

Media Update

12 May 2022

UNESCO PRESS RELEASE

UNESCO commemorates World Press Freedom Day 2022 in Pakistan

Under the UNESCO Multi-donor Program on Freedom of Expression & Safety of Journalists, the World Press Freedom Day (WPFJ) was celebrated on May 12, 2022 in Islamabad. The event was organized in partnership with the European Union Delegation to Pakistan, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Embassy of Sweden in Pakistan and High Commission of Canada in Pakistan. The event was attended by more than 50 participants from civil society, youth, media professionals, academia, international organizations, and diplomatic missions.

This year's theme – "Journalism under Digital Siege" highlights the multifaceted ways in which recent developments in surveillance by various actors, as well as big data collection and artificial intelligence (AI), impact journalism, freedom of expression and privacy. Today, media is faced with varying challenges, that not only threaten its existence but impact its viability as well. This can have adverse effects on freedom of expression and right to privacy. Taking stock of the situation the event explored the crucial role of media in these changing times and ensuring that its freedom and independence remain intact.

The Honourable Minister of State, Dr. Musadik Malik graced the event with his presence and emphasised that democratic principles must be applied to information systems and knowledge sharing to uphold fundamental freedoms. Mr. Paul Godbout, Chargé d'affaires at the High Commission of Canada in Pakistan shared remarks on behalf of the High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan and highlighted the importance of protecting press freedom to enable informed decision making by citizens and to hold governments accountable. While explaining the important role of national commission in safeguarding the fundamental rights in the country, Ms. Rabiya Javeria Agha, chairperson

National Commission for Human Rights, mentioned that states that the power of journalism is undeniable as it has the potential to become voice of the voiceless and the vulnerable. She particularly raised the issue of risks and violence faced by women journalists that stated it must be addressed through policy measures.

The World Press Freedom Day event also entailed a panel discussion titled **“Striving for freer, safer digital spaces”**, on the right to privacy, freedom of expression, data protection and media viability, with a special focus on free press and its challenges. The panel consisted of experts in the field of data privacy issues in Pakistan. The panel was moderated by Aftab Alam, Executive Director Institute of Research, Advocacy and development (IRADA) and a legal expert in media development and legislative reforms. Panellists included Nighat Dad, founder of Digital Rights Foundation and Bilal Abbasi, General Manager Ignite. The panel culminated in recommendations for greater accountability, transparency and a multistakeholder approach to ensure a balance between regulation of digital media landscape and safeguarding fundamental rights online as well.

The event concluded by sharing UNESCO’s upcoming research findings in partnership with Media Matter for Democracy, **“Media Development and Media Viability Indicators Assessment”** in Pakistan. UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) launched this global initiative to develop a set of indicators aimed to strengthen media development, freedom, and sustainability.