

International Mechanisms for Promoting Freedom of Expression

JOINT DECLARATION

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression met for the first time in London on the 26th of November 1999 under the auspices of *ARTICLE 19*.

- We recall that freedom of expression is a fundamental international human right and a basic component of a civil society based on democratic principles.
- An independent and pluralistic media is essential to a free and open society and accountable government. Respect for freedom of the media in our Member States, although very different from country to country, leaves much to be desired.
- Certain States have continued to exert and allow impermissible pressure on the media in their respective countries. The levels of harassment might be different but the general aim is the same: to suppress pluralism and open debate on issues of concern to citizens.
- Freedom of expression is not only a fundamental human right in and of itself, but it has ramifications for economic development as well. The media has a “corrective” function by bringing to the public’s attention corruption and inequitable practises. The absence of free media can lead to economic stagnation and improper practises by both governments and businesses.
- Implicit in freedom of expression is the public’s right to open access to information and to know what governments are doing on their behalf, without which truth would languish and people’s participation in government would remain fragmented.
- The media should refrain from any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to violence or to any other similar action.
- In many countries laws are in place, such as criminal defamation laws, which unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression. We urge States to review these laws with a view to bringing them into line with their international obligations.
- We affirm that States must ensure an effective, serious and impartial judicial process, based on the rule of law, in order to combat impunity of perpetrators of attacks against freedom of expression.

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