

# Journalists for journalism

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**Speech by Jacqueline Park, Director, Asia-Pacific, International Federation of Journalists Colombo, Sri Lanka on Sep 10, 2006**

Journalists are the ears and eyes for their communities, they are at the front line and it is through them that much of our world is interpreted.

The quality of the information in our media is determined by the professionalism, commitment and courage of the journalists in the field and the independence and professional support they are given by editors.



Journalism driven by public service values encourages democracy, pluralism and tolerance.

It ensures its citizens are well-informed on the actions of government, the administration and key players in society;

- by acting as a watchdog on government and business;
- by demanding transparency in decision-making in government and administration;
- and by providing information and opinion that reflects the diversity of the cultural and political society in which they live.

As journalists, we know how often our work attracts criticism. And here in Sri Lanka we know how easily this criticism turns into something more dangerous.

In a society divided by political forces and rising intolerance, it would be easy for us to despair, particularly when journalists and other media workers are too often the targets for abuse, assault and murder.

As journalists we know that it is precisely these challenges that make a free, vibrant and independent media so important. Right now, Sri Lanka needs more courageous and campaigning journalism.

The International Federation of Journalists representing 500,000 journalists around the world, is proud to be working with the five journalists organizations to develop a strong and democratic public service media culture.

Central to the reform is the recognition of the roles and responsibility of provincial journalists – too often neglected, underpaid and under supported.

Yet so much of the critical challenges for Sri Lanka are happening around the country, outside the capital where the media is based. And to find out about them, Sri Lanka relies on the dedication and commitment of the country's provincial journalists.

These awards are an opportunity to recognize the centrality of that work, to reward our colleagues who work under unbelievably difficult conditions and to celebrate the excellence of their work.

This is an opportunity to reclaim the media for the values of journalism, to celebrate a media space that we can work in, that encourages the practice of independent ethical journalism, that is a journalism deeply embedded in true public service values.

This change will only come from journalists standing together and forcing change.

That's as true in Sri Lanka as it is in every country around the world.

That's why journalists in almost every country come together to form independent trade unions and associations of journalists. And that's why those organizations come together in the International Federation of Journalists – the global voice of journalists.

Here in Sri Lanka there are strong roots for collective action among journalists. The survival of the Sri Lankan Working Journalists Association as the largest organization of journalists. The collective trade union action of the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions in defending the rights of all media workers. The campaigning of the Free Media Movement to defend and extend press freedom. The work of the Tamil and Muslim organizations in advancing rights of journalists from minority communities.

The strength of this diversity provides avenues for activity for many journalists.

The coming together of these organisations under the Media Charter last year was a truly historic moment in Sri Lankan journalism. While these organizations had often worked together in a true spirit of solidarity for press freedom and journalists' rights, their mutual recognition that they needed to do better demonstrated the strong roots of the media community here in Sri Lanka.

As a craft committed to pluralism and tolerance, we need to bring journalists together and demand respect for the important job we do, and the right to do it in safety, free from physical attacks as well as the raging intolerance we are seeing in the hate speech against those independent voices.

We also need to fulfill the promise that our craft of journalism holds out to our communities: respect for truth, respect for the public's right to know and respect for each other.

Journalists outside Colombo are at greatest risk as violence escalates. They have less security from the state, are more vulnerable to violence and receive less support from their employers.

Since that 2005 media charter, the IFJ and the five journalists organisations have been working to more deeply link provincial journalists into the all-island journalistic community. These awards are a key part of the process.

The privileges and benefits we demand as journalists are only worth holding if we deliver in turn to empower our communities by informing, educating and entertaining.

Tonight we recognize the best of the work that has helped to empower communities around the island. And in recognizing, we celebrate our work and our role as the people who inform our world.