



**Tbilisi Declaration by journalists of the Caucasus
Final Document of the International Meeting – Seminar
of Journalists from Countries of the Caucasus**

Tbilisi, Georgia, 16 September 1998

We, the participants in the international meeting seminar of journalists from countries from both sides of the Caucasus mountains, brought together on the initiative of UNESCO and the E. Shevardnaze “Democracy and Revival” Foundation, and with the support of the Evan Dzhavakhishvili Tbilisi State University and the Journalists Federation of Georgia, believe that the very fact that colleagues, who only recently were on the opposite sides of the front line in international and regional conflicts, have come together in this meeting should in itself be considered as a *milestone*. It is our first, albeit small shared success.

As Mr Eduard Shervadnaze, President of Georgia, said in his message to us, we thus have taken another step forward in the difficult but honourable struggle against extremism and violence, in order to create an adequate public opinion and to strengthen the principles of justice and humanism in society.

We have come together to pursue the high goals of peace and good. we do not seek to find the reasons for, nor the perpetrators of the tragic events on our rich Caucasian lands. We have declared a three-day *moratorium* on accusations and animosities in order to think together how to bring back peace to our common home. It is not without reason that journalists are often said to have more blood on their hands than soldiers and fighters.

Today we simply must, before God and the people, speak the language of reason, good and love. Nothing is easier for the "information machine" than to churn out hatred or to stir up chauvinism. Alas, never in history has that done any good.

We fully support the view expressed by Mr Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, in his message to the participants in this meeting: the potential contribution of journalists to peace-building is all the greater in today's world, where we witness a multiplication of "small" wars and local conflicts, which claim thousands of lives.

In view of the above and based on the results of our open discussions and sincere exchange of opinions:

We call upon the journalists of our troubled corner of the Earth, where today a fragile and tense peace obtains, to do all in their power to abstain from statements tainted with extremism, racism or hatred and to disseminate information likely to breed violence or provoke conflict;

We say: Enough of “witch hunting”. It is high time we stopped using our neighbours face as a model for the “portrait of the enemy” and root out the

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propaganda of distorted views about the “greatness” of certain nations or countries. We and our peoples know only too well the price that has been paid for today’s peace. It may not seem quite faire to some, as it may not suite some others – that is their problem. But no one has the right to blow up this peace;

We believe that the *moratorium* on intolerance announced at the Tbilisi Meeting should be extended in time and expanded to cover the entire media space of the Caucasus;

We remind everyone, and our colleagues in particular, of the dangerous and destructive role of the media in instigating and perpetuating conflicts, but also about the constructive peace-building mission and their outstanding, often decisive, capacity to overcome and appease tension in society;

We also reiterate that in reporting from zones of tension, objective information and the highest professional skills are of the utmost importance, together with observance of universal moral standards and journalism ethics;

We declare our commitment to the principles of the Declaration adopted in Puebla, Mexico Mexico, in May 1997, at the Meeting of Publishers and editors of Latin American Newspapers for a Culture of Peace and recognise the fundamental significance of the ideas proclaimed therein;

We support UN General Assembly Resolution 52/15 on the proclamation of the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the Declaration on a Culture of Peace submitted by UNESCO to the UN General Assembly at its 53 session;

We reaffirm our commitment to the ideals of a society whose members live in peaceful coexistence, rejecting the “culture of war” in favour of a culture of peace;

We approve the proposal put forward at the meeting to establish in Tbilisi, under the aegis of UNESCO, a special mechanism or press body to co-ordinate and consolidated peace-building efforts of the Caucasian journalists.

The participants thank Mr Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, and Mr Eduard Schevardnaze, President of Georgia, for their attention and support to the meeting and express their gratitude to the organisers.

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