

## **Right to know: an entitlement for all, not a favour (Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, Frank La Rue, on World Press Freedom Day, 3 May 2010)**

GENEVA – On World Press Freedom Day, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, urges all countries to ensure the full enjoyment of the freedom of information and the right to know:

“It is imperative that we talk about a ‘right’ wherein ordinary citizens can get information as an entitlement, and not as a favour. Watering down what is now universally regarded as a fundamental right to passive concepts like ‘access’ or ‘freedom’ will blur the focus and dilute the effectiveness of any concerted effort to open up records.

World Press Freedom Day serves as an occasion to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate the benefits of a free and independent press; and to defend the media from attacks on their independence. This year’s topic for the World Press Freedom day is ‘Freedom of information: the right to know’. Freedom of information is indeed intrinsically linked to press freedom. It is essential to allow the media and journalists to fully play their role in promoting accountability and transparency of Government conduct. In turn, a free and independent press is crucial to ensure the right of all people to know.

The Special Rapporteur wishes to state again that the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kind, regardless of frontiers, and through any media of his or her choice, set forth in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reiterated in article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is not merely a corollary of freedom of opinion and expression: it is a right in and of itself. As such, it is one of the rights upon which free and democratic societies depend. It is also a right that gives meaning to the right to participate, which has been acknowledged as fundamental to the realization of all human rights.

It is equally important to recognize the ‘right to truth’ in relation to human rights violations: victims, not only have the right to access current or historical archives and documents to ascertain how and why the violations occurred and who was responsible, in order to hold the perpetrators accountable, they are also entitled to make this information public if they wish so, to pay tribute to the memory to those whose right to life was violated.

The Special Rapporteur wishes, however, to emphasize his continuing concern about the tendency of Governments and their institutions to withhold from the people information that is rightly theirs, in that the decisions of Governments, and the implementation of policies by public institutions, have a direct and often immediate impact on their lives and may not be undertaken without their informed consent.

The Special Rapporteur commends the decision taken by an increasing number of countries to adopt laws recognizing a right to access information. On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, the Special Rapporteur urges all States to review existing legislation or adopt new legislation on access to information in conformity with international standards, as a way to ensure the full enjoyment of the freedom of information and the right to know. The Special Rapporteur further urges all States to establish mechanisms and institutions to give full effect to the right to access information, and to develop widespread awareness campaigns to inform the public on this right and its exercise”.