

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

### Two to One Concur – Governments are Winning the Information War

**London, UK – 1 May 2009.** Governments are becoming increasingly skilful at controlling the international media in times of war, a group of senior media practitioners, commentators and press freedom experts have declared. In a vote of more than two to one, it was agreed, “Governments at war are winning the battle for controlling the international media”.

On 1 May, at the annual World Press Freedom Day London debate, Evening Standard columnist **Andrew Gilligan** and NATO spokesperson **Jamie Shea** teamed up to argue that in times of conflict and turbulence, governments are winning the battle of controlling the international media. Gilligan opened the debate, saying that recent history has shown that during combat operations, real time reporting clearly favours governments. Shea stressed that governments are quick learners, ensuring that when they try to influence media coverage of military interventions, past mistakes are not repeated.

Gilligan and Shea were challenged by **Alan Fisher** of Al Jazeera English and **Jeremy Dear** of the NUJ, who claimed that governments have failed to prevail in this ongoing struggle. Fisher stressed that over time, the commitment of outstanding journalists ensures that the truth emerges. “It just takes one to break the damn, to uncover the truth. We might not have the full story at the start, but it will get out,” said Fisher.

**Sharif Nashashibi**, Director of Arab Media Watch, pointed to new technologies, such as camera phones, as the most important weapon in this war, allowing people to circumvent governments, bringing revealing images and information to light. **Norbert Mbu-Mputu** brought his powerful experiences in the Democratic Republic of Congo to argue how many governments are winning this battle, often by force and intimidation.

The volley of arguments was moderated by the debate Chair, William Horsley (Chair of the Association of European Journalists, UK). The debate was broadcast live online to a global audience. The final vote on the motion came to 38 in favour and 15 against, with 9 abstaining.

At the opening of the debate, Annabel Symington was announced as the winner of the 2009 World Press Freedom Day Student Journalism Competition. Annabel, an MA student studying International Journalism at City University, was honoured for her article on the use of local sources in coverage of the Gaza conflict in early 2009.

The 2009 World Press Freedom Day London debate was organised by the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the Press Freedom Network, with the support of the Frontline Club.

## ENDS

### Notes to Editors

**For further information, please contact Ian White at the UK National Commission for UNESCO on +44 (0)20 7766 3492 or [iwhite@unesco.org.uk](mailto:iwhite@unesco.org.uk).**

- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to the Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.
- **The Press Freedom Network** is a loose grouping of organisations, publications and individuals who are sympathetic to or directly interested in the cause of media freedom. It contributes to the organisation of the annual World Press Freedom Day event (usually a debate) on May 3, in addition to discussing other topical and relevant issues. The network operates mainly via an effective e-group but with occasional meetings (in London); and acts primarily as an information and debating forum rather than seeking to make policy decisions binding to any member.
- **The Frontline Club** was established over three years ago and is aimed at supporting independent journalism. The Frontline Club now have over 1200 members - mainly journalists and photojournalists specialising in foreign news - from all major international news media including BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, Channel 4, CBC, all British quality dailies, The Economist, The New Yorker, Newsweek, The New York Times, and the Washington Post, to name but a few. In this time the Club became a true hub for everyone involved with foreign news, people who cover it, comment on it, write reviews, or interview political leaders. It is the place where people meet to discuss things that matter and to have fun along the way (the Club houses two bars and a restaurant).
- **World Press Freedom Day (3 May)** is a day to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession. 3 May was proclaimed World Press Freedom Day by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a Recommendation adopted at the twenty-sixth session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991. It serves as an occasion to inform citizens of violations of press freedom - a reminder 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.