



**New Media: The Press Freedom Dimension
Challenges and Opportunities of New Media for Press Freedom
15 & 16 February, 2007
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new communication technologies nowadays quite often provide the much-needed oxygen for the democratisation process. And in consequence democracy provides the environment for basic press freedom.

In the past decade there were numerous examples of how advanced information flows played a central role in resisting dictatorial regimes.

Examples such as

- the “people power” revolution in the Philippines
- the student rallies on Tiananmen Square
- the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico
- the anti-military demonstrations in Bangkok
- the orange revolution in the Ukraine and the rose Revolution in Georgia
- the investigative Internet media in Malaysia
- online petitions and “Freedom Manifestos” of dissident movements in Vietnam
- or the emergency of large bloggers communities like in Iran

just to mention a few.

Fidel Castro once said: *‘Socialism in Central Europe failed because people received more information than was necessary’*. He obviously understood very well the power of information.

And, of course, such intense use of communications technologies like fax machines, voice- or video-recording equipments, mobile phones, PCs’, laptops and – above all – the Internet, frightens the authorities.

They are therefore trying to stop the flow of information and communication by passing harsh laws and fixing criminal penalties.

Scores of people have been imprisoned for the unauthorized distribution of news, articles, declarations or protests.

The installation of tapping facilities, filtering equipments for the Internet and the blocking of access to websites are other methods of trying to make sure that no uncensored information is distributed.

When talking about new media, we should however keep in mind that, what is an “old” or “traditional” media for the advanced societies, may for other regions be revolutionary new in its use – such as the community radio in India.

An expert, helping villagers to run a community station was quoted by the Washington Post: "Community radio in India is not about playing alternative rock music. It is a new source of strength for poor people because it addresses their most basic development needs." And, she continued: "Our radio is more powerful than the corrupt and inefficient village council."

And this seems to define the essence of what we want to discuss during this conference: How can the various communications technologies allow us to test and push the boundaries of free speech and press freedom?

When doing such an analysis, we must also be aware of some stunning figures, such as the reported news that there are over 100.000 bloggers in Iran and that Farsi / Persian is the third most commonly used language in the blogosphere, after English and French.

And finally, a report from China, where “Super Girl”, a talent contest for female singers, attracted 800 million votes by mobile phone, despite the fact that China has only about 400 million mobile handsets. It is easy to understand that such a phenomenon is seen as a potential threat with the vision that it could be turned to what is called “phone journalism”.

May I now present the speakers in alphabetical order.