

# **Launch of the "Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press" 2012**

Press Conference – 25 January 2012

## **Introductory remarks by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

### **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

Today we launch for the 7<sup>th</sup> time the "Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the press". I welcome the presence of Mrs. Gisèle Khoury-Kassir and Mr. Walid Kassir, the representatives of the Samir Kassir Foundation, and the Ambassadors and representatives of European Union Member States accredited to Lebanon

Today we reconfirm our commitment to journalist and writer Samir Kassir and the values he held dear. His assassination in 2005 did not silence him. His battle for freedom of expression continues to inspire journalists to be courageous and professional in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. It inspires them to use words as weapons against oppression.

Samir Kassir's memory and values are more alive than ever in this period of transition in a newer Mediterranean region. His memory continues to inspire us all to be an engine for democracy and human rights and to open windows for positive change, for freedom, dignity and social justice.

Any modern society needs good governance structures in place allow its media to operate freely. Journalists should have the space and opportunity to professionally report human stories and real situations without fear of intimidation or reprisals. In doing so, journalists act as a bridge between citizens and their leaders, conveying information, voicing opinions and sharing ideas but also as a bridge among citizens, allowing them to learn about others and developing as individuals and as a community.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The coverage of the uprisings in this part of the world has revealed the power of the wide range of tools that journalists have now available to immediately access and share information through new media. Unfortunately, the limitations imposed on journalists and media professionals to freely and safely accomplish their missions, are equally powerful. They vary from inhibiting the flow and access to information, to arrests of media workers and bloggers, expulsions and visa refusals for international journalists, kidnappings and even murders.

Unfortunately, 2011 was not a good year for media freedom neither in this region nor in the rest of the world as recently underlined by Journalists without Borders in their annual report. Many journalists had to pay a heavy price to perform their duties of bringing information, seeking the truth, illustrating and publishing it. 66 journalists lost their lives in 2011, 20 out of those were killed in the Middle East, twice as many as in 2010. Furthermore, 252 were arrested, 553 attacked or

threatened and 30 kidnapped. These unacceptable figures reveal that the right to freedom of expression also requires consistent defense and protection.

Freedom of the press is a cornerstone of freedom of expression, a fundamental right of every human being and an inherent part of human dignity. For the European Union, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom of the press are fundamental pillars of democracy and the rule of law and prerequisites for the protection of all other freedoms.

Our commitment to these liberties is constantly renewed: not only do we denounce unjustified restrictions to freedom of media and to the work of journalists but we also take tangible actions like the yearly re-edition of this award or the provision of assistance to initiatives like Samir Kassir Eyes (SKEYES), supporting directly journalists, monitoring violations of freedom of the press and culture and providing legal support to journalists and intellectuals facing prosecution.

Let us not forget that freedom of expression is a right as well as a responsibility that needs to be taken seriously and applied with professionalism. Responsible press needs to rely on integrity, ethics and honesty to be credible and trustable.

This year once again the Samir Kassir Award pays tribute to those who strive to work and battle for a freer press and a more informed and more democratic society in the region.

Since its creation, the award has gained more and more recognition and has experienced continuous increased participation totaling over 630 journalists participating in the Prize since 2006. The 12 awarded articles have covered a variety of themes linked to the rule of law or human rights such as protection of vulnerable populations, discrimination, women rights, elections and democracy and freedom of expression.

I therefore encourage all journalists to participate; we look forward to receiving many thought-provoking, informative and inspiring pieces which will compete for the Samir Kassir Award 2012.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Gisèle Khoury-Kassir, President of the Samir Kassir Foundation.

Thank you all.