

**World Press Freedom Day 2013**  
**Safe to Speak: Securing Freedom of Expression in All Media**  
**Opening Remarks by James Heenan,**  
**OHCHR Cambodia Representative a.i.**

---

OHCHR is happy to be here with our co-organizers UNESCO, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Cambodian Club of Journalists, the Cambodian Communication Institute and the Department of Media and Communication of the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

In case you have missed it, we are here today to talk about *press freedom* or *freedom of the press*. We often talk about press freedom, and certainly we talk about it every year on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day.

*Meaning of press freedom*

But what does press freedom mean? Certainly, it means that we are allowed to read the press, without restriction. This is part of every human beings' freedom to seek and receive information and ideas of all kinds' as is set out in the human rights treaties. But press freedom also means the freedoms enjoyed by members of the press themselves, most importantly, their freedom to express themselves. This freedom is guaranteed by international law as well as by the Constitution here in Cambodia.

But freedom from what? International law and commentary talks of the press being:

- 'uncensored and unhindered';
- working 'without restraint',;
- 'with independence';
- 'without unlawful discrimination'; and
- of the freedom being 'regardless of frontiers', and 'through any media'.

Today we are focusing on those things that make media professionals feel "not free" to do their reporting. It could be unlawful censorship or arbitrary legal restraints, such as the threat of prosecution. It could be attacks on their independence, such as when they are coerced to write a story to favour a particular person or group. It might be through discrimination, where a media professional is not treated equally on the basis of their sex or , language, religion or political opinion. It might be an international journalist or media organization which is not able to report because of where they come from.

*Threats against media professionals*

Most seriously, media professionals feel not free when they feel not safe. Over 100 journalists were murdered worldwide doing their job in 2012. Many more were physically attacked. And we can only wonder how many more were intimidated by threats of violence to themselves, their families and their colleagues. Intimidated into not writing a story, filming an event, interviewing a witness.

Although many countries have far more terrible records in respect of safety of journalists than Cambodia, the situation here is not perfect. The 1990s saw a spate of

killings of journalists: Chan Dara, Thun Bun Ly, Nun Chan and others. Thankfully things have improved. However only last year we saw the murder of a journalist in Rattanakiri Province; a journalist who had received threats for his reporting on illegal logging.

To this distinguished audience, I do not need to talk about why press freedom is vital to a country's development. Nor how restrictions on and threats to journalists undermines this freedom. What we should be talking about is how to increase the freedom and safety of journalists in all countries.

*Ways toward greater protection of rights*

Let me make four short suggestions for your consideration during today's discussion.

1. First, ensure that the law - particularly the criminal law - protects and respects journalists' right to freedom of expression. For example, laws that too widely protect people's reputations, or public security or public order are inconsistent with the international law. What international law requires has been set out in this short text by the UN Human Rights Committee. OHCHR has translated it into Khmer. I urge you all to take a copy and read it.
2. Second, investigate and prosecute perpetrators of threats against journalists. This must be undertaken in an impartial, independent and competent manner. Impunity for crimes give a green light to others wishing to commit the same crimes. And just as threats against journalists can change behaviour, so the threat of prosecution can change the behaviour of those wishing to threaten, maim or kill journalists.
3. Third, ensure that journalists know their rights, provide them with support should they feel threatened and train them how to assess risk in their work, particularly young journalists.
4. Finally, the hardest of all: work to change culture. If the public feels that inappropriate pressure on journalists is a normal part of life, if people see independent journalism as a dangerous profession, if journalists think there are areas into which they cannot stray, if the public become used to people not being held to account for their crimes: then genuine press freedom will remain a distant goal.

No one wants to read or hear one-sided, inaccurate reporting. We all benefit from press freedom.

Thank you.