



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the Award Ceremony of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano

World Press Freedom Prize

Jakarta, 3 May 2017

His Excellency Mr Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia,

Excellency Mr José Ramos-Horta, Former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize laureate,

Ms Bethlehem Isaak, daughter of Mr Dawit Isaak, Laureate of the 2017 *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize*,

Ms Cilla Benkö, Chair of the Independent Jury of the *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize*,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank His Excellency Mr Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia, for leading this global celebration of press freedom.

UNESCO has long worked with the Government and the people of Indonesia to strengthen media freedom, and I pledge we will continue to do so, to bolster this country's leadership in this vital field -- in the spirit of this country, in the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, unity in diversity.

Twenty years ago, UNESCO created the *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize* to honour a person or organization that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and promotion of press freedom, especially in the face of danger.

This Prize was named after a man whose example remains powerful still today.

Guillermo Cano Isaza was a Colombian journalist murdered in 1986 for reporting on drug cartels.

His career was a model of courage ... in defending truth ... in denouncing injustice.

He exercised his profession with integrity ... with his typewriter as his only tool.

Against violence, he nurtured the power of sharp and honest reporting.

Against brutality, he put forward knowledge and social commentary.

He was assassinated on 17 December 1986 in front of the newspaper of which he was editor.

His killing shocked Colombia, it shocked the world, and it still symbolizes today the struggle too many journalists face.

Guillermo Cano Isaza's voice was cut off -- but his example, and countless others, resonates to this very day.

His wife, Ana María, a journalist herself, kept his fight alive, and created the *Guillermo Cano Foundation*, whose generous support brings us here today -- I met with her recently in Colombia, and she expressed her deep gratitude to Indonesia and to all those here today.

The same determination underpins all UNESCO's action, to strengthen independent, free and pluralistic media, to bolster media professionalism, to ensure respect for fundamental freedoms, to enhance the safety of journalists and end impunity.

Across the world, killers are silencing journalists and walking free.

This tears at families and friends ... it undermines democracy and the rule of law ... it weakens societies as a whole.

Over the last decade, 900 journalists lost their lives on the job.

Only 7 percent of these cases can be considered resolved.

This impunity is a poison, a vicious circle that feeds on itself, and it must be stopped.

This is why UNESCO is spearheading the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, working across the world with Governments, parliaments, civil society, academia, the media.

We work with one goal, to end violence, to ensure justice, to defend freedom of expression ... to allow truth to reign -- to take forward the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and specifically SDG 16, for strong institutions, the rule of law and good governance.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* must remain the compass setting for all our action.

This is the spirit underpinning the *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize* -- to shine light on those who stand for fundamental freedoms and human rights, despite all pressures -- and I wish to thank Ms Cilla Benko and all members of the International Jury for their leadership and support.

In this spirit, Ladies and Gentlemen, today, we honour the courage of a person who has always stood up for free speech and a free press.

Dawit Isaak is the 2017 *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize Laureate*.

He was born in Eritrea, still part of Ethiopia, and he lived in Sweden as a young man and became a Swedish citizen.

When Eritrea gained independence in 1991 after decades of conflict, he decided to return, to contribute to the birth of a peaceful and just society, as a reporter for the country's first independent newspaper, *Setit*.

In 2001, severe repression led to his imprisonment, together with other prominent journalists.

Dawit Isaak has been detained without trial -- but his case has to be forgotten.

Today, UNESCO stands with all our partners to plead for justice.

Throughout its history, the award of *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize* has been followed by the release of several laureates, most recently of the 2016 Laureate Ms Khadija Ismayilova -- I sincerely hope the award this year can produce a similar prompt result.

I wish to conclude with the words of Mr Mazen Darwish, 2015 Laureate, who received the Prize while in prison in Syria and who was released several months later:

"No prison," he said, "is big enough to contain free speech."

In this spirit, I express my gratitude to the *Guillermo Cano Foundation* and the *Helsingin Sanomat Foundation* for their support, and I invite Ms Bethlehem Isaak, daughter of Dawit Isaak, to receive the Prize in his name.