

Press Release

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Media freedom must not fall victim to anti-terrorist laws, says Council of Europe Secretary General on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May

Strasbourg, 30.04.2009 – "The right to freely receive and impart information is essential at any time in a democratic society, but in times of crisis, such as a terrorist attack it is even more important" said Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis today in a statement to mark the World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

"It is true that we live in dangerous and uncertain times, but in order to protect our societies from the threats we face, we need more, not fewer human rights. We need more, not less freedom of expression.

It is possible to combat terrorism robustly and effectively while fully respecting freedom of expression and information. That is why I call on our member states to ensure that their national anti-terrorist laws and practices comply with the Council of Europe's standards.

We must ensure that any legislation concerning this fundamental right fully respects Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The Council of Europe ministerial conference on Media and New Communication Services in Reykjavik on 28 and 29 May will be an opportunity to review the situation in our member states and discuss new ways to protect – and benefit from – the freedom of media in the context of the fight against terrorism", he said.

Since 2001, most European countries have reviewed their anti terrorist laws. Against this background, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2005 adopted a [Declaration on freedom of expression and information in the media in the context of the fight against terrorism](#). In 2007, it adopted [Guidelines on protecting freedom of expression in times of crisis](#).

The Council of Europe also recently commissioned a report on the effects of counter-terrorism legislation on freedom of the media in Europe. The report entitled "[Speaking of terror](#)", by an independent expert David Banisar, concludes that "freedom of speech has been challenged by the adoption of new laws prohibiting speech which is considered "extremist" or "supporting terrorism".

The report is also critical of the role of international institutions in this respect.

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