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Conference adopts Brisbane Declaration

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Governments have been called on to enact laws guaranteeing the right to information. Participants of World Press Freedom Day on Monday adopted the Brisbane Declaration.

The declaration calls on UNESCO member states "to enact legislation guaranteeing the right to information in accordance with the internationally-recognised principle of maximum disclosure".

It also demands that media companies to raise awareness of freedom of expression and the right to information, and for UNESCO to aid the development and implementation of new laws.

World Press Freedom Day 2010 was held at the University of Queensland on May 1 to 3.

The full text of the declaration follows:

Brisbane Declaration: Freedom of Information, the Right to Know

We, the participants at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference in Brisbane, Australia, 3 May 2010:

Recalling Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Noting that the Millennium Declaration highlights good governance as being central to development and the eradication of poverty, and acknowledging that press freedom and the right to know are essential to promoting democracy and ensuring respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

Underscoring the principles set forth in the Declarations of Windhoek, Alma-Ata, Sana'a, Santiago and Sofia, which identify a free, pluralistic and independent media as a cornerstone of democratic societies and development;

Reaffirming the principles and recommendations of the Doha Declaration of 3 May 2009 on the Potential of Media for Dialogue, Mutual Understanding and Reconciliation, and the Maputo Declaration of 3 May 2008 on Fostering Freedom of Expression, Access to Information and Empowerment of People;

Recalling the Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) phases of the World Summit of the Information Society, which reaffirmed freedom of expression and universal access to information as essential foundations of inclusive knowledge societies;

Reaffirming that the right to information is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression, and that both are fundamental underpinnings of democracy and all other rights and freedoms;

Defining the right to information as the right of everyone to access information held by public bodies at all levels, local, national and international;

Emphasizing that the right to information is critical for informed decision-making, for participation in democratic life, for monitoring of public actions, and for enhancing transparency and accountability, and represents a powerful tool to fight corruption;

Highlighting that the right to information is instrumental to the realization of people's empowerment, and strengthened civic trust, and for promoting the equality of all groups in society, including women and indigenous peoples;

Noting that improved access to information contributes to strengthening markets, increasing investment, reducing financial vulnerability and enhancing the effectiveness of development aid;

Recognizing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs), when accessible to all, to facilitate full realization of the right to information for all people, including women and indigenous peoples;

Welcoming growing global recognition of the right to information, reflected in international statements, conventions and jurisprudence, as well as in the significant recent trend to adopt right to information laws at the national level;

Aware that the majority of the world's States have still not adopted legislation giving effect to this fundamental right;

Concerned that even where right to information laws have been adopted, their implementation faces significant challenges, including political and bureaucratic resistance;

Honoring the journalists and media personnel who contribute to press freedom and the right to information through their work, often bravely risking their lives in the process;

Condemning the intimidation, attacks, arrests and murders faced by journalists and media personnel all over the world, which dramatically violate their own fundamental rights and the right of everyone to receive a diversity of information and ideas.

Call on member states:

To enact legislation guaranteeing the right to information in accordance with the internationally-recognized principle of maximum disclosure;

Such legislation should establish limited exceptions, proactive obligations to disclose information, clear and simple procedures for making requests, an independent and effective oversight system, and adequate promotional measures;

To ensure the effective implementation of the right to information by allocating sufficient financial and human resources for the structures and systems that are required to successfully implement legislation;

To ensure that the wider legal environment is consistent with and supports the right to information, including by protecting freedom of expression and press freedom, by establishing other disclosure systems, and by bringing secrecy rules into line with the principle of maximum disclosure;

To foster public awareness about the right to information and to develop the capacity of everyone to exercise that right, placing particular emphasis on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, including women, minority language groups, indigenous peoples and disabled persons;

To enable unfettered access to information relevant to human rights violations, including information held in current and historical archives.

To harness the power of information communication technologies (ICTs) to realize the right to information and to foster enhanced pluralism in information flows;

To bridge the digital and knowledge divide by overcoming low literacy levels and poor Internet connectivity, and by making information available in local languages and in a form that is easily understandable by diverse audiences;

To urge international organizations of which they are members to adopt enforceable and effective right to information policies, based on the principle of maximum disclosure;

To give renewed emphasis to public debate on the role of journalism and independent media in the creation of a culture of democratic pluralism, through journalism that is transparent, credible, relevant and with a degree of accountability founded on principles of self-regulation that will build public trust in journalism and independent media;

To examine, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, new forms of assistance to media,

including supporting innovation in the development of media, encouraging investigative and ethical journalism, and promoting public service values in journalism, while ensuring that the provision of assistance does not compromise editorial independence and journalistic freedom;

To promote media literacy and awareness about the right to information, including through incorporating these topics into school curricula and higher education courses, and training programs for civil services;

Call on professional associations, media outlets and industry:

To raise awareness about freedom of expression and the right to information;

To promote and support investigative journalism and to raise awareness about the role played by the right to information in journalism;

To implement innovative strategies aimed at channeling relevant information to the marginalized and underrepresented, and at promoting diversity in the workplace;

To contribute to disseminating good practices and experiences showcasing the direct link between the right to information, journalism, democracy and people's quality of life;

To provide leadership in support of the principles of transparency and accountability by adopting policies on the disclosure of information within the media industry, especially regarding ownership, revenues from official advertising, and other forms of funding;

To promote social dialogue between employers and media personnel aimed at creating partnerships in order to strengthen attachment to ethical standards and the creation of transparency, credibility and relevance in the provision of information;

To respect freedom of association and core labor standards, to work towards improving the safety and working conditions of journalists and other media personnel, and to provide adequate training opportunities;

To promote and strengthen forms of self-regulation and new forms of review of performance of media that enhance and support ethical journalism, with the aim of building public trust;

Call on UNESCO

To sensitize Member States, public authorities, civil society and individuals about freedom of expression and the right to information, and their centrality in a democratic society;

To provide assistance and to promote synergies between relevant actors for the development and implementation of laws and policies fostering freedom of expression and the right to information, with particular attention to the needs of small island States;

To support initiatives aimed at promoting professional and ethical standards in journalism and to promote a new approach to media accountability based upon principles of self-regulation;

To promote the free flow of information and ideas through the Internet, and to condemn censorship and other violations of Internet freedom of expression;

To support efforts to increase media and information literacy and awareness about the right to information through their inclusion at different levels of educational and training systems;

To foster research, documentation and the sharing of good practices on and implementation of the right to information;

To ensure the inclusion of freedom of expression, press freedom and the right to information, and the related issues addressed throughout this Declaration, as key topics within the development agenda, and to facilitate discussion and a coordinated approach on these matters among UN agencies and other relevant stakeholders;

To adopt a UNESCO framework giving effect to the right to information in relation to its own operations, and to promote the adoption of similar policies by other agencies of the United Nations;

To communicate this Declaration to Member States and other international and regional organizations for their consideration;

To use this Declaration as a reference for UNESCO's activities in the field of freedom of expression and the right to information.

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