Welcome by Caroline Pauwels and Yvon Englert

(Caroline Pauwels and Yvon Englert)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome

Today is World Press Freedom Day.

(Caroline Pauwels)

We know, for a long time now, that journalists around the world are killed to be silenced and to control information.

The Paris shootings in 2015 killing eight Charlie Hebdo journalists and the killing of the journalist and blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017 in Malta, made us realize that we, in old Europe, are not immune to this plague.

(Yvon Englert)

We, the sister Brussels universities, bound by the culture of freedom of speech, were shocked by the Charlie Hebdo killings. Therefore, we decided to organize a yearly event celebrating the freedom of expression, in collaboration with great partners, involving as many free press representatives as possible. The first edition of Difference Day took place on the 3rd of May of 2015, at Bozar, the reknown Brussels centre for fine arts.

Why do we call it Difference Day?

Because freedom of expression implies respect for the opinion of others.

And therefore, *World Press Freedom Day* is called *Difference Day*.

Today, we live stream the sixth edition.

(Caroline Pauwels)

In corona times, during which almost all public events are cancelled, we decided not to cancel Difference Day.

Freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom of expression are more important than ever in these times of confinement during which we accept restrictions of our fundamental rights - don’t you agree? The media definitely play a crucial role in this Covid-19 situation.

We welcome you to this live streaming edition of *Difference Day*, not from the beautiful venue of Bozar this time, but from our studio at VUB campus.

It will be our honor, once more, to award the Difference Day Honorary Title for Freedom of Expression later on.

Journalism without fear or favour.

That is this year’s theme.

(Yvon Englert)

This theme was chosen before the outbreak of the corona pandemic, but it is obvious that journalism without fear or favor is precisely what we need today. Globally.

Do you remember how China tried to cover up Corona, at the beginning of the outbreak, by threatening Dr. Li Wenliang, the first doctor who warned about the COVID-19 epidemic in Wuhan? Is China speaking the truth now?

Just recently, the Moroccan journalist Hajar Raissouni was imprisoned for “illegal abortion and extramarital relations”. This was denounced by the Moroccan association of human rights as a manoeuvre trying to hit her journal and showing that opposition journalists are tracked by the Moroccan secret services.

(Caroline Pauwels)

Or what about Chechnya, where the Russian journalist Elena Milashina is threatened today by the Chechen government because they did not like the report that she wrote on the management of the coronavirus crisis by the Chechen authorities, in Novaya Gazeta. The leader of the Republic said - and I quote him – he “could not rule out violent actions” against Elena.

One year ago, Elena Milashina was present, here, on Difference Day, to be awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of ULB and VUB. Today, we reaffirm our support for this courageous Russian journalist.

(Yvon Englert)

And we reaffirm our support for all journalists, media workers, and writers that are threatened by governments, by fanatics, by criminal organizations, and who resist bribery.

Threatened and silenced, as we will find out shortly.

Thank you, all of you, for being here, with us, today.

We hope that you will enjoy the very first live streaming edition of Difference Day.

(Caroline Pauwels et Yvon Englert)

And remember: Speak freely, listen respectfully, different opinions matter.