



# Association of Caribbean Mediaworkers

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## **MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, BAN KI-MOON ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2009**

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". On World Press Freedom Day, we reiterate the central importance of this right -- and the need to protect the journalists and media outlets on the frontlines of exercising it.

Attacks on journalists remain shockingly high in number. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 11 journalists have been killed in the line of duty so far this year. Among them was Lasantha Wickrematunge, a prominent Sri Lankan journalist assassinated in January on his way to work. I call on the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that those responsible for his murder are found and prosecuted. UNESCO has honored Mr. Wickrematunge posthumously with its World Press Freedom Prize for 2009, to be presented in a Press Freedom Day ceremony in Doha.

The CPJ also reports that as of 1 December 2008, 125 journalists were in prison. Some have been incarcerated for years – and some for more than a decade. Three countries – China, Cuba and Eritrea – account for half of those cases. I urge all Governments that have detained journalists to ensure that their rights are fully respected, including the right to appeal and defend themselves against charges.

Murder and detention are only the most blatant ways that journalists are silenced. Often, fear leads journalists to censor themselves. This, too, is unacceptable; journalists must be able to do their job free of intimidation and harassment.

I am also concerned that some Governments are suppressing Internet access and the work of Internet-based journalists and others using the "new media". Not surprisingly, blogging has flourished in countries where restrictions on media are toughest. Now, according to the CPJ, some 45 percent of all media workers jailed worldwide are bloggers. I urge all governments to respect the rights of these citizen journalists, who may lack the legal resources or political connections that might assist them in gaining their freedom.

The annual observance of World Press Freedom Day is also an opportunity to reflect on the important role of the media in addressing global problems. This year the focus is on the media's potential to foster dialogue, reconciliation and mutual understanding. Indeed, the press plays a vital role in challenging entrenched attitudes about religious, political or other differences among people. Media can also give voice to minorities and marginalized groups, thereby enlarging and even reframing debate within a community or across communities.



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In societies struggling to rebuild after conflict, free and responsible news media are essential for good governance and to promote confidence and trust between leaders and the public. Governments that stifle or otherwise obstruct this work are acting against their own best interests and that of their societies.

On World Press Freedom Day, I pay tribute to all those who work in difficult conditions to ensure that the rest of the world can have access to free and unbiased information. Let us renew our resolve to protect their freedom and safety, and let us proclaim again our commitment to free and independent media as an essential agent of human rights, development and peace.