



## Factsheet

# World Press Freedom Conference 2020

*Journalism without Fear or Favour*

Photographer: Thomas Hawk

#WorldPressFreedomDay | UNESCO & the Kingdom of the Netherlands | #PressFreedom | UNESCO & the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Netherlands and UNESCO will host the World Press Freedom Conference (WPFC) in 2020. The event will take place on 22-24 April at the World Forum in The Hague, a city known for its role in international peace and justice. Both organisers urge those active in the field of press freedom to participate. The WPFC will also feature the first-ever World Press Freedom Festival. At least 1,500 participants from all over the world are expected, including a number of high-profile journalists.

WPFC 2020 will be followed by the annual World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) on 3 May. The theme of this year's celebration is '*Journalism without Fear or Favour*'. The Conference seeks to promote the idea that we need to stand up for free and independent media and protect journalism from new and existing forms of control. With the independence and freedom of the media under attack in so many countries, this is now more relevant than ever.

### INSPIRING POSITIVE CHANGE

By putting this issue on the agenda of world leaders, by inspiring and educating, and by mobilising people to take action, WPFC and WPFDD 2020 call on all parties concerned to contribute to positive change – including governments, journalists and media outlets, the judiciary and legal sector, internet businesses, civil society, academia and young people.

## World Press Freedom Day

Every year, on 3 May we take a moment to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom, assess the state of press freedom around the world, defend the media from attacks on their independence and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives while on the job. WPFDD was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a recommendation adopted at the 26th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991. This in turn was a response to a call by African journalists who in 1991 produced the landmark Windhoek Declaration on media pluralism and independence.

This special day acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. At the same time 3 May is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics. Just as importantly, WPFDD is a day of support for those in the media who are targets of forces that seek to restrict or abolish press freedom. It is also a day of remembrance for those journalists who lost their lives in the pursuit of a story.

## World Press Freedom Conference 2020

In 2020 we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the 75th anniversary of the Netherlands' liberation. That year, the Netherlands will also have a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. It is only fitting then that this country will be joining hands with UNESCO to organise WPFC 2020.

During the conference the 2020 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize will be awarded to a journalist that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence of press freedom, often at risk to their own lives. This prize has been awarded annually since 1997.

WPFC and the prize ceremony will be followed by the annual WPFDF. The conference seeks to ensure that journalists can work freely and independently, now and in the future.

Discussions will be structured around four topics:

1. Editorial independence and media capture
2. Diversity and inclusion in media
3. Independent journalism and media in the digital age
4. Journalism without fear or favour

WPFC will kick off with a reception on Tuesday 21 April in The Hague City Hall. On 22 and 23 April there are alternating plenary and break-out sessions in the World Forum. On 24 April the latter venue will be transformed into a festival area.

## Journalism without Fear or Favour

The phrase ‘without fear or favour’ comes from Adolph S. Ochs, the founding father of the modern *New York Times*. In 1896, he bought the failing newspaper, which was competing against sensationalistic and tabloid-style journalism. Ochs was determined to run a paper that would be ethical, impartial and independent, and upon buying the *Times*, he published a declaration of principles outlining how he intended to run the newspaper. These words – ‘without fear or favour’ – are at the heart of his philosophy.

Over 123 years later, the phrase has evolved to become synonymous with the concept of journalist independence and impartiality. It is an affirmation that reporters will undertake their work without special deference towards any particular person, group, opinion, ideology or interest. It is a phrase well-known around the world and has often been used in titles of books, essays and papers. It is a commitment that journalists make, and it reflects the standards of the industry. With the independence and freedom of the media under attack in so many countries, these words are now more relevant than ever.

## Human rights and press freedom

Freedom of expression is a key human right. It is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy where people can live freely. Journalists play an important role in this regard, as an independent source of information and watchdog. They must be able to do their work independently and in safety. Unfortunately, this cannot be taken for granted. The independence of the media is under pressure. Even now, journalists are being intimidated, threatened and murdered, including in Europe.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the independent position of journalists and media organisations worldwide in a variety of ways, with a particular focus on:

- **Prevention.** For example, fostering a culture in which freedom of expression is considered self-evident.

- **Protection.** For example, offering online and offline security training courses, having effective legislation in place and providing a safe haven for threatened journalists.
- **Prosecution.** For example, combating impunity for people who threaten or attack journalists.

At international level the Netherlands strengthens freedom of expression in a variety of ways:

- by putting the issue at the top of the agenda of various international organisations.
- by working with NGOs that promote freedom of expression.
- by supporting projects related to freedom of expression through its Human Rights Fund.

The theme of WPFC 2020 is in line with the Netherlands’ human rights policy and its policy on foreign trade and development cooperation. In a parliamentary motion by MPs Lilianne Ploumen (Labour Party) and Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66), the Dutch House of Representatives called for a greater focus on the growing threat to the free exercise of journalistic activities. Eager to put these issues on the international agenda, Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok accepted the House’s proposal to host WPFC 2020.

## UNESCO

Freedom of the press and freedom of expression are at the heart of UNESCO’s mandate. UNESCO believes that these freedoms allow for mutual understanding, which is the foundation of sustainable peace. World Press Freedom Day serves as an occasion to inform the public about violations of press freedom and remind people that in dozens of countries around the world, publications are censored, fined, suspended and closed down, while journalists, editors and publishers are harassed, attacked, detained and even murdered. It is a day to encourage and develop initiatives in favour of press freedom.

[www.en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldpressfreedomday](http://www.en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldpressfreedomday)  
[www.rijksoverheid.nl/WPFC2020](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/WPFC2020)  
[www.government.nl/WPFC2020](http://www.government.nl/WPFC2020)  
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This is a publication of the  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
Postbus 20061 | 2500 EB The Hague | The Netherlands

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