

**Opening remarks by Ambassador Kano  
at WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2026 Conference  
4 May 2026 - Lusaka, Zambia**

Honorable Mr Cornelius Mweetwa, Minister of Information  
and Media, Republic of Zambia,

Madam Mariya Gabriel, Assistant Director General  
Communication and Information of UNESCO,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Let me start by thanking people and the Government of  
Zambia for their warm hospitality in hosting this important  
conference.

Zambia has become very popular for Japanese diplomats in  
recent weeks. Just last Thursday, my boss, Japanese Foreign  
Minister Toshimitsu Motegi visited Lusaka, having a fruitful  
discussion with his counterpart, Foreign Minister of

Zambia, on deepening our bilateral relationship. Today, I myself have the privilege of coming to Lusaka, for the first time personally, and perhaps officially as the first Japanese Ambassador to UNESCO from Paris.

At UNESCO, Japan and Zambia closely work together in many fields. Both countries served as World Heritage Committee members for four years until last year, and now both of us serve as Executive Board members since last year. So my good friend Ambassador of Zambia to UNESCO, Ms Judith Mulenga, and I see each other very often in Paris, maybe more often than our own respective partner !

Today, we come together for World Press Freedom Day 2026 Conference, to discuss **“Shaping a Future at Peace: Promoting Press freedom for Human Rights, Development and Security”**, a very timely topic given today’s increasingly complex global environment.

And I am greatly honoured to participate today, in the capacity of the Chair of IPDC, the International Programme for the Development of Communication, a subsidiary body of UNESCO General Conference.

Last year, UNESCO published its latest Global Report on Freedom of Expression and Media Development. One of its key findings is that the Freedom of Expression Index has declined by 10% globally since 2012. The report also points out that democracies are now outnumbered for the first time in 20 years.

I largely concur with these observations, based upon my own personal experiences since 1989, when I joined the Japanese Foreign Service, witnessing the news of the end of the Cold War. In early years of the Post-Cold War period, you may recall the general euphoria that liberal democracy and market economy would prevail throughout the world,

benefitting people globally, with freedom assured, and that international disputes will be settled by the rules, not by force.

But later on that euphoria faded. We now witness in international arena an increasing number of moves to change the rule-based order by force. And the setbacks of political and economic freedom are observed in many parts of the world.

A couple of years ago, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that “the Post-Cold War period is over”. During the Post-Cold War period, we have taken for granted that values such as democracy, freedom, and multilateralism will be widely accepted, but they now face challenges.

But why has democracy declined, and the freedom of expression has declined accordingly in the first place, as is shown in the UNESCO Global Report?

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War, many people did indeed aspire for freedom. Nowadays, some people seem to wish to escape from freedom, as Erich Fromm wrote in 1941. So why?

My intention of questioning is of course not out of a sense of resignation. On the contrary, we should not underestimate the resilience of international multilateral system that survived in the last 80 years. We should reinvigorate freedom, rather than escaping from freedom. And the role of press freedom and independent media has never been more critical. We should explore our collaborative efforts to that end, recognizing emerging challenges such as escalating disinformation; AI-generated misinformation; digital surveillance; economic pressures on independent journalism; and violence against journalists.

In this context, the role of UNESCO has been instrumental,

and its IPDC, which I now chair, has played both normative functions as well as supporting the concrete projects on the ground.

IPDC serves as the only UN multilateral forum in the UN system designed to mobilize the international community to promote free, independent, pluralistic and viable media. For more than four decades, the IPDC has played a leading role in mobilizing political commitment and channeling support to grassroots media development projects in developing countries and countries in transition. I am happy to elaborate more on this in panel discussion this afternoon.

Japan, since its accession to UNESCO 75 years ago, has been a steadfast supporter to the Organization, in all of its mandates. We have paid particular attention to the area of communication and information in recent years, and has supported its concrete programs to address the issues such as safety of journalists, disinformation, and capacity building

of local media.

As IPDC chair, I firmly believe that the freedom of expression and press freedom should be respected anywhere in the world, and that they should not be subject to intimidation or coercion anywhere in the world.

So, I would like to encourage more Member States and other stakeholders to join together supporting this important area.

Today's conference is an important opportunity for us to reconfirm that we want more freedom of expression, not escaping from it. And I look forward to actively participating in the discussion.

“Together, let us shape a future at peace through the protection of truth, the defense of freedom, and the empowerment of independent media.”

Thank you.