

Media Caucus Government Plenary Intervention - 22.2.2005

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The members of the Media Caucus, including Northern and Southern journalists of both the industrialized and developing worlds, have expressed their deep concern that the texts currently under consideration for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society make only a passing and ambiguous reference to the central place of the media in that information society.

We hold strongly that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be reaffirmed. Not only that, we concur in the statement by African and Arab and international journalists groups in their recent Declaration of Marrakech - held under the aegis of ORBICOM, the international network of UNESCO Chairs in Communication, and the Kingdom of Morocco, with the support of UNESCO -- that "The time has come to move from the promise of Article 19 to its universal implementation."

We recall that Article 19 states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers."

The member states of the United Nations are all committed to those fine words. They must all now honour those commitments. If they do not, then tomorrow's Information Society will prove to be an empty shell.

This December's catastrophic tsunami illustrated that, to be effective, international solidarity requires an immediate and truly free flow of information. The same principle applies to longer term development. There can be information without development, but there cannot be effective development without full and free information.

Journalists and their outlets in the North and the South must have the same opportunities to transmit their news and comments. That is a large part of what overcoming the digital divide is all about.

On that basis, the Media caucus calls for the insertion of the following text in Chapter Two:

Public and private aid providers and grantors should insist that there be freedom of expression and press freedom when they fund programs and projects to help media and to overcome the digital divide.