



May 03, 2023

EMBARGOED UNTIL MAY 3, 2023 AT 01H00

PRESS STATEMENT

Imagine a world without a free press ...

The 2023 laureates of the prestigious Unesco/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize **Niloofar Hamedi, Elaheh Mohammadi** and **Narges Mohammadi** are facing grave consequences for doing their work. Hamedi and Mohammadi, journalists for reformist newspapers in Iran, have been detained in Evin Prison since September 2022 for reporting on the death and funeral of Mahsa Amini. They were recognised for their journalistic integrity with the 2023 International Press Freedom Award, Harvard's Louis M. Lyons Award, and named in Time Magazine's list of 100 Most Influential People. Mohammadi, an author and journalist, is serving a 16-year prison sentence and continues to report from within. Our fervent hope is that this award will draw worldwide attention to the struggles of these journalists and serve as a catalyst for unlocking prison doors not only for them, but for countless others who are unjustly deprived of their freedom due to their unwavering dedication to the truth. The threats to press freedom and more real and more pervasive than ever before. So, hoping this award will shine a light on the imperative to protect it at all costs.

In a world without press freedom and independent, pluralistic, and diverse media, the consequences would be dire for society. It would be characterised by the suppression of information, the absence of transparency, and the stifling of free expression. The flow of information would be tightly controlled, and individuals would have no access to diverse perspectives, opinions, or sources of news. The absence of media pluralism would make it easier for those in power to manipulate public opinion, control the narrative, and maintain their grip on power.

Without press freedom and media pluralism, people would be unable to make informed decisions about their lives, participate meaningfully in democratic processes, and hold those in power to account. The lack of diverse voices and perspectives would lead to the silencing of marginalised communities, and the absence of independent media would leave individuals at the mercy of government propaganda and disinformation. Moreover, without the ability to freely express themselves, they would be denied their fundamental human right to freedom of speech, which is a cornerstone of democratic societies. Ultimately, a world without press freedom and independent, pluralistic, and diverse media would be a world of ignorance, manipulation, and authoritarianism.

And for these reasons, on World Press Freedom Day 2023, the Namibia Media Trust (NMT) underscores the critical importance of freedom of expression, and by association press freedom and access to information, as enablers of all other human rights. We echo the call by Unesco to "re-centre press freedom, as well as independent, pluralistic and diverse media, as key to the

enjoyment of all other human rights”. We are dedicated to playing an active role in the global discourse surrounding the advancement of human rights, as well as the critical task of preserving and safeguarding them in a world that is constantly changing. It is also for this reason that we take great pride in being a supporter of the Unesco/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize since 2018. This initiative is a testament to our unwavering commitment to acknowledging and celebrating the courageous individuals from across the globe who champion our freedom.

Zoé Titus

Director

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