

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

Three to One Vote that World media freedom IS in retreat

London, UK – 4 May 2007. An audience of 100 of Britain's senior media practitioners voted that World media freedom is in retreat at the UK National Commission World Press Freedom Day debate at Portcullis House yesterday.

In an Oxford Union style debate chaired by William Horsley, 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, previously BBC Controller of Editorial Policy) and Iain Dale, political blogger debated the motion "World Media Freedom is In Retreat".

Tribute was also paid to Alan Johnston and his family on the 53rd day of his disappearance in Gaza. The debate was attended by over 100 participants, including 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) and Charlie Beckett (Director of Polis). Those named acted as expert witnesses and gave statements drawing on their professional and personal experience.

Whilst recognising that the internet had opened up opportunities and provided access to information at an unprecedented level, the audience voted three to one (57 for the motion vs 18 against the motion) in support of Miklos Haraszti and Tatiana Lokshina's argument, pointing to factors such as legislation and repressive Government regimes limiting access to information and media freedom, including the intimidation and danger faced by journalists in many countries.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in a statement by Minister Ian McCartney to mark World Press Freedom Day reaffirmed the Government's commitment to promote, defend and protect the right of journalists and media workers. In a concurrent EU statement, tribute was paid to journalists and media professionals who have sacrificed their lives or their liberty in their profession. The statement reiterated that freedom and independence of the media is "a cornerstone of democratic society and a vital component in the protection of all other freedoms and liberties".

The Portcullis House debate noted the closure on 1st May of the TV training organization, Educated Media Foundation (formerly Internews Russia) and criminal charges against its director and the death of Anna Politkovskaya in the past 12 months. Anna was the recipient of this year's UNESCO / Guillermo Cano Press Freedom Prize award. Contributions from the audience also pointed out that many countries in Africa also face serious media freedom restrictions. While Zimbabwe remains a focus of international pressure, even countries with strong democratic institutions such as Uganda face limitations on the press at election times.

At a lunch debate later in the day, Oleg Panfilov of the Centre for Journalists in Extreme Situations also highlighted the recent imprisonment in Tashkent of Uzbek journalist Umida Neyazova. Her seven-year sentence was based on the evidence that she did not declare her work lap top to customs on arrival in the country and her distribution of articles from Panfilov's

organisation and Human Rights Watch, on the basis that these human rights groups were seditious organisations.

The award for the 2007 UK UNESCO/The Independent World Press Freedom Day Article Writing Competition was also presented at the Portcullis House debate to student Lydia Polzer. Lydia, a student at London City University won £1,000 for her article on the dashed media freedom hopes of East Germans in the past 15 years since the fall of the Berlin wall. Her article will be published in the Independent media section in the next two weeks.

ENDS

For photographs and transcript of the debate, contact the UK National Commission for UNESCO (email: info@unesco.org.uk).

Notes for Editors

- *To read the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and EU statements, go to: [http://www.unesco.org.uk/World_Press_Freedom_Day_\(3_May\).htm](http://www.unesco.org.uk/World_Press_Freedom_Day_(3_May).htm)*
- *The Guardian Unlimited Comment is Free is running a discussion on world press freedom issues. To view contributions and join in the discussion, go to http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/open_thread/2007/05/world_press_freedom_day.html*
- *To read other reports and blogs on the debate, go to: [http://www.unesco.org.uk/World_Press_Freedom_Day_\(3_May\).htm](http://www.unesco.org.uk/World_Press_Freedom_Day_(3_May).htm)*
- ***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.*
- ***UNESCO*** (*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; www.unesco.org*) *is the only United Nations Agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and freedom of the press.*
- *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 practices*