



WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY STATEMENT – 3RD MAY 2020

The designated theme for World Press Freedom Day 2020 is “Journalism Without Fear or Favour”. Now more than ever, the relevance of such a theme is realized. In an age of disinformation where Truth is already compromised, largely due to social media, journalists and media houses are grappling with the reality of a New Normal in a COVID-19 world. UNESCO states that, “Based on a machine learning analysis of 112 million public social media posts, in 64 languages, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers at the Bruno Kessler Foundation found 40% of posts came from unreliable sources.”

Globally journalists and the media have proven our significance in a time of crisis. The media is indeed the bridge between citizens and government, with independent media taking the lead as the most credible player. The media has proven itself as an essential service as we inform the public we serve.

As an industry we face grave economic uncertainty like most other business sectors. New business models and innovative approaches may arise. In the past, in other times of slow economic growth, we have seen consolidation, mergers and acquisitions. What the media will look like in a reshaped economy is undetermined. The advertising revenue decline in March and April 2020 is approximately fifty percent.

A policy brief by the UN Secretary-General found that the COVID-19 public health crisis has led to a “human rights crisis with impacts related to a range of human rights, including the rights to free expression, access to information, and privacy.” Transparency and freedom of information is critical for the media to continue to do its job effectively.

We salute our media workers who have risen to the strain and stress of this time to fulfill their responsibility to ensure our citizens stay informed. We have had reports of obstacles to accessing information and we hope that the government will continue to work towards communication models with regularly updated data and respond to requests for further information. This pandemic has proven the importance of data and immediate information. The daily press briefings regarding the pandemic is laudable and we commend the government on this forward thinking approach. There are many other countries where such a forum is non-existent and this blurs freedom of press. In other parts of the world there have been arrests and assaults on journalists for reporting on COVID-19.

Many have said that the COVID-19 pandemic shows that our humanity is on trial. It is a time when we need to appreciate that doing the right thing together is what can make the difference for our existence. Life will never be as it was before and we must adapt. What remains the same is the commitment of our media to the public’s right to know.

As we commemorate World Press Freedom Day 2020, we salute our media colleagues globally who have been in the front lines, sacrificing their own personal and psychological safety to get the stories out to the rest of the world.