

Statement on the World Press Freedom Day

May 3, 2006

Yerevan Press Club, Journalists Union of Armenia, Internews and the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression welcome the tradition established in the country to widely celebrate the World Press Freedom Day, when the enormous role of the media in the development of democracy, strengthening of civil society, ensuring the rule of law, enhancement of international cooperation and security is stressed.

The upcoming years define a number of important tasks for Armenia, the achievement of which conditions the development and prosperity of the country. These include the conductance of free and fair elections, effective actions against poverty and corruption, implementation of major international programs under European Neighborhood Policy and the Millennium Challenge Account, real progress in the resolution of Karabagh conflict, use of the regional integration potential, etc.

The guarantees for freedom of expression and the existence of strong independent media are the most important factors determining the fulfillment of the tasks above. In this regard our organizations think the following directions of our activities to be priorities:

- Reformation of the legislation on media (first and foremost, television and radio), the need for which is imposed by the amended RA Constitution. Despite the fact that we have repeatedly expressed our discontent by the depth of the amendments to the Constitution, that refer to media, we think it possible and expedient to make the reform more profound by the improvement of separate laws;
- Enhancement of the role of press in the fight against corruption, human rights violations calls for the greater legal protection of the journalists themselves, the insurance of their unobstructed access to official information, the elimination of possible imprisonment for libel and insult, increased responsibility of the authorities for the hindrance of the professional activities of journalists. In this regard lobbying of a number of legislative initiatives and practical steps are envisaged;
- The assistance to wide-scale, open and free political debate and impartial coverage as a necessary condition for democratic elections. Taking into account the exceptional influence of the TV air on political processes as well as the special mission of the Public Television of Armenia it is necessary to avoid the repetition of biased coverage on the pre-election campaign by most TV channels, including PTA, in 2007-2008. Our organizations will do their best to help the appearance of such programs on the TV air, particularly, on the Public Television, that would assist the citizens in making a free and informed choice;
- Information support to the programs of European Neighborhood Policy and Millennium Challenge Account, the process of thorough reformation, economic development and eradication of poverty. Their success will be largely dependent on the effective public control, elimination of imitational activities and waste of resources. We will be contributing to the professional and consistent reporting on all the stages of the program implementation and to close cooperation of media with the interested and competent representatives of the civil society;

– Creation of conditions for a wide press coverage of the possibilities for the resolution of Karabagh conflict, overcoming other regional problems and activation of European integration processes in the South Caucasus. To this effect various forms of dialogue and information exchange with the colleagues from the neighbor countries are to be used, the trends of mutual isolation and “cold war” methods are to be opposed;

– Increase of transparency and impartiality of the activities of the National Commission on Television and Radio, the trust to which, as to a broadcast regulatory body, has reduced significantly, in particular, after the competitions it held with unsuccessful participation of “A1+” and “Noyan Tapan” TV companies. Our organizations will be advocating the involvement of independent experts in the bid consideration with a consultative vote, as stipulated by the RA Law “On Television and Radio”;

– Introduction and observation of norms of professional journalism by the establishment and development of self-regulation institutes and media accountability systems, such as Press Council, inner ombudsman, ethical codes, etc.

We call on the journalistic community, colleagues to unite efforts and to coordinate joint actions to meet the targets above, leading to strengthening of freedom of expression and media in Armenia.

Yerevan Press Club

Journalists Union of Armenia

Internews

Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression