TEGUCIGALPA ACTION PLAN

Tegucigalpa, Honduras
August 10, 2012

The participants in the Security, Protection and Solidarity for Freedom of Expression Conference brought together by the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) and the Association of News Media of Honduras met in Tegucigalpa on August 9 and 10, 2012, with the objective of generating consensus that enables the elaboration of suitable, achievable and verifiable public policies, from which might emerge a plan of action that makes it possible to deal with and reverse the serious situation of lack of safety and the impunity facing the work of the press in the Central American country.

Aware that democracy and its healthy evolution depends on the existence of freedom of expression, which is a fundamental right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its Article 19, and recognizing that the principles of the Declaration of Chapultepec constitute a basic document that considers the guarantees and defense of free speech, freedom and independence of the press, and the right to information.

Taking into account the efforts of inter-governmental agencies such as UNESCO, the OAS, the Offices of Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Defenders in the world that ensuring the protection of journalists and freedom of the press is a responsibility of the government, as is guaranteeing transparent and swift justice in crimes against the press.

Aware that in Honduras, as throughout Latin America, there prevails a serious threat to the unfettered practice of journalism, we hereafter express the commitments, consensus and proposals achieved at this Conference among the various players that took part, from the Executive and Legislative branches of government, and representatives of academia, news media, inter-governmental bodies and international organizations, and special guests from other countries, editors, publishers and reporters.

Specific actions:

Representatives of the organizations present and individual journalists will follow up on the proposals made during the Conference; in particular, the four proposals made by President Porfirio Lobo outlined below. These proposals mirror some of the demands the IAPA has been making to the government of Honduras and echo its efforts to have them become official public policies.
Similar follow-up will be given to the proposals presented and commitments made by lawmakers Jarier Waldina Paz and Augusto Cruz Asensio, and Justice and Human Rights Minister Ana Pineda.

In summary, the above-mentioned proposals and commitments are:

To create a special unit made up of investigative police officers and public prosecutors for the investigation of crimes against journalists and vulnerable groups.

To carry out the implementation of the institutional mechanism for the protection of journalists and other groups especially affected by generalized violence created within the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, and to make it operative.

To create special human rights tribunals to deal with cases in which journalists, among others, are victims.

To draft the proposed reform to make libel, calumny, and defamation no longer criminal offenses so that they can be dealt with and fought in civil court.

Those in power are urged to carry out a technical-juridical analysis, reach consensus, and elaborate a unified proposal to enact a law that facilitates and supports the effective implementation of mechanisms of protection for journalists and vulnerable groups.

The above-mentioned initiatives will be promoted and supported by the Liberal Party, as manifested at this Conference by the Chair of the Party’s delegation. A call for political will on the part of the National Congress to approve these initiatives was made by the legislators present.

**Other Actions Proposed:**

Also, the following shared proposals from the various work tables will be followed up:

To urge the government to assume its responsibility and obligation regarding freedom of expression and thought, and comply with the rulings issued by national and international tribunals. To urge the opportune and effective implementation of preventive measures for the protection of journalists, social communicators, and the news media.

To demand that the Public Prosecutor’s Office have sufficient technical and budgetary infrastructure, particularly the special unit that the Executive Branch will create to deal with cases affecting journalists and vulnerable groups, and that its officials receive training so they can deal with offenses in an integral and effective manner.
To urge that the agencies that prosecute crimes establish quality standards in their operation, and that they encourage transparency in the investigations into attacks on journalists and social communicators.

To verify that the Legislative Branch discusses and approves the proposal to no longer make libel and calumny criminal offenses, particularly as it pertains to public officials, so that there is no censoring of the work of the press.

To urge the strengthening of mechanisms for genuine access to government information through the Institute for Access to Public Information, taking into account that transparency is an essential element for the exercise of freedom of expression.

To verify and urge that the mechanism for protection of journalists to be implemented by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights have legal support guaranteeing its permanence, sufficient budget, the inclusion of social and inter-institutional parties, the protection of witnesses that testify in cases of attacks on journalists, and the inclusion of a trustworthy police force trained to provide such protection.

To urge the Executive Branch to include within the Central American Security Commission agenda, and in particular, within the Inter-American Commission Against Organized Crime agenda, strategies for the protection of the work of the press and the prosecution of those who attack journalists.

To create awareness within the news media of the need to make a serious commitment towards the exercise of freedom of expression, particularly with regards to reporting in a responsible, serious, and ethical manner, a practice that would encourage a culture of legality and would not allow self-censorship.

To adopt obligatory mechanisms of evaluation of risk and of protection against such risk within the news media to enable the practice of responsible and safe journalism. To strengthen such measures, the proposal calls for the organization of workshops on self-protection and ethics.

To promote that journalists assume as an individual responsibility their ongoing training in quality standards and journalistic ethics, risk measuring during dangerous coverage, and on how to denounce threats in front of human rights bodies and authorities.

To review the conditions under which the press works in Honduras, so as to implement adequate salaries, life insurance, and obligatory protocols for dangerous news coverage.

To pursue and bring about solidarity among news media, social communicators, and press organizations, creating spaces for dialogue so that voices are raised jointly against attacks on journalists. To pursue the inclusion of investigations on crimes against the press and the battle against impunity in the news agenda.
To encourage that organizations and news media carry out promotional campaigns to create awareness of the importance of the exercise of freedom of expression.

THIS CONFERENCE FINALIZES WITH THE HOPE OF CHANGES IN THE NEAR FUTURE, BUT ALSO WITH SORROW AND CONDOLENCES FOR THE MURDER OF A NEW EMPLOYEE OF A MEDIA OUTLET IN HONDURAS, WHICH OCCURRED TODAY.

ACCORDING TO INITIAL REPORTS, THE VICTIM IS JOSÉ NOEL CANALES OF HONDUDIARIO. THIS IS AN OCCURRENCE THAT DEMONSTRATES THE URGENCY AND IMPORTANCE THAT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION PLAN HAS.