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

3 May 2018

"Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." These words written by Thomas Jefferson in 1786, when he was fighting for the independence of his country, have a universal scope that transcends the historical moment of the foundation of the United States of America. Any State under the rule of law that respects individual freedoms, and particularly the freedoms of opinion, conscience and expression, relies on a free, independent press that is safe from censorship or coercion.

The ideal of a State under the rule of law calls for well-informed citizens, transparent political decisions, public debates on topics of common interest and a plurality of viewpoints that shapes opinions and undermines official truths and dogmatism. This shaping and informative power mainly falls to the press and the media in general, under all their guises and through various mediums.

UNESCO is actively involved in defending the freedom of expression, which is at the core of its mandate, and today celebrates the 25th World Press Freedom Day. The theme chosen this year is an open invitation to think of the relations between the media, justice and the rule of law. It is also an opportunity to examine the new challenges regarding the freedom of online press.

Freedom of the press, like any other freedom, is never completely secure. The development of a knowledge and information-based society via digital channels implies heightened vigilance, to ensure the essential criteria of transparency, free access and quality.

Quality information requires working to check sources and select pertinent subjects; it calls for ethics and an independence of mind. It thus depends entirely on the work of journalists. World Press Freedom Day is also an opportunity to highlight the crucial role played by this profession in defending and preserving the democratic rule of law.

In 2017, 79 journalists were assassinated worldwide in the exercise of their profession. UNESCO is committed to defending the safety of journalists and fighting against impunity for crimes committed against them. It also contributes to their training and helps the authorities in different countries to adapt their laws on freedom of expression to international standards.

On the occasion of this year's World Press Freedom Day, UNESCO is organizing an international conference for the defence of the freedom of the press, to be held in Ghana, during which the UNESCO-Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize will be awarded. The Prize bears the name of the Colombian journalist assassinated in 1986 for bravely denouncing the power of drug-trafficking cartels.

Today, we invite you to celebrate the freedom of the press and the work carried out by journalists, and to participate in the online campaign around the hashtags #WorldPressFreedomDay and #PressFreedom.

Audrey Azoulay