

Ambassador John Phillips  
Remarks on "Freedom of Expression in a Complex New World,"  
at the University of Bari Aldo Moro  
Bari, Puglia Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Good morning. It's a pleasure for me to be here at the University of Bari and spend a few days in Puglia, one of Italy's fastest growing and most dynamic regions. During this visit, we have learned so much about the culture and history, tasted the incredible food – especially the olives! – and have seen first-hand what a powerhouse Puglia is becoming when it comes to entrepreneurship, environmental protection, and its commitment to developing a first-class skilled and integrated work force.

I am very grateful for the invitation to speak to all of you at this great university with a well-earned reputation, for smart, innovative students and faculty who are looking forward to their chance to lead Italy toward a prosperous future.

Perhaps some of you are here today? Okay, great!

Before I begin, I would like to thank Rector Antonio Uricchio and Professor Marina Castellaneta for their hospitality and for allowing me the opportunity to talk with you today.

I must also thank and acknowledge the great work of Colombia Barrosse and her team at the U.S. Consulate General, which is located in Naples but serves all of Southern Italy. It's a big job, and I'm grateful for all they are doing to build the partnership between the United States and the people of southern Italy.

Also, I am pleased that my wife, Linda Douglass, is able to join me here today. Linda is a journalist; she served in key roles at the Obama White House, and will be sharing her insights regarding the changing nature of journalism in the context of new challenges facing our world today.

Your professors have explained to me that most of you are aspiring journalists, attorneys and professionals in communication and international relations. I congratulate you on your choice of careers.

Between Linda and myself, we've had the privilege of working in all of

those fields – I worked as an attorney for most of my career, before President Obama asked me to serve as his chief diplomat in Rome. These professions offer tremendous opportunities for service to your country and your community, for intellectual exploration and growth, and for personal accomplishment and distinction.

As the death of twelve French journalists in the recent attacks in Paris and in Copenhagen show, it's also a difficult time to be on the vanguard of those who are practicing freedom of expression – as all communicators do, every day, by exercising their chosen craft. And it's never been a more important time for defenders of freedom of expression to stand up – and in that category I count legal practitioners and scholars of our laws and liberties, and diplomats who defend universal values like freedom of expression on behalf of their countries and fellow citizens.

The attacks in Paris have sparked an international debate – an important debate – about what we mean by freedom of expression, and why we defend it, and what kinds of speech we defend. In the course of that debate, it's become clear that many of us come to those questions

from different perspectives, from different historical legacies, from different cultural assumptions. But it's also become clear that across the democracies of the world, we share a core commitment to the freedom of speech, and in particular, to the absolute necessity of personal freedom of expression. That no matter what you or I might think as a matter of our own personal opinion about how someone else chooses to exercise their views, their right to do so is sacrosanct.

I'd like to focus today on how the world is responding to these and other challenges and in particular, how young professionals can get involved.

In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, President Obama, speaking about the solidarity that he and the American people felt for the citizens of France, referred to the attacks as “cowardly” and “evil.” Evil goes without saying. But I think it's important to note his use of “cowardly.” Terrorists like the perpetrators of the massacre in Paris who use violence to silence the speech of others and deny them their rights *are* cowardly. They're afraid – rightly afraid – that their poorly-thought-out conspiracy theories, their hateful views, can't win a debate conducted freely in the open air. They know, at some level, that the warped, extremist

ideologies they espouse will fail to convince others, whether those others are secular cartoonists, or devout Muslims who follow a mainstream interpretation of Islam that rejects senseless violence. They use violence precisely because they're unwilling to engage in an open dialogue – they use it to silence the rest of us, against whom they know they can't win a fair argument.

Contrast that with the courage shown by the journalists around the world who stood up in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks to defend their murdered colleagues and the principle of freedom of expression. Contrast that with the courage of journalists like Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff and Kenji Goto, who were kidnapped and brutally killed while attempting to bring the rest of the world news from the battlefield in Syria. In a year in which Syria became the world's most dangerous country for journalism – with at least seventeen reporters killed – they died trying to tell us the story of the Syrian peoples' suffering. They were killed by terrorists whose actions are prolonging that suffering, who want to control the narrative coming out of Syria and prevent the rest of us from getting objective information about what's happening.

The killers want to intimidate us – but Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff and Kenji Goto weren't intimidated, and the international community won't be intimidated by this barbarity either. This will only strengthen our solidarity and our resolve.

Incidents of violent extremism and intolerance in Europe, as well as on the battlefields of the Middle East, present a challenge that the international community will have to face together. Italy, the United States, and our allies are responding by re-affirming our values, by proudly declaring our choice to live in a world shaped by the values of democracy, pluralism and mutual respect, a world shaped by the free expression of ideas. Because we firmly believe that in any open exchange of views, our values will win out any day over the narrow, hateful ideologies espoused by the Paris attackers and the killers of thousands upon thousands of innocent civilians in Syria.

But this isn't just a project for governments. It's a project for all of us. It's a cause you can serve by getting the best education you can and using your time at university to challenge and question. Through education we learn to respect and benefit from differences of culture and perception – and in the end, we often gain mutual understanding. We become citizens of pluralist societies, comfortable with the coexistence of universal values and diverse political and cultural perspectives. It's a cause you can serve by getting involved in your local communities, by reaching out to new immigrants, by working to ensure the full participation of women and minorities who have struggled in the past against barriers to their inclusion in their country's political and economic and cultural life, whichever part of the world they live in.

And it's a cause you can serve as journalists, and lawyers, and practitioners of international communications by honoring the sacrifices of those who have gone before you in your chosen field. The best way to do that is to advance the universal values they spoke for – through ethical conduct, and objectivity, and curiosity, and respect for diversity of views, and above all, an unshakeable commitment to our right to an

open, free public dialogue.

Following Jim Foley's murder in Syria, President Obama pledged that "we will continue to confront this hateful terrorism, and replace it with a sense of hope and civility." He noted that hope and civility were "what Jim Foley stood for," saying that Jim was "a man who lived his work; who courageously told the stories of his fellow human beings; who was liked and loved by friends and family." In doing so, Jim Foley and his fellow journalists, including those killed in Paris, were serving a larger cause, as well as living lives well worth living. We all honor their memory by doing the same.

As we observe the 29th anniversary of the kidnapping and murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro -- for whom this great university is named -- let's also honor him, and the values for which he stood, in remembrance of his and all of the other voices felled by terror in the last century and this new one.

I thank you again for your hospitality and willingness to be a part of this conversation. And, now, let's move into the media's role in all of this before we open for questions.

Linda, how would you describe the impact of the developments of the past year on how journalism is practiced today, in the United States and around the world?