

Message by His Excellency the Governor Daniel Pruce on World Press Freedom Day

Release Date: 3 May, 2025

On World Press Freedom Day, we celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom. It provides an opportunity to evaluate press freedom around the world and allows us to defend the important work of the media. It acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. It is also a day of reflection among media professionals and a day of remembrance for those journalists who lost their lives in the pursuit of a story.

Media freedom has a fundamental role in promoting and protecting democracy globally. To quote Winston Churchill, 'a free press is the sleeping guardian of all other rights that free men prize; it is the most dangerous foe of tyranny.'

Journalism is the lifeblood of democracy and all the values that underpin it. All around the world, journalists put themselves at risk in defence of those values.

Human rights, the rule of law and good governance are essential for democratic societies. The free flow of accurate information enabled by a free media contributes to strengthening civil society by amplifying its work, upholding the rule of law by exposing abuse, championing equal rights by giving a voice to the

marginalised, strengthening institutions by holding them to account and raising the profile of global challenges.

In many parts of the world, the freedom of the media is under threat. From harassment and intimidation to censorship and violence, the challenges that journalists face are formidable and numerous. Censorship and harassment of journalists, particularly women journalists, remains a challenge to free and fair reporting.

Media organisations are also facing a decline in public trust, the spread of disinformation and increased financial pressures. Without the ability to express and disseminate factual information and free opinion, there can be no accountability and no informed public discourse.

This year, the theme for World Press Freedom Day is how artificial intelligence is reshaping media, journalism and information.

There's no doubt that the media landscape has changed significantly since the UN General Assembly proclaimed World Press Freedom Day in 1993. It has certainly evolved since I was the British Government's Spokesman at the EU in Brussels and when I worked in the press office at Number 10 Downing Street when Tony Blair was Prime Minister.

Artificial Intelligence or A.I., is transforming journalism, providing tools that enhance investigative reporting, content creation, and fact-checking. Its potential benefits can include greater efficiency, multilingual accessibility, and improved data analysis.

However, these advancements also bring risks: AI can be used to reproduce misinformation, spread disinformation, amplify online hate speech, and enable new forms of censorship. Some actors use AI for mass surveillance of journalists and citizens, creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Private platforms increasingly use AI to filter, moderate, and curate content, becoming gatekeepers of information.

Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among governments, media, and civil society. Cooperation is essential to develop AI-driven tools for information integrity, detecting and mitigating disinformation, fostering secure and human rights-based digital ecosystems.

Here in the Virgin Islands, there is a vibrant digital media ecosystem. With great power – as communicators, commentators and content creators – comes great responsibility. In lieu of any formal regulatory bodies it is important that editorial policies uphold truth-telling, respect and integrity. After all, when consumers know that a news source adheres to strict editorial guidelines, they are more likely to place their trust in that source.

To conclude I'd like to say thank you. Without the work that journalists do to inform the public and hold states, companies and individuals to account, progress in many other areas – such as combatting corruption, upholding the rule of law, protecting the vulnerable, saving our climate and improving healthcare – would become more difficult if not impossible. So, let's continue to enjoy vibrant, open discussion, let's consider how we can keep a free media here in the Virgin Islands and reflect how we can all uphold standards for a transparent and respected press.