

The whole field of human rights is one that I have been interested and involved in for a number of years. Indeed it is my sincere conviction that the very purpose of being in political life is to foster the cause of human rights. For surely this is what governments are for - to help their people achieve the highest level of which they are capable in physical, political and economic terms. That is just another way of saying that governments are in the business of fostering human rights. So strongly do I feel this personally, that I took that as my theme in addressing the United Nations General Assembly three weeks ago in New York. It is a subject to which it is impossible to pay too much attention.

And there is no aspect of rights more vital to the maintenance of freedom, nothing more integral to the proper functioning of democracy, than freedom of expression and freedom of the press. There is no need for me to tell you here that the right to publish without political restraint is absolutely essential if tyranny is to be prevented.

There is no lack of public declarations of agreement with the principle of freedom of the press. It is recognized in such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in the more recently adopted declaration on mass media by the 1978 General Assembly of UNESCO. Many countries have their own Bill of Rights or similar document enshrining this principle, often in the formal constitution.

We have learned from bitter experience, however, that solemn declarations are not always accompanied by similar actions. Anyone who has had anything to do with government must realize that occasions arise where the exercise of one freedom or right by one individual or group in society may actually impede the rights of others. Some of the most difficult decisions any government makes are in cases where two legitimate rights are in conflict. I remember one occasion when faced with a clear conflict between two equally valid and important rights, one of my colleagues said "Ladies and gentlemen this is clearly a case where we must rise above our principles".

Thus it is not surprising that in certain instances in certain countries the government of the day may find it convenient, and perhaps even in its own mind justifiable, to circumscribe the freedom of the press. It is to your very great credit that you have formed this association devoted to fighting this tendency wherever it may arise.