

Joint Statement on World Press Freedom Day

2 May 2006

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, *Mr. Ambeyi Ligabo*; the Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression of the Organization of American States, *Mr. Ignacio Alvarez*; the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Mr. Miklos Haraszti*; and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, *Ms. Faith Pansy Tlakula*, wish to commend the vital role the press has been playing in the progression of democracy and human rights.

Journalists are indispensable for disseminating information, promoting debate and facilitating dialogue, activities that constitute the foundation of a democratic society based on a pluralistic approach, where individuals and groups are encouraged to exchange information and express opinions freely. In this context, maintaining and nourishing media diversity, based on mutual respect and tolerance amongst different groups, is essential.

This year's World Press Freedom Day also sheds light on the link between freedom of the press and poverty eradication. Free and independent media is a key to combat poverty, as it serves as a medium to ensure unhindered circulation of ideas and to promote education and awareness thus upgrading opportunities. A special effort needs to be made to bring these benefits to the less developed countries and the poor in general, as they should be the prime beneficiaries of the unprecedented opportunities the global information society offers.

It is, however, with grave sorrow that we remind ourselves that in the year 2005 the world recorded the highest number of journalists and other media professionals killed or injured in the line of duty. Attacks, intimidation and harassment against journalists and media professionals have regrettably become everyday events in some parts of the world. We note with serious concern that violence against the media and journalists often occurs with impunity. Criminal sanctions against persons and media who express critical opinions continue, including in the forms of criminal defamation or libel suits. Media ownership concentration, censorship, harassment through judicial or administrative measures, such as discriminatory application of media accreditation procedures or entry permits to a country, continue to be reported. With the rapid development of technology, Internet has become one of the main means to disseminate information and exchange opinions, but at the same time, the freedom of the Internet is being targeted more and more.

The four special rapporteurs would like to take this opportunity to call upon all governments to combat impunity with regard to violence against journalists and media personnel, by bringing to justice those responsible for attacks against them, and by taking measures that enable journalists and media personnel to continue providing information freely and independently. All journalists detained because of their media-related activities should be released immediately.

In this context, it is the parallel obligation of all to avoid the use of discriminatory forms of expression, such as hate speech. True freedom of expression and the press is firmly based on the culture of pluralism, diversity, tolerance and mutual understanding.