Declaration of Vienna

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Abstract

A joint declaration of principles entitled "Press Freedom in New Communication Media" by member groups of the Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations, first formulated in 2002 and updated in 2007 and 2012. Signatories: COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS, COMMONWEALTH PRESS UNION MEDIA TRUST, FIPP ? THE WORLDWIDE MAGAZINE MEDIA ASSOCIATION, INTER AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTING, INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE,WAN-IFRA - WORLD ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS PUBLISHERS, WORLD PRESS FREEDOM COMMITTEE

Document

COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS

COMMONWEALTH PRESS UNION MEDIA TRUST

FIPP – THE WORLDWIDE MAGAZINE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

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WORLD ASSOCIATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS PUBLISHERS

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM COMMITTEE

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PRESS FREEDOM IN NEW COMMUNICATION MEDIA

The members of the Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations issued the following statement defending and promoting press freedom on the Internet and other new forms of communication. They recalled their Statement of Vienna of November 2002, issued in advance of the World Summits on the Information Society, reaffirmed in February 2007.

They renewed their attachment to its principles in the following terms:

1. News media in cyberspace, via international satellite broadcasts, and using other new forms of communication should be afforded the same freedom of expression rights as traditional news media. The texts adopted by the World Summits on the Information Society reflected that view. A free press means a free people. Press freedom on the Internet must be a fundamental characteristic of this and of any new communication system.

2. This principle was embodied in UNESCO's 1997 Declaration of Sofia : *“The access to and the use of these new media should be afforded the same freedom of expression protections as traditional media.”*

This declaration, adopted by a broad cross-section of journalists from both East and West Europe, was formally endorsed by the member states of UNESCO at its General Conference in 1997.

This has now been unanimously reaffirmed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in a resolution stating: *"The same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression."*

3. A major priority must be implementation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *"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."*

That pledge, made by the international community in 1948, must be a living reality everywhere.

4. There are many types of communication over the Internet and other new media, and it is important not to confuse them. News, for example, differs from such activities as pornography, pedophilia, fraud, conspiracy for terrorism, incitement to violence, hate speech, etc., although there may be news stories about such problems. Such matters as those listed are normally covered in existing national general legislation and can, if appropriate and necessary, be prosecuted on the national level in the country of origin.

No new legislation or international treaty is necessary.

5. Some countries that have advocated controls over the free flow of information across national frontiers have tried to justify such controls on political grounds, regional value systems or national information sovereignty. Such controls are clearly in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

6. Over the years, developing countries have complained of being unequal partners in world communication ability. The new information technologies afford just the opportunity for interactive and multi-way communication that these developing world critics have said they want. For those in many countries, Article 19 is still a promise rather than a reality. The new communication technologies could go a very long way toward fulfilling the promise.

7. Those who seek answers to the so-called “digital divide” neglect to recall that previous communication technologies such as printing, radio and television also started in advanced, more developed countries and spread virtually throughout the world, largely thanks to natural market processes. The rate of spread of each successive new communication technology accelerated radically. According to the International

Telecommunication Union, it took 38 years for the first 50 million radio sets to be in place worldwide, 13 years for the first 50 million television sets, and just four years for the first 50 million Internet connections. More than 2billion persons are now said to have access to Internet worldwide.

8. Because general principles are at stake, there is concern that controls instituted for new communication technologies could “wash back” into controls over traditional news media. This would be regressive and tragic. Nothing that could work in this manner should be permitted.

9. A number of proposals for regulation and controls now being made were rejected during the now-discredited campaign for a “new world information and communication order.” There are clearly those at work who seek to revive and assert for their own purposes such restrictive proposals in the new guise of countering alleged threats and dangers posed by new communication technologies. These proposals must again be successfully resisted, just as they were earlier.

10. Many of the fears over the new communication technologies expressed by officials and politicians seem to reflect anxieties about the new and unfamiliar, which they do not control. Such anxieties often reflect ignorance on what the new communication technologies really are and of how they work. They can also reflect a fear of freedom.

Discussions of many alleged problems are often conducted on the basis of unproved

assertions and speculations. Rigorously researched, hard data is missing to describe the supposed threats posed by the new communication technologies, with these unproven dangers used to justify the calls for controls.

11. If successful, proposals to control content and its dissemination through new information technologies would severely constrain their rapid spread and development.

12. In the broader freedom of expression context, existing international copyright regimes and intellectual property rights agreements are, generally speaking, an indispensable encouragement to creation and innovation. Those who seek to undermine such existing conventions on the grounds of free access would, in fact, succeed only in drastically reducing incentives for developing and distributing information. Yet, legitimate attempts to protect copyright should under no circumstances be allowed to be used as a cover for state or private censorship.

13. Most people in the world continue to receive their news and information through traditional broadcast and print media and are likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

14. The various follow-ups to the World Summits on the Information Society provide both opportunities to broaden the reach of freedom of expression as well as dangers from those who would narrow it -- unthinkingly or deliberately.

15. Everyone involved in following up on the unfinished business of those Summits should bear firmly in mind the need to maximize opportunities for extending press freedom and to resist the threats to restrict it. To that end, civil society and all those engaged in news flows over the Internet and other new media must continue to be an integral part of the deliberations at every stage. The future of new and evolving forms of communication cannot be left to governments and technocrats alone.

16. Proposals to subject the Internet to control, authority or oversight by an intergovernmental body or organization run the risk of reducing its content to the lowest common denominator that authoritarian member governments would allow. Current arrangements have in practice served Internet freedom, and any measures to replace those arrangements should be resisted if they present any dangers of introducing restrictions to the continued free flow of information in cyberspace.

17. The Coordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organizations calls for concerted effort to make preserving and extending the free flow of news and information in cyberspace and elsewhere an ongoing basic concern. News on the Internet and other new forms of communication is the same as news everywhere. New technology does not require any reconsideration of fundamental rights such as freedom of the press.

We call on those involved in deliberations on the future of new forms of communication to:

a) reject any proposal aimed at restricting news content or media operations,

b) work for inclusion of clear statements of unqualified support for press freedom on the Internet and other new forms of communication in any new agreements or declarations of principle on the subject,

c) stipulate in any text that could be used restrictively a clear statement that the particular provision involved is not intended to limit freedom of expression or press freedom.

d) support continuation of access and dissemination of news and information in cyberspace without compromise of the principle of "net neutrality,"

e) recognize that existing protections of journalists' sources offline also apply to online journalism and that actors in the online world should do nothing to compromise the safety of journalists.

There must be press freedom in all the new spaces created for communication.