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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day

3 May 2016

Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms – This Is Your Right!

Access to Information is a fundamental freedom and part of the basic human right to freedom of expression. Receiving and imparting information, both offline and online, is a cornerstone of democracy, good governance, and rule of law.

Last year, the world agreed on the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* to guide all efforts over the new fifteen years, to end poverty, to protect the planet, and to ensure prosperity and lasting peace for all. The new Sustainable Development Goals include a target on public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms -- two interrelated objectives that are key accelerators of progress across all of the new agenda.

At this time of turbulence and change across the world, including new challenges that require global cooperation and action, the need for quality information has never been so important – this requires a strong environment of press freedom and well-functioning systems to ensure the people's right to know.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the first formal Right to Information legislation was enacted in what is today Sweden and Finland. A historical breakthrough at the time, this still provides inspiration today, as Governments increasingly adopt laws that allow public access to information. Twenty-five years ago, in then newly-independent Namibia, the historic *Windhoek Declaration on Press Freedom* was adopted, paving the way to recognition by the United Nations of *World Press Freedom Day*.

In marking these anniversaries, *World Press Freedom Day* this year highlights the importance of free and independent journalism for advancing the 2030 Agenda. This

includes the safety of journalists, at a time when, tragically, a media professional is killed every five days. This cannot stand, and guided by the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, UNESCO is working with Governments around the world to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers everywhere.

In this spirit, I call on everyone to stand united in defending and encouraging press freedom and the right to access to information. This is essential for human rights and dignity, for our aspirations for sustainable development, for common determination to build lasting peace.

This Is Your Right!

Irina Bokova