

HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CALLS FOR END TO
IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS

*The following is the message of United Nations High Commissioner for
Human Rights Louise Arbour on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, 3 May:*

World Press Freedom Day is an occasion to celebrate one of the cornerstones of human rights, enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to take stock of the state of this fundamental entitlement around the world.

Never before have so many countries claimed to respect and defend the right of the media to work freely, without interference or pressure. Yet never have those who make it possible for all of us to contribute to building free societies as informed citizens been under so much threat. In 2006, over 150 journalists and media workers were killed, more than at any other time since this grim tally started.

Countries in conflict are the deadliest for journalists, and the past year was no exception. Media workers are often accidental victims of armed confrontation, but disturbingly frequently they are intentionally targeted by warring parties who have an interest in operating in obscurity. But journalists are also killed, harassed and intimidated -- by authorities, armed groups or organized crime -- in countries that are nominally at peace. Whether at war or not, the most dangerous countries for media work share a common trait: they almost always fail to bring those who kill and attack journalists to justice. The prevalence of impunity certainly plays a major role in the multiplication of attacks on the press and violations of the right to freedom of expression.

In the face of these dangers, there has never been more information available to so many around the world. This represents a vibrant tribute to the perseverance and courage of the press and workers in "old" and "new" media, and evidence of the unquenchable human thirst for information and knowledge. But whether they recognize that attempting to curtail the free flow of ideas is ultimately futile, governments and authorities have an obligation to respect the right of all to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontiers. I therefore take this occasion to appeal to all governments and authorities to respect or renew their commitment to guarantee the exercise of freedom of expression, ensure the safety of journalists and end impunity for crimes against them.

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