



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 Award Ceremony of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano  
World Press Freedom Prize**

**Riga, Latvia, 3 May 2015**

His Excellency Mr Andris Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia,

Ms Ulla Koski, Vice President of the *Helsingin Sanomat Foundation*,

Mr Ko-Ko U, Chair of the Independent Jury of the *UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World  
Press Freedom Prize*,

Ms Yara Bader,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the President and Government of Latvia for their leadership in supporting  
UNESCO, its objectives and values.

UNESCO was created seventy years ago on the idea peace had to be built in new  
ways, in the minds of women and men, on the basis of human rights and dignity.

The Organisation was born from the conviction that taking this vision forward requires  
*"the free flow of ideas by word and image."*

It requires every woman and man to have opportunities to speak out.

We have gathered today, because we all share this vision.

We agree freedom of expression is a fundamental right that underpins all other civil  
liberties.

We agree freedom of expression is a key ingredient for tolerant societies, for the rule of law and democratic governance.

We agree freedom of expression is essential for sustainable development, to catalyse innovation, to bolster accountability.

We agree freedom of expression is vital for dialogue and reconciliation, for mutual understanding.

I see these values embodied in this very building, the National Library of Latvia, whose construction UNESCO supported since 1999, and whose foundation stone is freedom of expression.

We agree on all of these points, and this is why human rights must be the compass setting to the new global sustainable development agenda States are shaping to follow 2015

This is especially important in times of change and turbulence.

The media business is undergoing a revolution with the rise of digital networks and social media.

New actors are emerging, including citizen journalists, redrawing the boundaries of journalism – this was one of the themes of the *World Press Freedom Day* conference we held in Washington DC, in 2011.

Traditional news institutions remain agenda-setters – but they are deeply caught up with the digital revolution, even as radio remains a major source of information, as highlighted during *World Radio Day*, a UNESCO initiative taken up by the United Nations.

New technology is opening channels for new voices, including for women – but we have not seen rising gender equality in media content or decision-making.

In the midst of all this, new threats are rising.

These take different shapes -- from digital controls and blocking to physical threats.

We see also the rise of media campaigns, especially social media, that target young minds, seeking to lure them to extremism.

At worse, we see increasing violence against journalists.

We must not tire from repeating the figures.

Over the last ten years, 675 journalists have been killed.

Only one out of ten cases has been brought to justice.

All of this is a call to action -- we must respond.

We must respond by supporting quality journalism, by advancing gender equality, by enhancing the safety of journalists – the issues at the heart of this year's *World Press Freedom Day*.

As the specialised agency of the United Nations, this is UNESCO's mandate, to promote freedom of expression, everywhere, on all platforms.

This is the importance of the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, coordinated by UNESCO, led forward in Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, and South Sudan.

This is why I stand up every time a journalist is killed and call for justice.

To succeed, we must be relentless and outspoken.

This is why I have just appointed Ms Christiane Amanpour, CNN Chief International Correspondent, as *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Freedom of Expression and Journalist Safety*.

Today, more than ever, we need champions for freedom of expression.

This is why we have gathered today, to honour a person who has never relented in fighting for his freedom to speak, to publish, to be heard.

Mr Darwish is a lawyer and press freedom advocate.

He is the President of the *Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression*, founded in 2004.

He is a founder of the *Voice* newspaper and the independent news website *syriaview.net*, and, in 2011, he established *Media Club*, the first Syrian magazine about media affairs.

All of this highlights Mr Darwish's tireless commitment to promoting press freedom and freedom of expression.

Mr Darwish has been detained since 2012, along with his other colleagues, for his work and, unfortunately, could not be with us today – I call on the Syrian authorities for his release, in compliance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution of 2013.

Despite difficulties, in the most challenging circumstances, Mr Darwish has maintained an unwavering commitment to freedom of expression as a pillar of democracy, peace and reconciliation.

Quality journalism can prosper only when the media is free and independent, when journalists are safe to report without persecution, when impunity is the exception not the norm.

We need freedom of expression and press freedom to thrive -- for this, we need brave journalists, like Mr Darwish.

In this spirit, on behalf of the International Jury, I am pleased to award the *2015 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Day Prize* to Mr Mazen Darwish.

As you know, this Prize is named in honour of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist killed in front of the offices of his newspaper, *El Espectador*, in Bogotá, on

17 December 1986, generously supported by the *Cano Foundation* and the *Helsingin Sanomat Foundation* – I know Ms Marisol Cano, Director of the *Guillermo Cano Foundation* would have wished to be with us today.

In this spirit, we are honoured that Mr Darwish's wife, Director of the *Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression*, Ms Yara Bader, is here with us to accept the Prize on behalf of Mr Dawish.

Thank you.