

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 3 May 2007, 10.00am GMT

UK National Commission asks on World Press Freedom Day “Is world press freedom in retreat?”

London, UK – 1 May 2007. The UK National Commission for UNESCO is marking the Day with a debate at Portcullis House in London with the motion “World press freedom is in retreat”. The debate aims to focus attention on the global threats to media freedom and is organised in association with the Press Freedom Network and with support from the Open Society Foundation.

On the 53rd day since the disappearance of BBC journalist Alan Johnston in Gaza, a wide range of high-profile speakers will speak for and against the motion including:

- Miklos Haraszti, OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media
- Tatiana Lokshina, Chair of the Demos Centre for Information and Research (from Russia)
- Stephen Whittle, Chair of the Broadcast and Training Skills Regulator
- Iain Dale, political blogger

Expert witnesses will include:

- Oleg Panfilov, Director of the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations (from Russia)
- Nicholas Jones, author of “Sultans of Spin”
- Emily Taylor, Director of Legal and Policy, Nominet UK
- Robert Hutchinson, Vice-Chair of the D-Notice Committee
- Jean Chalaby, City University lecturer
- Charlie Beckett, Director of Polis

The debate, which takes place from 10.00am to noon, will be chaired by William Horsley, Chair of the Association of European Journalists. It will follow the Oxford Union debate format and will culminate in an audience vote on the motion. The debate is sponsored by Chris Huhne, MP for Eastleigh, David Willets, Shadow Secretary for Education and MP for Havant and Derek Wyatt, MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey.

This year, in association with The Independent, the UK National Commission has run a competition for UK students to write an article on the theme “The greatest threat to media freedom in the world is.....”. Lydia Polzer’s entry, drawing on her own experience growing up in East Germany, emerged as the clear winner. Lydia is currently completing a MA in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the London College of Communication.

In addition, The Guardian is also marking World Press Freedom Day by running a week-long discussion on issues of media freedom at its online “Comment is Free” site from 30 April – 4 May.

ENDS

For further information on the debate, please ring the National Commission on 020 7766 3490.

Notes for Editors

- ***The Foreign Press Association*** will be hosting a lunch on 3 May at 1pm where Tatiana Lokshina of the Demos Centre and Oleg Panfilov of the Centre for Journalists in Extreme Situations will be discussing: *Russian in the Twilight of the Putin Era*. To RSVP please email: briefings@foreign-press.org.uk.

- **The Frontline Club** will also be holding an event on 3 May at 7.30pm entitled “Media Talk: Blogging – Self Expression?” To book, visit: www.frontlineclub.com
- **UNESCO** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; www.unesco.org) is the only United Nations Agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and freedom of the press.
- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** (www.unesco.org.uk) is an independent body established by UK Government in 2004 to act as a national coordinating body for the engagement of the UK civil society in UNESCO’s global activities in education, sciences, culture and communication.
- On 23 December 2006, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1738 which condemns intentional attacks against journalists “and calls upon all parties to put an end to such practises”.