

"Defending Press Freedom in the 21st Century"

A Roundtable Discussion held by the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press and the National Endowment For Democracy's Center for International Media Assistance

May 3, 2011

A discussion moderated by U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, **David T. Killion**, with the participation of:

Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Esther Brimmer, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs

Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy

Adam B. Schiff, U.S. Representative for California's 29th congressional district,

Mariane Pearl, reporter, wife of slain journalist, Daniel Pearl, and author of *A Might Heart*

Wael Abbas, Egyptian journalist, blogger, and human rights activist

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

GERSHMAN: Thanks very much. My name is Carl Gershman. I'm the president of the National Endowment for Democracy, which sponsors the Center for International Media Assistance, and it's a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you here this morning.

It was four years ago on World Press Freedom Day that the Center for International Media was launched here on Capitol Hill.

As I mentioned in my remarks the other evening, we took this initiative to create a center at the urging of Senator Richard Lugar. Senator Lugar is one of the co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Freedom of the Press. His other Senate co-chair was just with us a moment ago. He retired, Senator Chris Dodd, but has been just a great friend of the NED. And in the House, of course, it's Adam Schiff and Michael Healey Pence.

[The Caucus] always been bipartisan and it's been very, very active. And as we all know, today is the first anniversary of an initiative by this Caucus and by the Congress, which is to create the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act.

It's been my pleasure in the last two days to get to know David Killion, the U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, and of course, Irina Bokova, the Director-General. And I can understand why there has been so much enthusiasm for the U.S. being part of UNESCO and working with UNESCO.

The purpose of the Center for International Media Assistance has been not only to be an advocate for free media and media assistance but also to strengthen its place in democracy assistance. The NED works across the board with parties, unions, business association, civil society and so forth, but media has always been very, very essential to this.

I mentioned the other night in my remarks that we are honored by the presence of four women at this conference whose husbands were journalists and were killed in the line of duty.

Of course, we are honored by the presence of Anna Maria Busquets de Cano, whose husband, Guillermo Cano, was murdered by mafia drug traffickers in 1986, in Columbia.

My dear friend, Myroslava Gongadze, whose husband, Georgiy, the editor of *Ukrainska Pravda*, was murdered in 2000. I always say that the demonstrations that took place in Ukraine following his murder were the beginning of the Orange Revolution that took place four years later.

And Mariane Pearl, of course, is with us, and also Sonali Samarasinghe Wickrematunga, whose husband, Lasantha Wickrematunga, was murdered in Sri Lanka in 2008, and received the Cano Prize posthumously in 2009.

Yesterday, I learned that somebody we at the NED have worked with, or at least his now widow, Siamak Pourzand, a journalist from Iran who had been in prison, committed suicide just this week. His widow, Mehrangiz Kar, is an Iranian lawyer, human rights activist and associate when she was in Iran of Shohreh Badi. She came to the United States in 2001, and, with Myroslava, was a member of the first class of Reagan-Fascell Fellows at the NED. She came with her daughter, her young daughter Azadi, and her husband remained in Iran and was in prison. And he, in despair and in protest against what happened in Iran, he committed suicide just this week. As you know, the Cano Prize is going to be given this afternoon to an imprisoned Iranian journalist, Ahmad Zeidabadi.

I got a statement from the daughter, Azadi. The name, Azadi stands for liberty, and in Iran, when freedom was denied to women, a lot of the daughters were named Azadi, or liberty. And she published an absolutely beautiful eulogy to her father. I want to read just one sentence in conclusion, which I think speaks for all the women, the widows who are here, whose husbands died serving the cause of press freedom. She wrote in this eulogy, "I love you dad. You will never die. You are a part of me. They were able finally to kill you but I will keep your legacy alive in this world. It is the most important promise I have every made in my life. You will live. You will live more than ever."

And I think it's fair to say that what we're trying to do here on World Press Freedom Day and in everything that we do to promote freedom of the press is keeping alive the memory of Guillermo Cano, Lasantha Wickrematunga, Georgiy Gongadze, Daniel Pearl, to keep alive that memory, which I think stands for the courage the journalists have who go into the most difficult situations in the world to report the truth about what's happening there to inform the world and defend the principles of freedom.

It's now my great pleasure to introduce David, Ambassador Killion. I learned yesterday that this is his home, the Congress. This is where he started. He was a Congressional staffer, somebody who was a great friend of the NED when he was up here on the Hill working for Tom Lantos and David Skaggs. And now he's our very distinguished representative in Paris to UNESCO. David.

KILLION: Thanks so much Carl. Carl's right, I'm very happy to be back here. I spent almost 15 years on Capitol Hill. And I have so many friends here today from the Foreign Affairs Committee and from other places, and it's really wonderful to be home.

I'd like to start by thanking the Center for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy for helping to organize this roundtable, and for inviting me and other representatives of the U.S. State Department to be here.

The State Department is deeply devoted to press freedom and one proof is that the United States is holding World Press Freedom for the first time in its 20-year history. This event is just one among a number of activities surrounding World Press Freedom Day, and we're very glad that you could join us for what I hope will be a frank and thoughtful discussion.

It's my pleasure to introduce our two State Department representatives—my colleagues, Dr. Esther Brimmer, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizational Affairs, and Mike Posner, our Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

Prior to joining the State Department, Assistant Secretary Posner was the founding Executive Director and then President of Human Rights First, a leading organization that works to protect the rights of refugees and supports those who defend human rights.

Assistant Secretary Posner was involved in the development of the global network initiative, a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at promoting free expression and privacy rights on the internet. I'd like to ask the assistant secretary to say a very few, brief words about the State Department's current efforts to protect the media.

POSNER: Thank you, David, and let me first say it's a pleasure to be here and I want to commend the Center for International Media Assistance and my good friend, Carl Gershman, from the National Endowment for Democracy. This is an important subject and a wonderful venue.

I want to start by saying that Obama administration is proud to work on, as a priority, the promotion of democracy and human rights around the world. We believe, as Secretary Clinton has said on numerous occasions, that sustainable democracies are our best allies and they're stable, prosperous societies that meet the needs of their own people.

As we've seen in the Arab Spring, people in that region and in fact everywhere in the world, are seeking to live in dignity. What people say on the streets of Cairo or Tunis is that they want to live in dignity. They want fairness. They want justice. They want economic opportunity and a chance to have a job, and they want a stake in their own society's political future.

I was in China last week and I heard much the same thing from Chinese activists, who were very much desiring the same opportunity in democracy. An essential element of sustainable democracy is media freedom.

And as we stop and reflect on the state of the media and the world and the opportunity to expand press freedom, I think we also need to remind ourselves, and I'm sure it's been discussed in some detail over the last couple of days, that when we talk about media and we talk about journalism today, part of it relates to the new media and the internet.

Secretary Clinton has given two major speeches on internet freedom. She said that, "The internet and the new electronic media are really the town square of the 21st century, a place for people to communicate with each other within a society freely and openly and to communicate across borders," and we're determined both through our diplomacy and our support, technical and otherwise, to help promote that kind of an open internet.

Secondly, I want to say very briefly is that part of what I do, part of what our bureau does in the State Department is to monitor what goes on in the world. And what's happening to journalists is a cause for great concern.

Already in this year, 2011, sixteen journalists have been killed. In the committee to protect journalists, which spends a lot of time and does excellent work in monitoring the treatment of journalists, has reported that, in the last twenty years since 1992, 545 journalists had been killed doing their job. And this is in addition to journalists who were killed, say, in war situations. These are targeted killings of journalists for doing their job, conveying information.

This year alone in the Middle East, 450 journalists have been assaulted. At the end of last year, there were 145 journalists in prison and more than 4,000 journalists in the last several years have had lawsuits brought against them by governments who don't like the fact that they're telling the truth.

Groups like Freedom House and the Committee to Protect Journalist monitor that, and we're indebted to them. We're also indebted to the Congress for passing the Daniel Pearl Act, which has given us the impetus to report now in a more comprehensive way and as part of our annual Human Rights Report on the state of journalists and the restrictions on their ability to operate.

We issued a report about a month ago. I urge you to take a look at it on our new website, humanrights.gov. We looked at 194 countries in the world. We will continue to vigorously monitor the state of press freedom in the world. Journalists and a free media are an essential piece in our efforts to help build democracy.

So thank you very much for having me here.

KILLION: Thanks very much.

Our dear friend, Adam Schiff, the congressman who is the author of the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act, a former colleague of mine from the Foreign Affairs Committee is here, and we're going to turn the floor over to him.

SCHIFF: Thank you, Ambassador. It's great to join you at the forum today as we honor World Press Freedom Day.

First, I want to thank the Center for International Media Assistance and the National Endowment for Democracy for organizing this event. Thank you not only for organizing the conference, but also for your commitment and dedication to an important issue that brings us together today.

While we address the topic of press freedom, I hope that we'll keep in mind the importance also of aiding grassroots advocates and their efforts to foster an independent media. The National Endowment for Democracy has been supporting these efforts now for 25 years or more and the Center for International Media Assistance has done an outstanding job of increasing awareness about the indispensable role a free and independent media plays in democratic societies.

Censorship, intimidation, imprisonment or murder of journalists violates not only the personal liberty of the journalists, but also the rights of broader society, which is denied access to ideas and information.

While an independent for holistic and free media is an essential guarantor of human rights, it also plays a critical role in democratic economic development by stimulating innovation, exposing corruption and spurring reform.

It provides citizens with information necessary to make informed political and economic choices and gives voice to women, youth and minorities along with dissident political opinions. [Journalists] also protect communities by helping citizens prevent and respond to disasters.

Today, as we observe World Press Freedom Day, we pay tribute to the thousands of men and women of the media domestically and around the world who strive every day, many of them in the face of extreme violence and repression, to report the news that we Americans understand in our bones to be the lifeblood of democracy.

Five years ago on World Press Freedom Day, I co-founded the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press, along with my colleague, Mike Pence, as well as Senator Dick Lugar and former Senator Chris Dodd.

The Caucus works to advance press freedom around the world by creating a forum to combat and condemn media censorship, as well as the persecution of journalists around the world. It's a very important task, and as a Caucus and as Americans, we definitely have our work cut out for us.

According to a Freedom House study released yesterday, the number of people worldwide with access to a free and independent media declined to its lowest level in more than a decade. In fact, currently, only one in six people live in countries with a press that is designated as free.

In recent years, authoritarian regimes are increasingly using licensing and regulatory frameworks so as to significantly limit independent broadcasting. In addition to censoring traditional media, repressive governments around the world have intensified efforts to exert control over new

means of communication, including satellite television, the internet and mobile telephones, as well as the news outlets that employ them.

In the past months, we have seen an unprecedented wave of protests and demonstrations sweep the Arab world. Two governments in Tunisia and Egypt have fallen to the demands of pro-democracy protestors, while others have come under intense pressure.

These uprisings have highlighted a level of violence and physical harassment directed at the press. We've seen journalists threatened, arrested, beaten, assaulted, and, in some cases, killed, while working on the frontlines in the fight for democracy and greater opportunity.

After two months of silence, Lara Logan, the CBS reporter, who was sexually assaulted by a mob in Cairo's Tahrir Square the night that President Mubarak stepped down in February, opened up about the brutal attack in an emotional interview on "60 Minutes."

Logan, whose attack shined a light on the dangers that female journalists face while working abroad, said she is proud to have broken the silence on what some female journalists have experienced but never talked about for fear they will be taken off the story.

ABC's Christiane Amanpour and Fox News Channel's Greg Palkot and Olaf Wiig, also faced physical assault and intimidation during the protest that swept Mubarak from his post—noble examples out of as many as a hundred journalists who were assaulted, threatened or detained during the uprising in Egypt alone.

Elsewhere in the Arab world, four New York Times reporters were taken captive by the Libyan government, soldiers outside of Benghazi, in March. After enduring harassment and abuse, they were thankfully released.

Less fortunate were award-winning photojournalists, Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros, two of the most seasoned photojournalists who were killed while covering a battle between rebels and Libyan government forces in the city of Misrata.

Theirs is not only a loss to their family and friends but a great loss to the profession. Freedom of expression cannot exist where journalists are not safe from prosecution and attack, which have an unnerving effect on the profession. Alarming, the failure to punish or even seriously investigate crimes against journalists has now reached appalling proportions, as reported by the State Department and borne out by major 2010 reports by the Organization of American States, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Freedom House and many others.

We have seen disturbing examples in our own hemisphere of what Ms. June Erlick, a former correspondent now at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard, called a much more insidious form of press repression.

Quoted by the Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2010" report, Miss Erlick elaborated that you never know where the censorship is coming from—through threats, attacks

on the streets, new laws or lack of access. The threats are always there and sometimes lead to self censorship even before the censorship begins.

Congress must remain vigilant and vocal in defense of freedom of expression everywhere, not just on this day, Freedom Press Day, but every day of the year. As co-chair of the Caucus, I was proud to witness the signing of the law, the Daniel Press Freedom Act last year, which spotlights governments that silence media opposition.

Congressman Pence and I introduced this bill in 2009, along with Senator Dodd in the Senate, because we believe that our government must promote freedom of the press by putting at center stage those countries in which journalists are killed, imprisoned, kidnapped, threatened or censored.

This morning we are here to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Daniel Press Freedom Act. This Act gives prominence to freedom of the press projects within the State Department and ensures a long-term holistic approach to journalist and media development. It also commemorates the life and work of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter who was so tragically kidnapped and murdered in 2002.

I'm pleased to be part of the discussion here today. Thank you all for your commitment to fostering independent media in developing and democratizing countries around the world, and I'm proud to turn the microphone back over to David Killion and David, it's great to be with you again.

KILLION: Thanks so much, Congressman Schiff. It's really truly wonderful to have both you and Mariane here today on the one-year anniversary of the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act.

Now, I'd like to introduce to you the State Department's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Organizational Affairs, Dr. Esther Brimmer. Dr. Brimmer is a Professor of Foreign Policy and has had a distinguished career, both as a diplomat at the State Department and as an academic.

She's an expert on transatlantic relations and was a member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. I'd like to invite her to say a few words on how we are working to advance a free press on a multilateral basis in the State Department.

BRIMMER: Thank you very much Ambassador. It's good to see you and I'd like to also greet the congressmen and all of our distinguished guests, and particularly those people from around the world who came to Washington to be a part of the World Press Freedom events.

I work on the relations between the United Nations and the United States, who are particularly honored that the United States is hosting this event with UNESCO, as part of our strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy and the values of press freedom.

We are gathered here at the U.S. Capitol on World Press Freedom Day to celebrate the work of journalists globally and to reflect upon the United States' core values of freedom of expression. We are also here on the one-year anniversary of the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act.

This important legislation, signed into law by President Obama, highlights the invaluable role that the U.S. Congress plays in support of press freedom and as a vanguard for freedom of expression globally.

I want to join my colleague, Assistant Secretary Posner, and others here today in thanking the members of Congress and all those who are instrumental in enacting this important bipartisan measure.

As President Obama has said, our foreign policy and multilateral engagement aims in part, "To see that all principles of justice and human dignity are upheld by all." Indeed, our work in the United Nations and other multilateral bodies does more than just contribute to U.S. national security or help generate shared responses to common threats and challenges. It is also a critical avenue for promoting global respect for universal values, which is an enduring American interest and one we pursue across the United Nations system, including at UNESCO. So the United States hosts UNESCO World Press Freedom Day for the first time.

We are raising the profile of press freedom and commemorating the important and too often dangerous work that journalists do worldwide to provide us with invaluable information and insight. But our work on this important issue does not begin and end with today's events. We collaborate closely with UNESCO *all year* on press freedom and the development of independent media, including through support for its International Program for the Development of Communication, which expands opportunities for free, independent and pluralistic media in developing countries worldwide.

UNESCO's programs to promote press freedom and freedom of expression, including for members of the press, are not our only multilateral efforts to protect this human right. When the United States won election to the Human Rights Council in 2009, our first priority was to transform what had been a poisonous and divisive debate on speech and expression into a concrete action to promote this freedom.

We have shown our commitment to do so in our consistent support for the U.N. international rapporteurs responsible for monitoring threats to that right. Most recently, we have successfully reframed the decade-long attempt to legitimize restrictions on offensive speech, in a matter which would have had an impact on journalists, instead on the basis to protecting religion into a concept that was completely contrary to human rights.

In contrast, in March 2011, we were able to fashion a *consensus* around the principle that speech should be promoted as a solution rather than penalized as a problem. And the consensus in Geneva on the universal desire for freedom of expression is borne out on the ground.

I was recently in Kenya meeting with a United Nations officer there. While on that trip, I visited the Dadaab refugee camps, which house displaced people from Somalia. And despite the many

basic necessities and services that were in short supply, the camp residents have put together a newsletter and I was happy to receive a copy.

This newsletter, organized by the refugee youth, is a shining example that wherever in the world you are, there's a story to be told. Journalists and citizen reporters bring light to these stories and share them with the rest of the world.

From refugees in the Dadaab camps, to journalist and citizen activists facing arbitrary arrest, detention and torture in Syria and other countries, I would like to acknowledge those individuals who work tirelessly and courageously, at times putting their own lives at risk, to inform the public about the issues of events that shape our world.

We all benefit from the sacrifice journalists and citizen reporters make in the name of freedom of expression and today, we honor their commitment. Thank you.

KILLION: Now I'd like to introduce our main speakers. I have the great honor of introducing my friend, Mariane Pearl. This isn't the first time our paths have crossed. We've worked together in Paris from time to time on matters related to journalist safety.

Mariane wrote a powerful memoir about the resilience of women in the face of her husband's kidnapping and murder. Daniel Pearl was a journalist with a Wall Street Journal when he was kidnapped and killed by Al-Qaida. A journalist in her own right, Mariane has received numerous awards.

Today, she'll speak about the daily threats journalists confront across the globe and discuss the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act, which turns 1-year-old this week. Mariane is also my friend. My wife, Kristin, and I were introduced to her in Paris by UNESCO's Global Ambassador for Literacy, First Lady Laura Bush, and we've been friends ever since.

Next on our panel, we have Wael Abbas, an internationally renowned Egyptian journalist, blogger and human rights activist. Mr. Abbas is a pioneer in the age of digital journalism, using his blog and YouTube to report incidents of mobs harassing women and broadcast videos of police brutality.

Mr. Abbas' investigative journalism has garnered awards from the International Center for Journalists and from Human Rights Watch. Mr. Abbas will speak today about the state of journalism in the Middle East and describe the role traditional and social media has played in the Egyptian revolution.

Finally, I have the pleasure of introducing my dear friend and colleague, Irina Bokova, the director-general of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Many people may not realize that UNESCO is the only U.N. agency with a specific mandate to promote freedom of expression.

Director-General Bokova consistently speaks out against the killing and persecution of journalists. UNESCO regularly raises awareness of the importance of independent media worldwide. The organization also supports hundreds of community-based media programs around the world, providing an essential counterweight to governments who attempt to suppress or control media.

After a distinguished career in Bulgaria, Irina Bokova was elected UNESCO's Director-General in 2009. Ms. Bokova has been a relentless force and outstanding leader for UNESCO. Today, she will recognize Ahmad Zeidabadi, the 2011 Cano World Press Freedom Prize winner, for his courageous work in Iran.

She'll also explain how UNESCO is working to promote press freedom and what challenges the organization is facing in those efforts.

Before I turn this over to our panel, I'd like to make sure we all acknowledge our very special guests today.

Can I first ask Mrs. Anna Maria Busquets de Cano to standup please? Mrs. Cano is the widow of Guillermo Cano and the founder of the Cano World Press Freedom prize. Mrs. Cano, your hard work has ensured greater recognition of the sacrifices journalist make in the name of press freedom.

Next, could Mrs. Myroslava Gongadze please rise? Mrs. Gongadze is a journalist and political activist, and was married to Ukrainian journalist, Georgiy Gongadze. Mr. Gongadze was kidnapped and murdered in 2000. Mrs. Gongadze has never stopped her fight to bring her husband's killers to justice and thus raise the curtain on impunity for those who commit violence against journalists.

I'd also like to ask Mrs. Sonali Wickrematunga to stand. Mrs. Wickrematunga's husband, journalist and human rights activist, Lasantha Wickrematunga, was assassinated in 2009, following a wave of journalist murders in Sri Lanka. At present, his killing remains unsolved. He was awarded the 2009 Guillermo Cano prize posthumously.

Please join me in a moment of silence to honor those journalists and their families who sacrificed their lives and wellbeing in pursuit of bringing the truth to the public.

Now, each of our panelists will make a brief presentation.

Mariane, you have the floor.

PEARL: Hello everybody. I'm very happy and honored to be here. Obviously, for me, it's a very significant day, and it's also an opportunity to thank Congressman Schiff and Senator Dodd who was here earlier but is greatly missed in this room.

And because obviously, for me, it has great personal significance but also for the world to show that United States understands and commits to defend and protect the work of those who really act on the values that define us as a nation.

You know, we've heard a lot about journalists, about killing and torturing and kidnapping of people. One may wonder why journalists are doing what they do, since the auspices are so grim. And certainly, it's not a job that will bring you money or bring you fame or glory.

The only thing it really can bring you is the certainty and satisfaction that you will live according to your own beliefs. If you think about it, in the course of a life, you might lose a lot. You can easily lose fame, you can easily lose your money. But you can't lose your beliefs if you decide not to.

In our introduction, we heard about the journalist who just died this week, who took his own life, and what his daughter said. His daughter said, "You will live on through me because I will pick it up." And this is happening all over the world. People are saying journalists are killed and others pick up their work. And they say, "You killed a journalist but you won't kill the story." This is really what is happening all over the world. And I think it is worth it for us that everyone here is working in a different capacity to help freedom of the press in the world.

But what are the values that make these people risk their life? I know a lot of friends who are investigative reporters in emerging markets and here in the United States, and I can tell you that none of them has any will to lose his life or to hurt the people who love them. So what is it?

I think that everybody has his own answer for that, but in a way, when you're a journalist, you put yourself in a position where you just cannot give up. And the good news is that the values that most of these people are fighting for—accountability, justice, freedom—are values that are non-negotiable. A lot of people are going to die for them, but mostly, we cannot live without them. And that's why [journalists] are doing what they're doing. So it's easy to say, well, it's just a lot of numbers. All these journalists killed, all these journalists in prison, but each time it's an individual, and I'm very humbled by what I hear all the time. And I understand very intimately the position that these people are in, and I can tell you that in a way, they represent the best of democracy and that they are at the forefront of democracy.

This winter, I spent some time with Oxford University, looking at what's going on in global journalism in emerging markets. So obviously, you know the world is growing very fast, and I think it's growing in direct proportion to our need to better understand what's going on.

When there's no freedom of the press, the stories are not being told. And today, they are a lot of stories that are not being told just because all these journalists are working alone, they're very isolated, and they're very vulnerable. And in a lot of cases, the only hope is that they can get international attention. That's their only hope for survival because it's harder to attempt to take the life of a journalist who's protected by the [Committee to Protect Journalists], by Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act or by any other global effort to protect the value of his work.

So, the good news is that there's a lot of things going on in emerging markets and people are being trained in a very, very serious manner, to practice the highest standard of journalism from the developing world. So I think that the world of journalism is going to change a lot, and the sources of news are going to change a lot.

There are a lot of places where Western journalists have no access to, and a lot of the people that used to help that have access are now bona fide journalists. So they're going to bring the news. They're going to sell the story to the New York Times, to the television. They're going to be the next in the forefront, which is in my opinion is good news because, why not?

But this is where the global effort is essential. So I think for me, the [Daniel Pearl Act] is more than a reaction. It is a pioneering law because of everything that is to come. And so I think that by supporting those individuals, we're doing more than just being good. We're also being smart, because I think that we need this information. We need to support this people.

*****SOME TEXT NOT AVAILABLE*****

KILLION: Thanks, Mariane.

We'll turn this over to Wael Abbas.

ABBAS: Good morning. Freedom of the media in the Middle East is such a huge thing to talk about briefly. But I'll use Egypt as an example that represents, in my opinion, all of the Middle East and maybe all the countries of the Third World.

Imagine yourself as a journalist that has no syndicate or union to protect you... You practice journalism in the street and you face dangers for like ten or twenty years, and yet your syndicate won't accept you because you didn't sign a contract with a newspaper or a TV station or something like that. And you can easily go to jail if the police arrest you while you are interviewing somebody on the street and they can accuse you of impersonating a journalist. And then nobody will defend you, unfortunately, although you have all these stories published in archives.

State security was very big in Egypt before the revolution. It was able even to interfere in what the ministers do. They can force them to do stuff or to ignore other stuff. It was the main body that censored media in Egypt. It tells newspapers what to publish, what not to publish. It has the ability to prevent a newspaper from being issued at all.

In Egypt, we have this law that doesn't allow you to publish a newspaper unless you have a proper permission from a committee council, and it is of course headed by a member of the National Democratic Party, the ruling party. Unless you have this permission, you cannot publish your newspaper.

But even if you publish the newspaper, and you get this permission, you still have to play by the rules. You have to tell them exactly your editorial policy and you have to know that there are certain topics that are taboo, especially the army, and, of course, religion and sexuality and freedom of religion and freedom for minorities in Egypt.

*****SOME TEXT NOT AVAILABLE*****

If you have offices in Cairo, you are subject to harassment by security. They can harass your cameraman in the street, smash his camera, arrest him, or confiscate the tapes. They can even visit the headquarters of the station in Cairo and confiscate the tapes that they want. They call the talk show hosts and tell them who to host and who not to host, and what topics to cover and what topics not to cover.

So, as you can see, it's a very dangerous environment for journalists and media people in Egypt. The social media and the bloggers came in handy because they don't follow these restrictions and the security doesn't know their headquarters to send them or to call them. And whenever they call them, [bloggers and social media practitioners] don't listen. They do whatever they want to do. They publish whatever they want to publish.

So they use this margin of freedom to push the envelope off the media in Egypt. They were trying to embarrass the traditional media in order to make them cover the stories they always avoid covering, in order not to get into trouble with the authorities, including the foreign media. I personally was working for an international news agency, and I was kicked out because I published a very controversial story about the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the late Egyptian president.

So, even the foreign media can be under the influence of security, because if they do not follow these rules, they can close down their headquarters in Cairo like they closed down Al Jazeera and some Iranian and other TV stations in Cairo. And they cannot give you access to officials if you want to interview an official about a certain story, or go to the presidential palace to cover somebody who is visiting.

The bloggers defied all these rules because they take journalism as a form of activism. It's not a business or a career for them. They're not making money or advertisements out of it. And they are trying to free the media in order to uphold the rule that is supposed to play, which in my opinion is to represent the people, solve their problems through exposure, make their voices heard by the people responsible.

When we had the revolution, we had people who had acquired skills and experience in blogging and media, to the extent that they were able to publish live video footage from Tahrir Square during the revolution and compete with big networks that need a lot of equipment to show the people live footage from the Square.

But this battle for freedom is far from over. Yes, we had a revolution and it was successful, but still, the media is a big obstacle. We still have state media, it's not dissolved yet. We haven't changed the law that governs issuing newspapers and starting TV stations or terrestrial radio.

There is great challenge for bloggers now. A blogger has been sentenced to three years in jail after the revolution by the army in a military tribunal, which is a very bad precedent, for publishing a story about the torture and human rights violation that the army has done to protestors in Tahrir Square who refused to go home after the revolution.

And the army is still sending papers to newspapers and TV stations telling them that you cannot publish anything about the army without consulting a department in the army called Moral Affairs. So, we need to get rid of that. We need to be able to form unions for journalists. We need to change the laws governing the work of the media in Egypt. Thank you.

KILLION: Thank you very much.

And now, I'm turning the floor over to our UNESCO Director- General, Irina Bokova.

BOKOVA: Thank you very much, David and Congressman Schiff. Dear friends, I am very honored to be here with you today at this discussion held by the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press and the National Endowment for Democracy. Thank you very much, Carl, for hosting this event. We were also together yesterday for the conference that UNESCO organized in the Newseum to celebrate the 3rd of May, the World Press Freedom Day.

Let me just say that UNESCO is the only United Nations agency with the specific mandate. I know there are other agencies also who promote human rights and some freedoms, but we do have it in our constitution that we have to defend the freedom of expression and that we have to work with the media to promote it as an important ingredient for democracy, for development and for human rights.

And I'm extremely happy that this year, we are here in Washington celebrating for the first time the World Press Freedom Day. Let me say that, for the whole of United Nations, it's an important event.

We did send a strong message signed jointly by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Mrs. Navanethem Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and myself, to defend the freedom of expression. And I would just like to quote one paragraph, because I believe it's also very pertinent to the event that we are having now, which is under the title of "21st Century Media: New Frontiers New Barriers."

And let me say that the message is that new threats are arising to the freedom of expression in a context of rapid change, and these combine with old forms of restrictions to pose formidable challenges to freedom of expression. New measures to block, filter and censor information emerge every day.

Challenges take different features but share the same face as violations of a fundamental human right. And then our declaration goes on to state that the United Nations is dedicated to ensuring

that the internet becomes a truly global public resource to which all have access and where all voices are heard.

This underlines the importance of quality content. This calls for action to defend the integrity and safety of online reporters. All principles of freedom of expression must be brought to the online world.

I thought it was important that we mention this because we are entering a new phase of defending this fundamental human right, and I hope the conference that is currently ongoing and possibly the Washington declaration that is still under negotiation, will put a very strong emphasis and trace the main orientations and directions to where we go from that day on.

And of course, tomorrow, in the United Nations headquarters in New York, once again with the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, we will have another important event with all the more than 190 Member States of the United Nations to celebrate this important day.

But let me say that we at UNESCO consider it important [to go beyond] advocacy. Of course, it's important to continue promoting this fundamental human right. We defend every single killed journalist and organize important events all over the world. Right now, we have more than hundred of events at this very moment to celebrate the World Press Freedom Day in 100 countries. And then we consider also important that we start by some fundamentals. We work through the International Program for the Development of Communication, for which we have the strong support of the United Nations and the Department of State, and I'm very grateful for this support.

We have concrete projects in putting media legislation in countries where such legislation doesn't exist, and I think what Wael Abbas just said, it's important. In fact, this was one of the first initiatives we took after the revolution in Tunisia and Egypt—to make an assessment of the state of the media freedom, freedom of expression in these countries, and our initiative, our proposal is to help these two countries while they begin drafting their new constitution and new legislation so that they are very confident and secure in putting the right legislation in terms of freedom of expression.

And then, of course, it's the activity that we make every year. Only this year, we have 67 projects in 67 countries in terms of training of journalists, promoting, helping them establish their own professional associations and going into the community media, the community radios, and working with the local authorities and reaching out to centers of excellence and universities.

I believe this is our strong responsibility to not only as we say declare the importance of this and make the advocacy but also to anchor it, to anchor it so deeply into different societies and into different political systems and into different countries.

And finally, I'm very, very happy and very grateful to Madame Cano that once again, she is with us. Thank you very much for coming once again to celebrate with us World Press Freedom Day and give the 2011 year's prize, Guillermo Cano prize. It is one of our most important and emblematic UNESCO prizes, which we will be giving to the jailed Iranian journalist, Ahmad

Zeidabadi. I think we also have in the audience some of the members of the jury, and this will be once again a very important event to speak out very strongly in favor of freedom of expression.

So thank you once again for inviting and thank you for hosting this important event.

KILLION: Thanks so much, Irina.

And now, it's time for us to take questions from the audience. If you can identify yourself and tell us who you're directing your question to, that would be very helpful.

Who's going to be first?

QUESTION: Firstly, I want to thank the U.S. for its support of media freedom, especially in Sri Lanka, and for its support of individual journalists who are now in exile here. I want to ask you what is the commitment of the U.S. to bring to book its naturalized U.S. citizens, who in their own countries like Sri Lanka are the perpetrators of media suppression, have been involved in the killing of journalists, and who, in a new U.N. panel report released just a week ago, have also been accused of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. These are U.S. naturalized citizens. And I'd like to know what your commitment is to bring them to book because they're still in government in Sri Lanka, for instance? Thank you.

BRIMMER: First, thank you very much for your question and also for being here. And indeed, the United States is very interested in the issues of accountability and strongly *supports* issues of accountability. We are reading the report that was recently released from the Secretary-General's panel that was investigating the situation in Sri Lanka. We think it is a very important report, and we're looking at it very closely and trying to understand the best ways to raise these issues of accountability, both in our bilateral conversations and in our multilateral areas, because we think it is an important area to look for the best ways to bring forward, long-term accountability we're looking particularly at that at this stage. Thank you.

QUESTION: I would like comments on the significant role of multinational corporations in owning media. And the effects—sometimes subtle, sometimes not subtle—on self-censorship, on the fear of antagonizing sponsors. As we find greater and greater concentration economically, there are implications for people's sense of freedom. How can we enable people to transcend those fears and what kind of structures can be setup to be helpful?

GERSHMAN: That's a very tough question on self-censorship. You know, one of the reasons the NED does not have offices abroad is because our freedom cannot be limited in that way and there are obviously companies when they go abroad, they have to make arrangements.

I was very pleased that Google in China defended its principles and did not allow the Chinese government to interfere with what it could put on its searchable database. And, you know, I just think that there has to be pressure on companies to defend these principles, so that if they're going to compromise those principles, especially the companies that are internet companies—that involve information and whose instruments can be used by governments to track people to repress freedom—that they have to be subject to public pressure and public embarrassment. In a way, free media becomes the instrument for doing this. People write about it and that this is not something which is a secret, but which is exposed to public opinion.

PENCE: One of the things that is interesting in this area is that a group of non-governmental organizations, academics and several companies have formed a multi-stakeholder initiative called the Global Network Initiative, looking at free expression and privacy on the internet.

And three companies have stepped up, Google, Microsoft and Yahoo. But that means a whole range of others have not. And our view is that companies, especially in the electronic new media, need to be working together. Government can do a piece of this but the private sector also has a role. And so we've been kind to encourage other companies to step up to the plate and take responsibility and establish best practices, both with respect to free expression and privacy.

QUESTION: We heard a lot about murder of journalists, harassment, and intimidation around the world. And the fact that the level and the number of journalists who were harassed in last ten years is rising every single day.

The problem I see here is the feeling of impunity of local government, of internal government, who would never investigate the killing or murder of journalists if they are basically involved in that killing. I'm fighting against impunity for ten years, and I was successful in bringing four government officials to justice. They are serving time in prison in Ukraine. And now a President of the country who ordered the killing of my husband is under investigation.

But I think that it's very important to understand that promotion of journalism is very important, but defending journalists, I mean formally defending, having a mechanism to defend, that's important to establish.

And I would like to ask you, what is your stand on the need of such an inter-governmental mechanism to investigate harassment and murder of journalists in countries, of something that can work—because in internal justice doesn't work and we see it clearly. Thank you.

KILLION: Thank you very much.

Irina, would you like to try to take us out of that question?

BOKOVA: I would say that the question of impunity is very important. And it's not only a

condemnation, but sometimes we try to exert pressure on governments. Just recently, for example, I was in the Philippines, and we know there was a case of Filipino journalists killed, and I spoke with the President [about it]. And even before I spoke, he knew that I was going to [address it], and he told me that they had started internal investigations there, thus recognizing the importance of this fact.

So I think that if you look at the all-over tendency in the world, because we monitor the situation, I would say that there are some positive signs. I'm talking about the global picture. Overall, there is a high recognition of the fact that we cannot tolerate impunity. In more and more countries, there are investigations which have started. In more and more countries, there are already some sentences. But I'm speaking of the overall picture.

As to the other, it is difficult to say. I believe it's important to strengthen national mechanisms. I think it's very important to strengthen and to speak about a real system of justice, of independence of the system, of prosecution, and of having the necessary the legislation in place. Because in some cases, there is not even the special legislation, and when we speak to some governments, there are not even the necessary legal procedures in order to start this.

I believe first and foremost that we have to work so that [mechanisms are developed internally]. But of course, I guess, through the different mechanisms of the High Commission for Human Rights, because they have the specific mandate also to work in such cases, maybe the situation might be improved.

KILLION: Thank you very much.

Esther Brimmer, do we need new international mechanisms or do we need to do more of the ones we already have?

BRIMMER: I would think that we actually have some very important international mechanisms that the Director-General just mentioned, which in particular are the special rapporteurs that come out of the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations system, that have an important role to play.

We think that these often called "special procedures" but which include the special rapporteurs and others, are actually able to have investigations, to explore situations in specific countries. We think this is also a very important mechanism for trying to highlight accountability.

KILLION:

I think we'll wrap up and break into a more informal session.

Thanks everybody so much for your participation.