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Организация
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day**

3 May 2009

Every year, World Press Freedom Day provides an opportunity to affirm the importance of freedom of expression and press freedom – a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On World Press Freedom Day 2009 UNESCO is highlighting the potential of the media to foster dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Communicating across cultural differences is a central challenge of the contemporary world where globalizing forces have accelerated interactions among peoples. The media, viewed as an arbitrator, has an important role to play in encouraging and facilitating this communication and in providing an open platform for debate among all parts of society.

Respecting cultural differences while preserving freedom of expression will always exist as a tension to be debated and negotiated in any democracy. UNESCO believes that frank, even harsh speech is our right unless it seeks to incite discrimination, hostility or violence. Any attempt to restrict the right to freedom of expression must be balanced against this criterion.

Strengthening the principles and practices of a free and professional media is the most sustainable way of encouraging a media culture that works towards building peace. Only a media that is vibrant, independent, pluralistic, inclusive and fair, editorially free and beyond censorship and influence from owners or interests can contribute to dialogue and reconciliation across divides.

By challenging prevailing attitudes and stereotypes about other cultures, religions and peoples, the media can help to strip away the ignorance that breeds mistrust and suspicion, thus promoting tolerance and an acceptance of difference that values diversity as an opportunity for understanding.

We must strengthen our efforts to build a media that is critical of inherited assumptions yet tolerant of alternative perspectives; a media that provides the information that enables people to make well-informed decisions; a media that brings competing narratives into a shared story of interdependence; a media that responds to diversity through dialogue.

On World Press Freedom Day 2009, let us all commit to furthering press freedom and freedom of expression worldwide. We have the principles and frameworks to measure our actions and those of others. The fuller implementation of these standards is something we should all be working towards. A free press is not a luxury that can wait until more peaceful times. It is, rather, part of the very process through which they may be achieved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Matsuura', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Koïchiro Matsuura