



SDJF Newsletter

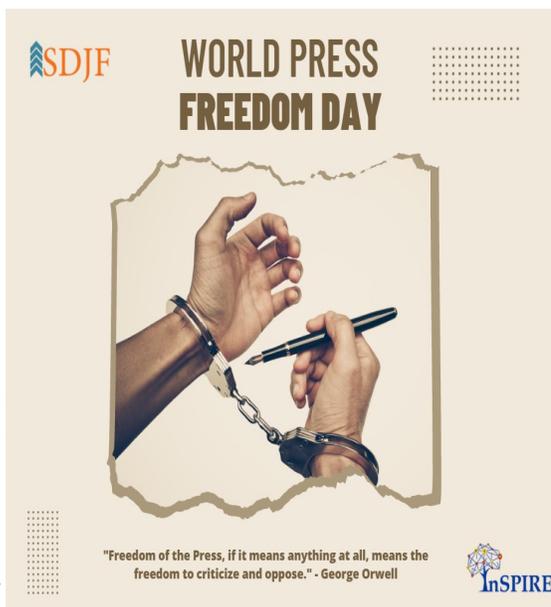
World Press Freedom Day: A Day to Celebrate and Uphold Democracy in its Entirety

By Ayodhya Krishani Amarajeewa

This year's theme of the World Press Freedom Day was 'Journalism under Digital Siege' which reflected on how freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, access to information and privacy are impacted on a digital era like 2022. The United Nations celebrated the Day under the above theme in Uruguay as they hosted the annual [World Press Freedom Day Global Conference](#) in a hybrid format. World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a [Recommendation adopted at the twenty-sixth session of UNESCO's General Conference](#) in 1991. The day was declared with the aim of having Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press.

On 3rd of May reminds the world that the governments of the countries need to respect their commitment to press freedom as it is synonymous with Democracy. It is also a Day of reflection among media professionals about issues and fundamental principles of press freedom and professional ethics in journalism. The issues include targeting media for the restraint, or abolition, of press freedom and those journalists who put their lives in danger in pursuit of covering a story.

Press Freedom covers the Freedom of Expression, access to information and public service role of journalism. Verified information disseminated in the public interest is news. It is people's right to seek and receive information, it is a public duty for the media to disseminate news. In this process, for media to operate in its full capacity in information access and freedom of expression, are pivotal aspects.



“Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.”

~ Walter Cronkite

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“The Press Freedom Day advocates for ensuring of transparency in the technology companies’ human and automated systems. This will ensure transparency of internet companies exploiting citizens’ data.”

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Lack of transparency and accountability in the media gatekeeping power is a problem in exercising press freedom in mega media institutions. These media institutions and Internet giants are being accused of “enabling hate and disinformation rather than journalism”. UN Sustainable Development goals has aspirations to advance “public access to information and fundamental freedoms” (SDG 16.10). If public service role of journalism needs to be promoted, access to information and freedom of expression must be strengthened. When journalists are questioned by the authorities and they are being under surveillance in the new media journalists lose their freedom to express. This is a direct violation of freedom of the press and restrains the public service role of journalism.

It is vital to remember that any attack on press freedom is an attack on democracy. In any country, the strength of its democracy is measured by the freedom of the Press.

InSPIRE students learn creative expression at the DSLR Photography Practical Training



Completing the cycle of Practical Training Sessions conducted to prepare the InSPIRE students for the upcoming Inter-University Competition, the final training was held on 7th and 8th May 2022 in Kandy on DSLR Photography.

The students from University of Peradeniya and University of Sri Jayewardenepura actively took part in the DSLR Photography training conducted by renowned trainers, Mr. Lahiru Wanigasekara and Mr. Isbahan Sharfdeen. The InSPIRE students learned many theoretical and practical aspects about DSLR photography. They were exposed to various aspects about DSLR cameras, different types of photography, Composition, Lighting, Rule of Thirds and other technical aspects of DSLR photography.

The students were able to take part in a practical exercise on both days as they took photographs from DSLR cameras. They captured human rights issues, gender inequality, freedom of expression and environmental issues in the Kandy town. The students even covered current peaceful protests happening in Kandy.



LEARN. SHARE. CONNECT – Diversifying learning through synergies: InSPIRE Annual Forum 2022



On the theme, LEARN. SHARE. CONNECT – Diversifying learning through synergies – the InSPIRE Annual Forum was held on Saturday, 28th May 2022 at Hotel Janaki, Colombo. This was held as one of the key activities of the project “Incubator Spaces for Promoting Information Rights and Freedom of Expression” (InSPIRE) implemented by HELVETAS Intercooperation gGmbH, in partnership with Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF), which is an initiative funded by the European Union.

The Annual Forum contributed towards the realization of creating aspiring future

journalists and media professionals by providing an enabling platform for the young Media and Communication undergraduates of the four universities to strengthen their networking through exchange and learning. The forum facilitated the engagement of 59 (M-24 / F - 35) students and focal points from University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP), University of Jaffna (UOJ), University of Peradeniya (UOP) and South Eastern University (SEU). A diverse group of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students participated in the sessions, as this ethnic and language diversity added value to the Forum.

A Panel Discussion on Investigative journalism, “Striving for Democracy Through Investigative Journalism” with the panelists Ms. Dilrukshi Handunetti, Executive Director for Center for Investigative reporting Sri Lanka; Mr. Shihar Aneez, Investigative/ Data Journalism trainer at the Center for Investigative Reporting Sri Lanka; Mr. Rifthi Ali, Founder/ Chief editor of Vidyal.lk; and moderator Mr. Azad Mustaffa, AAL, Program Director-SDJF; Practical training on Mobile livestreaming by the trainer Mr. Alexshanter Kamilas; and the Information Sharing session on Right to Information (RTI), conducted by Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL), made the Annual Forum an event that made meaningful contribution to university students to learn and share about investigative journalism and RTI.



The panel discussion was a very live and interactive session as the floor was open for discussion students continuously asked questions from the panelists. They were already enthusiastic about investigative journalism and how data journalism and RTI impact how journalists’ report.

The live streaming session was very popular among the students as they learned how to do a live stream and make use of the technique in reporting. This was followed by the RTI session which was very informative and successful as this taught how to file a RTI and the basics of RTI in Sinhala and Tamil languages.



InSPIRE students learn creative expression at the DSLR Photography Practical Training

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Coincidentally the occasion was marked by the visit of partner organization, HELVETAS. Its Regional Coordinator Ms. Esther Marthaler, Sri Lanka Country Director Ms. Subhashi Dissanayake, InSPIRE Program Manger Ms. Chandula Kumbukage and InSPIRE Project Officer Ms. Ramona Stephan joined the team visited.

The students discussed about the learnings during the InSPIRE project activities including practical training programs, inter-district exchange, virtual module training sessions and other webinars with the Regional Coordinator, Ms. Esther Marthaler. The students said that they got new knowledge about gender, women and new media, digital citizenship, freedom of expression, information rights, human rights and many aspects of MoJo and many more.



LEARN. SHARE. CONNECT – Diversifying Learning Through Synergies: InSPIRE Annual Forum 2022



A student from University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Ms. Sanuli Sriwardana said “The Panel discussion taught us about investigative journalism. We learned about how to collect information, how to give correct information to the public, etc. The learnings on the RTI were very informative and detailed while mobile livestreaming was a novel experience. I hope to become an investigative journalist in the future with the information I learned from today’s session.”

Mohamed Milhan from University of Jaffna also had some thoughts to share about the sessions. He said, “In the past, in my community and the area I live in, there has been news of lot of corruption and bribery. So to put a stop to that and get more information regarding these matters I find this session on RTI to be very helpful.”



“We have seen lot of livestreams. But we do not know the process that happens in the background. To work on this, in this workshop I received a lot of knowledge regarding livestreaming, “ said Fathima Rusla from South Eastern University.



LEARN. SHARE. CONNECT – Diversifying Learning Through Synergies: InSPIRE Annual Forum 2022

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As Helvetas and TISL came together to organize the RTI session, it created a great synergy in a novel partnership and a learning experience which reflected in the RTI session.

The Forum became more meaningful as the InSPIRE team handed over the printed modules developed under the Inspire project: Digital Citizenship; Freedom of Expression; Right to Information and Gender in New Media (English copies) to Prof. Rameez from South Eastern University who was a guest at the InSPIRE Annual Forum.

The host of the day was Ms. Ramona Stephen, InSPIRE Project Officer, who did a wonderful job by guiding the forum participants through the day's events. And last but not least, the day's end was marked by Ms. Chandula Kumbukage, InSPIRE Project Manager, as she delivered the vote of thanks.



Mentoring students from University of Sri Jayewardenepura at the Idea Market in Colombo

Do you have story ideas for media products to be submitted to the Inter-university competition? Then it is time to fine tune them to make an impact with your story. That is why the team at SDJF guides the InSPIRE students to get the mentorship from our renowned trainers at the Idea Market.

The 2nd Idea Market was organized by SDJF for 15 (M - 3 /F - 12) students from University of Sri Jayewardenepura on 29th May 2022 in Colombo. The mentors Mr. Joel Ravindran on Short Films, Mr. Ruwan Bogamuwa on Mobile Video Story-

telling, and Mr. Azad Mustafa on Multimedia articles and Blogs guided the InSPIRE students to shape their stories suitable to develop respective media products for the Inter-University Competition.

The students pitched ideas on stories that reflected many socio-economic problems in Sri Lanka. Among them the economic situation of the estate workers, garbage issue and the environmental issues in some areas, tourism related issues in the Calido beach and other areas, Child abuse issue and the victimization of children for abuse, current economic crisis, and substance abuse and HIV issue among the youth in Sri Lanka are some of the issues brought into spotlight by the students. The mentoring session was really stimulating as they actively took part in getting guidance from the mentors from each media category.



Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF)

3/8, Swarna Place, Nawala Road, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94112806265 | +94117209511

Email: info@Ldjf.org | Web: www.Ldjf.org

