



**New Media: The Press Freedom Dimension  
Challenges and Opportunities of New Media for Press Freedom  
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**Closing Remarks**

**UNESCO Assistant Director-General, Abdul Waheed Khan**

Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to start by apologizing for not being able to attend from the very beginning. I have been in Ethiopia for the UN Inter Agency meeting on media development. My colleagues have, however, briefed me extensively about what has happened yesterday and I must say that I am inspired by the spirit and content of these deliberations over the past two days. I want to congratulate all of you for participating in this important conference.

I think we succeeded in our efforts to address the opportunities and challenges of new media for press freedom. As with any honest and reflective exploration, some issues were clarified and some issues were problematized. I think both of these outcomes will contribute to the greater debate around new media and press freedom.

As this conference clearly demonstrated, the potential of new media is ambivalent. On the one hand, new media holds a hitherto unseen potential to

empower the individual by providing greater freedom of information that can lead to innovative courses of practical action. On the other hand, new media has also possibilities for widespread manipulation of information and governmental censorship. A central challenge is to fully exploit the potential of new media without compromising the fundamental right of freedom of expression.

One of the main lessons of this two-day conference is that the same principles apply to traditional media as new media. The free flow of ideas by word and image is a pre-requisite for any social and economic development. However, while what we often call 'new media' technologies always imply the fundamental right to freedom of expression for the individual, they do not necessarily imply freedom of the press – to borrow a distinction from Professor Berger's speech yesterday. Efforts to support new communication technologies, therefore, must be placed alongside efforts to support press freedom. We also heard from participants that efforts to support press freedom must be complimented with capacity-building efforts to strengthen professional standards and socio-economic programs to combat poverty. I think that this is very important because the impact of new media is, after all, dependent on quality of journalism and accessibility.

The issue of curbing free speech was a central theme of these discussions. I think all of us in this room stand firmly behind the principles freedom of expression and press freedom. We must continue to draw attention to the crucial role that a free, independent and pluralistic media plays in the democratic process. With this in mind, many participants highlighted issues of responsibility: firstly, with regard to governments that censor the information made possible through the new technologies, and secondly with regards to corporations that knowingly sell this technology to governments. We must emphasize that all citizens have the right to express their ideas and opinions worldwide through electronic networks.

Yesterday's panel on the role of media in new democracies clearly demonstrated that the media's work to provide independent and trustworthy information has contributed significantly to processes of reconstruction and reconciliation. This is an encouraging fact also why freedom of expression is acknowledged as a fundamental precondition for democracy and development.

Within this framework, I would like to draw your attention to the recent "The Power of Peace Forum" in Bali, Indonesia. Media and ICT professionals from over 30 countries gathered to find practical means of using communication and information to achieve peace. This culminated in the "Power of Peace Network" that is committed to build mechanisms through which media and information technologies can contribute to enhancing mutual understanding and peace.

I believe that the Bali meeting as well as our meeting here point towards what is perhaps the greatest role that new media can play in our world: namely, its potential for peace and understanding. Mutual understanding can only be achieved through a continuous exchange of information and knowledge – through the free flow of ideas by word and image, as UNESCO's Constitution puts it. In our age of information and communication technologies, we have new opportunities to find practical ways of using these tools of expression with an eye towards building peace.

As the Director-General of UNESCO has stated, "Dialogue, founded on mutual respect and understanding...constitutes the best way to overcome ignorance and promote peace, tolerance and the dialogue among civilizations, cultures, peoples and religions." I believe that new media has a lot to contribute in this regard.

I would like to congratulate you, the participants of this conference, for your honest debate on these important issues and your significant contributions to press freedom.

As a conclusion, I would like to emphasize that we must continue to develop ways of improving the impact of new media as a force for press freedom and mutual understanding. For its part, UNESCO will continue to fulfill its mandate to promote the free flow of ideas, universal access to information and press freedom.

Lastly, I would like to extend my special thanks to the interpreters, technicians and staff that facilitated this event, as well as a special thanks to World Press Freedom Committee, the World Association of Newspapers, and the Knight Foundation.