

Den Haag, 11-05-2023

Dear Mr. Van Zanen, Mayor of the Hague, dear delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the general assembly 2023 of the European Federation of Journalists, that we, as the NVJ, have the pleasure to host, alongside the city of The Hague. The bureau in Brussels has been courting us some time to organize this meeting until we were finally convinced that this is the right moment. Our campaign **Journalism has its price** has been successfully concluded, the Corona epidemic is all but over, and our new campaign **Journalism is a profession** is about to start. I will briefly come back to this in a few minutes.

War in Europe and the Fight for the Right to report. The theme of this assembly hovers over our deliberations today and tomorrow and indeed over our Federation. When we met in Izmir last year, the war was just a few months old, we were all taken by surprise that there was a full-blown war again, and an unprecedented aggression against civilians on European soil. As the past year has proven, our profession is deeply touched by the impact of war. Colleagues have died; many are in prison. How can we be impartial purveyors of news, when our sources cannot be checked? How can we be brokers between citizens, governments, organizations, nations, when our lives are in danger? How can we live up to journalistic ethics, if our outlets are jeopardized by social media, creating silos in an empty landscape, and wasteland in between? Indeed, how can we, journalists, function when targeted disinformation, amplified by digital channels, disables our profession, leading to an attitude of suspicion and even of turning away from the media by parts of society?

This era may have begun with former President Donald Trump firmly planting the term *fake news* in our language. For the first time, a President of the United States, considering itself the mother of all modern democracies, deliberately breached our professional integrity. Media outlets have just seen what the consequences may be, with the recent verdict of Fox news. For the first time, molesting the truth has been punished as a criminal act. What it takes to preserve one's professional standards in times of war is the subject of the Press Freedom Speech by Al Jazeera's correspondent Step Vaessen later this afternoon. And we are very much looking forward to it.

Dear colleagues. Before handing over to the mayor of The Hague, just a few words on your cohost the NVJ. Many of you are familiar with our successful program Persveilig, Safety4Journalists, and even our King is waxing lyrical about it. A panel will inform you on developments and challenges in just a moment. As NVJ, we will continue to fight for better wages, tariffs and working conditions for our 8000 members, both nationally and in the framework of the EFJ. At the same time, we need to reflect on the role of our profession, for reasons just mentioned. How do we preserve and improve our professional ethics in an era where the prerogative of the press, informing civic society in a responsible way, is challenged? Can anyone with a camera or notebook in hand be called a journalist? We want to take a step back and take our responsibility, in order to be proud again of a profession, a guild which is attacked from all sides. Journalism is no amateur game, it is no propaganda, it is not Any Masters Voice. Journalism it is an honest collection and publication of news, fair comments and criticism. Journalism is, in short, a Profession. And in that capacity, Journalism is an indispensable 'fourth estate' of any democratic society that deserves that name. I wish us all a very fruitful meeting, with wise decisions. And with this, I hand over to the Mayor of The Hague, Mr Van Zanen, you have the floor.