



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

11 December 2001

**Third Central Asian Media Conference
"Media Freedom in Times of Anti-Terrorist Conflict"**

On 10-11 December 2001, the Third Central Asian Media Conference was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Conference was organized by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Freimut Duve and the OSCE Centre in Almaty in co-operation with the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Expression *Adil Soz* and the *Friedrich Ebert Foundation*. More than 80 journalists of all five Central Asia countries, government officials, members of parliament and NGOs took part.

Similar to the last two conferences (Bishkek in 1999 and Dushanbe in 2000) the lively debate was focused on the latest developments in the media field. Structural issues, such as legal media framework and media ownership, were also discussed. The crucial role of the media in the development of the civil society was particularly underlined. Special attention was paid to the opportunities for the next generation in journalism. The new challenges for the media in times of anti-terrorist conflict, especially in Central Asia that is affected by the conflict, became the main point of discussion. The participants noted that the problems highlighted in the Dushanbe Declaration adopted at the Conference last year still remain of great concern.

Almaty Declaration on Freedom of the Media in Times of Anti-Terrorist Conflict

The debates during the Conference in Almaty stressed these conclusions.

1. The governments of the Anti-Terror Alliance should not, in times of conflict, use national security arguments to limit human rights at home and reduce their support elsewhere.
2. In particular, the governments of the Central Asian States should not take the new conflict situation as a justification for repressive steps against opposition media. On the contrary, they should use it as a catalyst for further steps towards creating a free media landscape in their societies.
3. The media should be free to exercise their corrective function towards economic, ecological and military decisions in their countries especially in times of conflict. The free public debate is imperative.
4. The media should be free to play its fundamental role as society's watchdog against corruption, which is a serious obstacle for all countries on their way to democracy. Especially after 11 September the media should not be prevented to inform the public about existing financial links between terrorist group activities and corruption.
5. Leading international media have to be, and must remain more actively engaged in the region, both as an important source of information and as example of professional journalism for their colleagues.

6. Under the conditions of increased international tension and continued contradictions in Central Asia journalists should manifest more solidarity and support for each other.
7. Journalists must undertake further efforts to report objectively and edit carefully their coverage of the conflict. Journalistic ethic is needed more than ever in times of conflict and the journalists have to be aware of their increased responsibility.
8. The international community, governmental and non-governmental organizations must do more to safeguard journalists working in conflict zones. The leading media outlets could provide the needed training and insurance and can establish so-called security pools. Media foundations can be approached to financially support these pools. The creation of more efficient identification documents for professional journalists working in conflict zones should be promoted.