

Fact based journalism celebrated at World Press Freedom Day conference in Jakarta

1500 participants to celebrate

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UNESCO's flagship World Press Freedom Day event, held in the Indonesian capital this year, brought together an unprecedented 1,500 participants to celebrate the fundamental right of an independent, pluralistic and free press from 1 to 4 May. Organized by UNESCO in partnership with the Government of Indonesia and the Indonesian Press Council, the celebration highlighted the role of the media in advancing peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. It was opened by the Vice-President of Indonesia, Mohammad Jusuf Kalla, who encouraged media to contribute to fostering peace and development, reflect people's views, and remain critical of governments to ensure good governance

THE CONFERENCE DREW THE PARTICIPATION OF 1000 STAKEHOLDERS-----The conference drew the participation 1,000 stakeholders from Indonesia and 500 from 90 countries from all parts of the world, who examined the challenges facing media around the world. The participants included media practitioners, experts, press freedom advocates, and academics, as well as government representatives. "We meet today in Jakarta to celebrate a freedom at the heart of all freedoms.", said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, at the opening ceremony, which was also attended by José Ramos-Horta, former President of Timor-Leste and 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and Richard Gingras, Vice President of News at Google who spoke of the need to build trust in the open web through news.

The conference focused on the theme Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies. It addressed a wide range of issues such as fake news, safety of journalists, gender equality and countering violent extremism. One plenary session highlighted the contribution of journalism to sustainable development and the role of journalists as the guardians of democracy. "It is better to have journalists that are loose cannons than not having a free media at all," said former Timor-Leste President Ramos-Horta, key speaker during this session.

Investigative journalism was at the heart of discussions in the second plenary, which was opened by Oscar Cantu, owner of Norte, the newspaper from the city of Juarez, Mexico, that was forced to close down last month due to security concerns following the murder of one of its journalists. He described the closure of his paper as an act of protest and a wake-up call regarding safety. "I decided to lower the curtain because if we cannot be loyal to our integrity, giving the reader what we consider he or she must know, I cannot put at risk my collaborators, their families or my own" [?], he said.

In the evening of 3 May, the 2017 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize was awarded to Dawit Isaak, the imprisoned Eritrean-born journalist, in a ceremony held in the presence of the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, who spoke of the serious threats and challenges facing press freedom today. But the President stressed his confidence that, "we will overcome [these challenges], we have done it before and we shall do it again." Accepting the prize on behalf of her father, Bethlehem Isaak said: "My father knew that without the basic establishment of human rights, freedom of speech, access to education and healthcare, no society could flourish, no nation could achieve stability, and no people could prosper. He wanted to give his people an environment where they could speak freely in mutual understanding and respect, and by peaceful means give people the right to determine their own destiny" [?]. At the close of the conference, participants adopted the Jakarta Declaration, which warns of three major challenges to press freedom: safety of journalists, false news and freedom of speech on the Internet. Indonesia issued a special post stamp dedicated to World Press Freedom Day to mark the 1st time that it hosted the annual celebration. Four different media organizations, Al Jazeera, El País, Rappler and Inter Press Service invited experts from all over the world to write on press freedom challenges for their blogs and special issues developed specially for the occasion. A group of 46 young journalists produced a special digital newspaper, Voice of Millennials, to cover World Press Freedom Day 2017 and its themes. Travelling from Algeria, Malaysia, Morocco, Palestine, United States and Finland, where last year's World Press Freedom Day was organized, they worked together with local aspiring reporters to cover the international celebration of press freedom. Cartoonists drew cartoons in real time to illustrate the discussions. Furthermore, a special selection of cartoons on press freedom was curated by UNESCO and Cartooning for Peace, an international organization founded by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and French editorial cartoonist Plantu.

WPDF local events were organized around the world by UNESCO and a wide range of other organizations.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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