*Information Note*

*On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day the Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order, Alfred de Zayas, reminds both private and public media that they hold an important trust for all of us, that they are obliged pursuant to article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to ensure objective reporting and pluralistic dissemination of views so that civil society can arrive at their own opinion and thus exercise their right to public participation as envisaged in article 25 ICCPR.*

*George Orwell already warned us about “newspeak” and the tendency of both the public and the private sector to manipulate words, to disseminate false or incomplete information, what today we know as “fake news” and “disinformation”. Indeed, it is not only governments that manipulate public opinion, but also private vested interest which aims to influence it. If articles 19 and 25 mean anything, they mean that in a democratic society, everyone must have access to reliable information so that a personal opinion can be formulated. It is this personal opinion that is protected by freedom of expression. It would be very sad if the only freedom of expression recognized by the law were the freedom to echo whatever nonsense we heard last night in the telejournal or read in the newspapers, in Facebook or Twitter.*

*The danger of neologisms, euphemisms and word-manipulations was recognized by Lewis Carroll in Alice in Wonderland:*

*“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”*

*“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”*

*“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”*

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 1872[[1]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=wm#m_6517998539814883821__ftn1)

[1] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (Hayes Barton Press, 1872), p.72.

Language indeed means something. The word can be more powerful than the sword. But language can also be emptied of content and used arbitrarily, today to mean something, tomorrow something else.

All journalists should always be mindful that what they write impacts society and may lead to reconciliation or more violence. Hence, they should keep in mind Article 20 ICCPR that prohibits propaganda for war and incitement to hate. Responsible journalists must report the truth without engaging in chauvinism or racism.

On World Press Freedom day we must honor the work of journalists in many countries who labor daily to obtain information that we so urgently need. Many journalists give their lives in this effort. The number of journalists killed or jailed is appalling.

I wish to salute the important work of whisteleblowers, including the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, who uncovered the scandals associated with tax evasion in tax havens including Panama and the Bahamas. I salute the work of whistleblowers like Edward Snowden who showed the world the degree to which our privacy is breached on a daily basis. I salute the work of Julian Assange, who was the recipient of many human rights awards, until he dared disclose crimes committed in Iraq, and who published the secret environmental, health, and investment protection chapters of international investment treaties, such as TPP, CETA and TTIP, thereby giving civil society the opportunity to discuss them and oppose them, even at a very late hour. In a very real sense, whisteleblowers are human rights defenders.

As I did in my report to the General Assembly 2016 (A/71/286), a Charter on the Rights of Whistleblowers should be adopted so that whistleblowers are no longer subjected to persecution and prosecution but do receive effective protection. The weight of the law should fall on the persons whose criminal acts are uncovered by the whistleblowers. But those who commit war crimes, those who engage in corruption, those who conspire to defraud States of their tax revenue, continue to enjoy impunity.

On World Press Freedom day, let us salute the journalistic profession and encourage journalists, bloggers, whistleblowers to continue helping the world advance toward a more democratic and equitable international order, toward justice and peace based on truth.