

## **United Nations General Assembly, Second Special Session on Disarmament, 24 June 1982**

### **Statement of Professor Kaarle Nordenstreng, President of the International Organization of Journalists**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends

It is a great honour for me to address this assembly of the international community in the name of 200,000 journalists from 120 countries. These are newspapermen and women, radio and television reporters, writers, cameramen – in short, professional workers in the mass media specialized in the task of informing the public opinion. The aim of my organization has been ever since its foundation in Copenhagen in 1946, and I quote the first article of our statutes: “The maintenance of peace and the consolidation of friendship among peoples as well as international understanding through free, accurate and honest informing of public opinion.”

It has not always been easy to pursue this aim, especially in those countries where the mass media are under a strong influence of commercial and military interests. We all know that the performance of the mass media has been far from ideal from the point of view of peace and disarmament. Often it has been a vital link in the socio-economic process which feeds arms race, by maintaining ignorance, prejudice and fear among the population, rather than by satisfying the people’s right to acquire an objective picture of reality by means of accurate and comprehensive information.

Let us recall what was said 35 years ago by an authoritative commission which carried out an independent study of the press in the United States. I quote:

With the means of self-destruction that are now at their disposal, men must live, if they are to live at all, by self restraint, moderation, and mutual understanding. They get their picture of one another through the press. The press can be inflammatory, sensational, and irresponsible. If it is, it and its freedom will go down in the universal catastrophe. On the other hand, the press can do its duty by the new world that is struggling to be born. It can help create a world community by giving men everywhere knowledge of the world and of one another, by promoting comprehension and appreciation of the goals of free society that shall embrace all men.

These words were written at the time of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since that time we have accumulated over a million time greater capacity for instant destruction. Therefore also the point made by the Commission on Free and Responsible Press is today a million times more serious. Especially so, since parallel to the arms race we have got hundreds of millions of poor people deprived from the most elementary human rights.

There is indeed a collective duty towards “the new world that is struggling to be born“. This is how we see the contemporary movement towards new international relations in general and a new international information order in particular. This new order, understood as an integral part of the New International Economic Order, is aimed at the decolonization and democratization of the field of information and communication on the basis of peaceful coexistence between peoples.

The majority of journalists in the world support this call by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and its manifestations such as the Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO. A new order is indispensable, because the status quo in the world does not promote peace, democracy and social progress. Those who are waging an ideological war against the new order – with a false image of freedom as their weapon – are in fact defending those socioeconomic structures which produce arms race and poverty.

The professional journalists today – no matter whether they are working under the sophisticated conditions of the industrialized countries, or with all the hardships of underdevelopment, or even in the middle of a liberation struggle in Palestine, Southern Africa, Western Sahara, El Salvador, and so on – all the same, they increasingly realize that we are faced with a struggle towards a new order and that the struggle is one, however great is its variety.

But the journalists have gone further than analytically observing the situation. A significant development has taken place in the ethics of the profession, as demonstrated by a declaration given two years ago in Mexico in the name of the international and regional non-governmental organizations which unite as many as 300,000 professional journalists from all continents and various political orientations. This is what they declared, among others, and I quote:

A true journalist stands for the universal value of humanism, above all peace, democracy, human rights, social progress and national liberation, while respecting the distinctive character, value and dignity of each culture as well as the right of each people freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems.

Consequently, a true journalist assumes a responsibility to fight against any justification for or incitement to wars of aggression and the arms race, especially in nuclear weapons, and other forms of violence, hatred or of national, racial or religious discrimination, oppression by tyrannical regimes, as well as all forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This fight contributes to a climate of opinion conducive to international détente, disarmament and national development.

This socially committed journalistic ethics has recently manifested itself in the popular peace movement which is sweeping across the world, in particular the Western hemisphere. Journalists have joined other professional groups in mobilizing against nuclear extermination and in defense of peace. Typical of this contemporary movement is what was declared four months ago by the Helsinki chapter of the Union of Journalists in Finland. I quote again:

The journalist's instrument is the word. This instrument can be used only under conditions of peace; therefore promotion of peace is the most effective way of defending freedom of speech.

What can be done in practical terms? Unfortunately professional journalists do not usually command the ultimate control of the mass media, and thus they only have a shared responsibility for how the channels of communication are being used. However, journalists for their part want to do their utmost in promoting social consciousness along the lines of the Mexico Declaration.

Among other things we are engaged in the preparation of an international code of journalistic ethics, based on the universal values held in the international community as well as on the common professional principles respected throughout the world, to be endorsed by non-governmental organizations of professional journalists at the national, regional as well as international level.

We also offer our cooperation to the United Nations in an effort to raise the standards of journalism in matters of arms race and disarmament by setting up of a presentative professional body in reviewing the performance of the press and suggesting practical means of improving the coverage.

Finally, we want to remind those engaged in the arms race that even a modest reduction of military expenditures would release financial resources for an extensive development of national and international systems of communication. Given our ethical orientation, we feel we have the moral right to demand that the governments, to begin with the permanent members of the Security Council, should curb the arms race and invest the resources thus saved to purposes of truthful and honest information.

Thank you.