



News Release



Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Embassy

U.S. Consulate Principal Officer Bryan Hunt Terms Free Press Essential to Democracy

Punjab University's Institute of Communication Studies Holds Dialogue on World Press Freedom Day

Lahore, May 3, 2007 – An independent and active press is an “important pillar of democracy” remarked U.S. Consulate’s Principal Officer Bryan Hunt while speaking to students and faculty at the Punjab University’s Institute of Communication Studies (ICS) on the World Press Freedom Day. ICS Director Dr. Mugheesuddin Sheikh spoke on challenges facing the press today.

“On World Press Freedom day, we recognize the important contributions of a free press and honor the sacrifices made by journalists around the world to report the truth. Without a free and vibrant press a nation cannot find its voice and become a flourishing democracy. We vigorously promote freedom of expression as a core component of our diplomacy and our assistance programs,” said Mr. Hunt.

The U.S. supports free press through programs and exchanges such as the Edward R. Murrow Journalism Program for foreign journalists, Mr. Hunt pointed out. “Independent media empowers people, exposes corruption, encourages transparency and promotes participation in the political process. Without it, society as a whole suffers,” he remarked.

“In February 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice launched the Global Internet Freedom Task Force (GIFT) which focuses on maximizing free flow of information and ideas on the Internet,” he said. He outlined that the U.S. State Department reports on the state of press freedom in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights and said that for the “first time, the 2006 reports included a separate sub-section on Internet repression.”

Speaking on how corporate influence can affect reporting, Dr. Mugheesuddin Sheikh commented that “business pressures as reflected in advertisement revenue can sometimes be an impediment to press freedom,” but noted that “separating commercialism from the media industry was neither feasible nor realistic.” He added that it is the responsibility of both journalists and media owners to strike a healthy balance without compromising either on the truth or the economic demands of their outlets, whether they be print or electronic.

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