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**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of
World Press Freedom Day**

3 May 2021

Thirty years ago today, journalists, editors and publishers from across Africa gathered to draft a call for press freedom, the “Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press”. This landmark Declaration aimed to make the free flow of information a public good – a goal which still resonates today.

Since 1991, the information landscape has undergone tremendous changes, especially with the advent of the Internet and social media. We now have incredible opportunities to express ourselves, stay informed and connect with others. But we are also facing a rise in misinformation and hate speech, the upending of media business models and the concentration of power in the hands of just a few private companies.

The pandemic has underlined the need for reliable information. It is independent journalism that has helped us make sense of this crisis. Journalists have reported from the field, even at great personal risk. Many have been threatened, detained, harassed – especially women. Sixty-two journalists were killed for their work in 2020, and many more lost their lives to COVID-19. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

The pandemic has also exacerbated existing challenges, with numerous media now facing financial losses. The power of Internet platforms has been further entrenched, with lockdowns forcing much of daily life online. And false information and rumours have flourished, in some cases with fatal consequences.

The theme of this year’s World Press Freedom Day, “Information as a Public Good”, underlines the indisputable importance of verified and reliable information. It calls attention to the essential role of free and professional journalists in producing and disseminating this information, by tackling misinformation and other harmful content.

This theme ties in with UNESCO's efforts to ensure the long-term health of independent, pluralistic journalism, and the safety of media workers everywhere, including through the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

As part of these efforts, we are working to create more transparency on online platforms in areas such as content moderation, while respecting human rights and international freedom of expression rules. We are equipping citizens with the Media and Information Literacy skills they need to navigate this new information landscape, so they can avoid being duped or manipulated online.

Today, we are also working to ensure that this changing landscape is reflected in the principles enshrined in the Windhoek Declaration, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of this essential text at the World Press Freedom Conference being held in Windhoek, Namibia, on 2 and 3 May.

As we mark World Press Freedom Day, I call on everyone to renew their commitment to the fundamental right to freedom of expression, to defend media workers, and to join us in ensuring that information remains a public good.