

## Celebrating the 30th Anniversary Advocating for the Freedom of the Modern Press.



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On World Press Freedom Day, His Excellency Dr. Muhammad bin Saif Al-Kuwari, Vice-Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee, said, “Freedom of expression is the key to enjoying all other human rights. The National Human Rights Committee has multiple initiatives to implement the right to freedom of expression”.

HE Dr. Muhammad bin Saif Al-Kuwari considered freedom of expression as one of the most important indicators of societies' civility and respect for human rights. On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, which came this year under the slogan 'Freedom of expression is the engine of other freedoms and human rights', HE Al-Kuwari said, "This year's celebration is distinguished because it coincides with the thirtieth anniversary since its declaration in 1993 as a global occasion celebrated by all human rights defenders".

HE Al-Kuwari pointed out that the last decade witnessed significant changes in the press industry, especially with the proliferation of independent media and the emergence of digital technologies that allow the free flow of information via the Internet. However, he said, freedom of the media, the safety of journalists and freedom of expression are increasingly at risk, affecting the realization of other human rights. Especially considering the international community facing multiple crises such as conflicts and violence, environmental crises and challenges to the health and well-being of people around the world, disinformation continues to spread through the Internet and beyond, greatly affecting the institutions on which democracy, the rule of law and human rights are based. In addition to its impact on the spread of hate speech among societies.

HE Al-Kuwari added, "The National Human Rights Committee, in formulating its goals in spreading and establishing a culture of human rights, has undertaken many initiatives in its

second founding decade in order to protect journalists, ensure their safety, achieve best practices in freedom of expression, and combat incitement and hate speech. In January 2012, the committee organized the first international conference of its kind in the Middle East to protect journalists in dangerous situations”. HE Al-Kuwari indicated that the conference highlighted the role of the media in raising awareness of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

HE the Vice-Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee said, “In March 2012, the committee launched the Martyr Ali Hassan Al-Jaber Award, Al-Jazeera cameraman, who was martyred while performing his message of conveying facts during the outbreak of the Libyan uprising in 2011. The launch of the award coincided with the Arab Day for Human Rights, out of the belief of the National Committee that freedom of expression is central to human rights”. He pointed out that the committee hosted, in September 2015, the third “Arab-Ibero-American Dialogue” conference for national human rights institutions, on combating hate speech and extremism, with the participation of more than fifty institutions. Nationals from the Americas and the Arab region, as well as representatives from the regional, European, Asian, and African networks, and the Office of the High Commissioner of human rights at the United Nations, as well as a number of special rapporteurs. The conference aimed to deepen dialogue on issues of combating hate speech and intolerance, and to produce an integrated approach to these issues, in

addition to presenting experiences, practices and lessons in confronting incitement to hatred as well as intolerance.

HE Al-Kuwari also said that among the most important initiatives of the committee was its organization in July of 2017 of the international conference on (Freedom of Expression: Towards Confronting Risks). The framework of the United Nations General Assembly would support the regulation of relevant obligations, which cannot be deduced from the multiple legal texts, making them accessible to decision-makers and law enforcement authorities, as well as considering human rights and humanitarian law standards for the situation of journalists. The signatory states are obligated to protect journalists from attacks on their lives, arbitrary arrest, campaigns of violence and intimidation, and the obligation to protect them from enforced disappearance and kidnapping.

HE the Vice-Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee added, “In February of 2020, the committee organized the international conference under the title (Means of Communication: Ways to Support Freedoms and Protect Activists) and called for the recommendations of this conference to work on clear regulations, legislation and standards, in addition to advocating the process of eradicating digital illiteracy and building the capacities of actors in civil society with regards on how to use social media, in addition to securing legal aid for journalists related to

freedom of expression and strengthening the process of implementing respect for the rights and ethics of journalists”.

HE Al-Kuwari explained that all these initiatives undertaken by the committee since its inception were based on its belief in the centrality of freedom of expression in the realization of human rights and the primacy of the right to freedom of expression, stipulated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a prerequisite and a driving force for the enjoyment of all other human rights.

HE Al-Kuwari said, “For the sake of the utmost importance of freedom of expression, we are participating in this occasion celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of this year’s World Press Freedom Day, which UNESCO considers a call for freedom of the modern press, as well as independent, pluralistic and diverse media, as a necessary key to the prosperity of human rights and its dissemination among all societies in all parts of the world”.