



**New Media: The Press Freedom Dimension
Challenges and Opportunities of New Media for Press Freedom
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Thank you, and thanks to all of you for making this an informative and thought-provoking conference. I'm delighted to be here and proud to represent the Knight Foundation, which is pleased to be sponsoring this conference. The issues under review – most notably the expansion of press freedom in an Internet-driven world and the threats to that freedom that an insecure world make inevitable – are of primary concern to us. For me, these past two days have been enormously stimulating. And I know that my colleagues in Miami will feel the same way when I report back to them.

Our president, Alberto Ibarguen, desperately wanted to be here, because he so strongly believes in the mission of the World Press Freedom Committee, the World Association of Newspapers and the World Editor's Forum. The good

news for me, concerning Alberto's scheduling conflicts was that somebody had to come to Paris.

I know I am in the unenviable position of being almost all that stands between you and a night in Paris. That almost makes me want to say thank you and let's go.

I'm aided in my goal to be brief, by what I wrote next when composing this talk: Put something witty here, to wake them up. But, since I have nothing witty to say, we'll just skip that part, and move on.

I'm not here to summarize the conference, but I will mention a few of the many points that struck me as important. I thought Leslie Harris's reminding us that it's one Internet, and we need to act that way, was very important. Because of our interconnectedness, a successful prior restraint on Internet communication in Cuba or Burma or Belarus, has a greater potential to affect us all than a restraint on a newspaper, for instance, in any of those countries.

We've learned that having a medium that can defeat geographic borders is only a precondition for the communication that can connect us, enrich our freedom and make us stronger as a people. But it's not a prescription. We have much work to do and many fights ahead. For example, Zaid Mohseni, from Afghanistan, reminded us that for many people, there's still a lack of understanding about the link between free media and democracy. In other words, the free flow of ideas on the Internet first needs us to make sure everyone understands the value of the free flow of ideas.

We also were starkly reminded by several speakers that new media in their country is old media in other countries. The restrictions they face are the restrictions we had hoped would be in the past. But they aren't.

Our hope for the future is that as we fight for open Internet, digital and mobile access, we are building upon open access to the previous media.

Knight Foundation is sponsoring this conference because we believe in the potential and the promise of the Internet's ability to break down barriers, ignore geographic borders and permit open communication between people who have never been exposed to one another before. It is what Time Magazine, in its much maligned Person of the Year issue, meant when it said we now have "an opportunity to build a new kind of international understanding, not politician to politician, or great man to great man, but citizen to citizen, person to person."

Two years ago, I had the good fortune to travel to Tunisia to talk to local Internet editors about strengthening their sites with the goal of making them economically viable. My sponsors, the U.S. embassy and Internews, had come to see the Internet as a way to combat the abuses of authoritarian government, and now argued that if we could find ways to make Internet sites self-sustaining, we'd have more freedom of speech. In other words, financial independence would lead to political independence.

My mission took metaphorical form as I traveled briefly in that beautiful and historic country. In Carthage, I saw the ancient Roman amphitheater with its

near perfect acoustics, and the irony of standing there, nearly 2,000 years later, still trying to send out messages unimpeded, was dramatic. It became even more so just a few months later when, with a dateline of Tunis, the human rights organization Human Rights Watch issued a 144-page report on online censorship in the Middle East and North Africa. It documented scores of online censorship cases in which Internet users had been detained for online activities in countries across the region, including Tunisia, Iran, Syria and Egypt.

There are other examples – many others, unfortunately – but even so, they are not going to prevail. The Internet will swallow its censors. It is only a matter of time. Much as the “many to many” model of Internet communication is changing the way we get information, the Internet’s ubiquity makes the spread of that information inevitable.

Knight Foundation’s roots are in newspapers; so our focus on press freedom extends back to our founding, more than 50 years ago. In that time, nothing has been more important to us than advancing the vitality of journalism: training its practitioners, protecting and enhancing its watchdog role and, perhaps most of all, ensuring that its relevance endures in our rapidly changing society.

Recognizing that the Internet advances our freedom by allowing messages to ignore boundaries, Knight Foundation nonetheless sees the value in people working for their common good in geographic communities where communication remains free and open. The tasks of citizenship and self-governance are based on geography.

In that spirit, last year we started The Knight Brothers 21st Century News Challenge, a funding offer of up to \$5 million a year – and up to \$25 million over the next five years – to explore whether and how the digital world can be used to connect people in the real-life places where they live and work.

Our thinking was that throughout the 20th century, newspapers were the glue – the “informational” glue – that connected states, cities, towns and suburbs. Now, as cyber-information becomes more pervasive, newspapers are might become less effective in that role. So we are asking: Is there a replacement? Can someone in digital space perform the community-defining function of newspapers?

The 21st Century News Challenge proposes nothing less than turning the Web inside out to help people connect in real life, not virtual life. It is a contest for great community news experiments, using any kind of digital method or device. It brings technology to the arena of journalism values, and it brings journalistic values to technology. We were very excited about it when we announced it in September, and we are even more excited now that we have seen the response.

In three months, we received 1,650 proposals for our challenge. 15% of those came from outside the United States. That’s not bad for the first year, but we are working hard to increase the number of international applications this year.

We will advertise the News Challenge in six or seven languages, but the message will be the same. We want to fund ideas that use digital news and information to create a sense of community in a given geographic area. We

believe that the role good newspapers played in uniting people around common problems and helping them to seek solutions that benefit their daily lives is a role that needs to continue with digital media. We hope to receive applications this year from each of you.

How all of this eventually plays out should be fascinating. This conference on New Media and the Press Freedom Dimension has given us all a wonderful opportunity to contemplate the changes taking place in a most constructive way. We are so grateful that we were able to play a role in making it possible. Thank you.