

Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on World Press Freedom Day

Media freedom is an integral element of a flourishing democracy; the key to support transparent, accountable democratic governance, highlight vital issues of public concern and protect people's rights and freedoms. In times of a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, independent media play a crucial role in countering disinformation and ensuring citizen access to reliable and verified information, contributing to public health and safety. In today's world of the unprecedented fast-paced flow of information and a rapidly growing number of digital news sharing platforms, robust fact-based journalism is more critical than ever.

Press freedom and freedom of opinion and expression are among the 19 democratic principles of the Community of Democracies (CoD) Warsaw Declaration. At its 20th anniversary in June 2020, CoD Member States reiterated their commitment to these values by adopting the [Bucharest Statement](#), which emphasized that renewed adherence to democratic principles of the Warsaw Declaration, including public access to information, is vital to respond to the global pandemic effectively. They also underlined the essential role of the internet in providing information. CoD Member States called on governments to prevent internet shutdowns, ensure the broadest possible access to internet services, and take steps to bridge digital divides, including the gender gap.

The theme of the 2021 World Press Freedom Day promotes the conception of information as a public good, urging for more solutions to address the weakening economic viability of the news media, ensure transparency of internet companies, and enhance media and information literacy. As democracies work together to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and build an inclusive post-pandemic world, there is also a need to strengthen global efforts and develop comprehensive strategies to address both pre-existing and emerging challenges to media freedoms. Protection of journalists, funding of independent media, digital literacy programs, and ensuring media pluralism and freedom of speech while countering disinformation should be key issues on the democratic governance agenda.

When media freedom is at stake, democracy is at stake. Access to information is a fundamental human right.