

**SPEECH BY  
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AT THE OPENING CEREMONY WORLD PRESS PHOTO EXHIBITION 2001  
AT EAST ENTRANCE ATRIUM, MID VALLEY MEGAMALL, KUALA LUMPUR  
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First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for having invited me again to officiate at the opening of the World Press Photo Exhibition. It gives me great pleasure to be amongst members of the Press, many of whom I meet frequently in the course of my duties.

2. Most politicians enjoy the glare of the camera lights because it makes them feel that they are still in the news. Sometimes, when the publicity is negative, they run and hide from the cameras. But as most of us find out, you can run from the Press, but you cannot hide.

3. On a more serious note, I would like to say that there are often negative perceptions of the Press, especially, photographers. Incidents such as the death of Princess Diana who was being chased by the paparazzi often tend to reiterate this perception.

4. Paparazzi has become a term to describe photographers and the Press in a negative tone. Just like people in public office, the Press have to deal with negative perceptions which are sometimes unjustified.

5. Exhibitions such as these give people a better idea of what the world of Press photography is all about. It is not just chasing actresses, the beautiful people and politicians, and clicking away. Press photography is a powerful information tool which has proven to change the course of history in many instances.

6. Often, a picture can be much more powerful than the written word. I can recall how the photograph of a young girl, the victim of napalm bombing in the Vietnam war, is etched in the minds of people all over the world. Or the photograph of a South Vietnamese general shooting dead a captured suspected Vietcong member which depicted how senseless the war in Vietnam had become. These two photographs moulded public opinion in the United States and forced a change of policy.

7. Similarly, the photograph of a starving Ethiopian child drew world attention to the extreme poverty in that country and other parts of Africa, creating an awareness that resulted in the pouring of funds, food and medicine to the less fortunate of that continent.

8. The horrors of Bosnia were enunciated by photographs of the mass graves and drew worldwide condemnation against the atrocities of the Serbs.

9. These and many other photographs had the effect of changing world and domestic opinions, resulting in policy changes, political fallouts and the fall of Governments.

10. Press photography is also a very dangerous career. We have seen how photographers have to be in the frontline in wars and riots and often, become the

first victims. A writer can sit on the sidelines and report; but a photographer has to be right up front to be able to get his shot. Many brave photo-journalists have died in the line of duty.

11. Photo-journalists also play an important role in social and economic development. We have seen how a photograph of a starving Sudanese tugs at the heartstrings. In the same manner, we have seen how telling photographs of squalor in the midsts of high-tech development create awareness, both in the public and in authorities, to move them to act. We have seen how photographs of drug addicts getting a fix in the side lanes of busy metropolitan cities move the police force to act and the welfare authorities to draw up rehabilitation programmes.

12. Similarly, it is often photographs which strike home and disprove lies. These are the positive attributes of photo-journalism which are often not highlighted when the world continues to view the Press as an intruder into their privacy and as an "evil" which has to be tolerated.

13. The pictures exhibited here today are a tribute to press photographers who have often risked life and limb so that the world can see what is happening in a distant part of their world. The creative vision of these photographs are worth more than the thousand words.

14. I believe every picture that is exhibited here has its own message. In Malaysia, photographs of wanton riots and senseless killings make us grateful we live in a peaceful and stable political climate. It makes Malaysians to strive even harder to maintain the peace and prosperity that we have become accustomed to.

15. Malaysian press photographers have also adapted themselves well to the fast changing world of communications and I am told that some Malaysians have made a mark for themselves in the international Press. We have Malaysian photojournalists occupying senior positions and working in foreign countries such as China. I hope one day we would be able to see the work of these and other Malaysian photographers exhibited here.

16. Already, we have world-class photographers who have produced many books on photography, especially a few in Sabah and Sarawak. I am confident that with the proper drive, ambition and determination, Malaysian photo-journalists can achieve their goal because they are creative and professional in their outlook.

17. Once again, I would like to thank the organizers for having invited me here today. It is my hope that you will continue to achieve higher standards in the field of Press photography. Thank you.