



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

Press and Public Information Unit

**Address by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia,
Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad**

**International Right to Know Day
Award Ceremony**

Media Center Belgrade, 28 September 2007

- I greet the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Radoljub Sabic, Ambassador Denis Huber of the Council of Europe, representatives of ABA/CEELI, and other participants.
- It is a great pleasure to mark the Right to Know Day again. It looks as if these events, where we publicly commend the public institutions which contributed the most to the free public access to information, became a tradition.
- Freedom of Information is a tool to remind the authorities that they provide service to the people and are accountable for their actions.
- It also encourages the citizens to question the governments at all levels, as well as the individual public institutions.
- These core freedoms are at heart of what the OSCE stands for.
- Our Mission to Serbia strongly supported the adoption of the Law on Free Access to Information and its implementation is now of the utmost importance.
- We are thankful to Commissioner Sabic and his office for the great work they do in protecting the right to free access to information, often with considerable resistance both directly and indirectly.
- While the government is obliged to make the information available, it is up to the media and civil society to use this tool and put investigative journalism at the service of citizens.
- During these last twelve months, our Mission has also focused on developing the skills of the media professionals to use the freedom of information while investigating a story. We hope this work will improve the in-depth and well-researched information as background to their stories.

- While there is still work to do regarding respect for the freedom of information from the side of public authorities, it is important that there is a willingness to work together to address problems where they emerge. Not only the Commissioner, but also other supervisory authorities are responsible for the freedom of information.
- In conclusion, let me use this opportunity to call on all public authorities to respect the right to freedom of information, and on media and citizens to exercise it.
- On behalf of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, I congratulate the winner of the award, and look forward to hearing other comments and remarks.
- Thank you.