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PRESS RELEASE

Copenhagen: ARTICLE 19 Calls for a Changed Climate for Free Expression and Freedom of Information

In a report released today to coincide with the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, ARTICLE 19 shows how responses to climate change will not be effective unless there is transparency in their development and implementation, a free flow of information and respect for freedom of expression.

“Across the globe, we have found instances of media reporting on climate change being silenced; scientists being censored; climate change protests repressed; activists investigating environmental disasters intimidated, arrested or even killed. Even the amount, origin and use of climate change funds are shrouded in secrecy” says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

The ARTICLE 19 report – *Changing the Climate for Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Information* – shows that climate change debates and interventions have failed so far to fully integrate a freedom of expression perspective, and that this is evident in many national and regional responses to climate change.

For example, the report details examples where journalists and others have been threatened, harassed or prosecuted by authorities or large corporations, or risked their lives to cover environmental degradation in some parts of the world. In July 2009, the French journalist Cyril Payen was arrested by security guards and handed over to the police while investigating illegal logging by a leading Indonesian industrial group in Sumatra. In November 2009, Kumkum Dasgupta, senior assistant editor with the Delhi-based *Hindustan Times* and Raimondo Bultrini, reporter for the Italian newspaper *L'Espresso* were arrested while covering a Greenpeace protest against uncontrolled deforestation in Pelalawan district in the province of Riau, on Sumatra. In Brazil, Vilmar Berna, the editor of the Niterói-based environmentalist daily *Jornal do Meio Ambiente*, which exposes clandestine overfishing and threats to protected marine life in Rio de Janeiro Bay, has been a constant target of threats and intimidation attempts since May 2006.

With scientists being accused of trying to manipulate the debate on one hand, and on the other, evidence that scientists in the USA were pressured to delete references to climate change in scientific papers, or were prevented by authorities from talking to the media, the importance of transparency cannot be overstated.

“To date, public participation globally in planning for effective mitigation and adaptation in the face of climate change has been marked by high degrees of inequality of access to critical information in what is an increasingly technical but opaque international debate” adds Callamard.

“This is a profoundly wrong departure point for our joint efforts to secure the future of the planet. No matter what positive outcome emerges from the Copenhagen Conference, little will be delivered unless and until implementation is accompanied by full respect for the free flow of information, the free exercise of public debate, a free and independent media, transparency and accountability.”

The Copenhagen Conference offers the international community an unprecedented opportunity to forge a legally enforceable framework to combat climate change.

ARTICLE 19’s report includes 34 recommendations addressed to states, the media and civil society aimed at addressing some flagrant but often unrecognised flaws in current climate change agreements and practices. The recommendations call for a strengthening of the environment for effective climate change responses by ensuring that human rights, and particularly freedom of expression and freedom of information, are fully integrated into climate change strategies and respected in their implementation.

In particular, ARTICLE 19 calls for:

- Strengthening the legal framework for protection of information and expression rights;
- Promoting the Aarhus Principles (contained in the 1998 Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) in international agreements;
- The pro-active disclosure and updates of high quality information on climate change;
- Protecting and promoting the free flow of information and public debate;
- Promoting the participation of vulnerable groups;
- Open, effective and transparent systems of accountability at national and international level; and
- Addressing the disparities and inequality between states negotiating climate change agreements.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- To view the ARTICLE 19 report *Changing the Climate for Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Information*, go to: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/changing-the-climate-for-freedom-of-expression-and-freedom-of-information.pdf>
- For more information please contact: Sejal Parmar, Senior Legal Officer at ARTICLE 19, tel: +44-207-278 9292; email: sejal@article19.org.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.