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1. The principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information were enshrined in 1946, when the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on information in the service of humanity. While the first principle refers to the right of the press to do its job, the second refers to the unfettered flow of information. Only when upheld together, the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media is ensured.
2. Freedom of opinion and expression, which is the foundation of press freedom, is neither a gift nor a political concession. There is also no north and south divide when it comes to upholding this fundamental human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, unequivocally states in its article 19, “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 regardless of frontiers”.
3. The press is one of the vehicles through which we exercise this fundamental human right. Because it can expose abuse of other human rights, freedom of press forms the very lifeline of a society and serves as a barometer of its progress. Only through a free press can we expect to hear all voices within a society , even the smallest ones. The principle that such a press is an indispensable element – not a luxury – for growth of democracy as well as economic development finds a reaffirmation in the historic Windhoek Declaration, adopted in 1991.
4. Everyone needs freedom of expression, but the people living in poverty perhaps need it more than anybody else. Poverty is a condition that creates inequality in all sectors of life, and as a result the voice of the poor is always muted or muffled. The interests and concerns of the poor are rarely reflected in the media. Unless poverty is eradicated and the poor are empowered, the benefits of a free press will not be evenly distributed. That’s why Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen taught us, free press and hunger are incompatible.
5. Realization of freedom of expression requires not only a free media but also a media – both print and electronic - which is pluralistic and diverse. By a pluralistic media, the Windhoek Declaration tells us, we mean the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community . If drafted today, this declaration would have definitely included the electronic media, where the monopolistic tendencies are increasingly growing. A pluralistic media, as envisaged at the Windhoek conference more than ten years ago, presupposes diversity of forms of ownership, more equitable access to communication, and support for linguistic and cultural diversity.
6. Is it enough to proclaim the principle of press freedom? Obviously not. A press cannot be free or independent if it is weak or underdeveloped. Living in a world of disparities, a large number of developing countries are unable to participate in a fair and equitable manner in the free flow of information. They don’t have the infrastructure and technical know how. Mindful of this, the General Assembly has renewed its call for increased assistance for the development of communications infrastructure and capabilities in developing countries.
7. Disparities that now exist between the developed and developing countries in the field of communications have further widened with the advent of the new information and communications technologies. We even have a fancy name for it: the digital divide. Admittedly the changes brought about by ICTs are nothing less than revolutionary . However, this revolution has not benefited all nations alike. As with globalization of the world economy, rich and powerful nations have reaped greater benefits from the growing digitization of the world communications system. Currently 79 per cent of the world’s Internet users come from OECD countries. Africa, on the other hand, has less bandwidth

than Sao Paulo, Brazil, or Luxembourg. To make press freedom truly meaningful, we have to turn the current digital divide into digital opportunities for people everywhere in the world.

8. Of course, we say “yes” to press freedom, but we also say “yes” to development. Of course we say “yes” to freedom of expression, but we also say “yes” to diversity and pluralism. These values go hand-in-hand. And of course we say “yes” to ICTs, but we say “no” to digital divide.