preserve their language and culture via media.
3. The media should be free to play its constructive role in combating discrimination, promoting understanding and building stable peace in multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies. Hate speech must not be used to advocate and provoke violence.
4. Governments should ensure broad access for journalists to sources of information of public relevance. Governments should prevent and resolve cases of harassment by power structures of the media and journalists in Central Asia. Access should be guaranteed to state and non-state media equally.
5. Access to media for everybody should be ensured and supported. Control through printing, distribution, taxes and licenses should not be used to deny and hinder access to information for the public.
6. Media councils could be set up to facilitate, mediate and solve conflicts arising from journalistic activities as an alternative to court processes. The members should be elected and operate truly independent from state structures.
7. A clear distinction should be made between journalistic activities and public relations work for power structures and businesses. The public should be able to differentiate between these two.
8. Libel should be decriminalized and insult laws that provide undue protection for public officials repealed. In cases of civil libel the fines levied on the media by courts of law should be proportionate and not have a chilling effect on investigative journalism or lead to bankruptcy.