ME conference opens with call to protect journalists

DUBAI, UAE: The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) opened its annual Middle East Conference this week by calling on authorities to protect journalists covering the ongoing demonstrations in the region and to allow the press to fulfil its role in providing free and credible news.

"The demonstrations in the Middle East illustrate the need for strong newspapers in the region," said Christoph Riess, CEO of WAN-IFRA, the global association of the world's press. "We need newspapers that are free to provide credible, critical and timely information to the society."

"Journalists who are covering the ongoing demonstrations must be free to report without fear of attack or arrest," he said.

The 6th annual WAN-IFRA conference drew 250 participants from 17 countries and is focused on successful cross-platform advertising strategies. However, the demonstrations in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and elsewhere also were addressed.

Dhaen Shaheen, CEO and editor-in-chief of *Al Bayan* newspaper in Dubai, one of the conference hosts, said the demonstrations "have created a new situation in the media" and illustrate how technology allows for more open debate.

"We can see the new technology has created a virtual space, virtual parliaments and discussion platforms to express everything they want," he said. "The technology has changed the tools of communication, especially regarding the expression of points of view."

The conference, which continues through Friday, will examine the transformation of newspapers into multi-media companies and how they can succeed in offer cross-media advertising solutions. This is a critical issue for the newspaper business in the region; 85% of newspapers in the Arab world have their own websites, but digital platforms produce only 2% of advertising revenues, said Mohammad Abdullah, managing director of TECOM Investments Media Cluster in Dubai, a conference host.

Summaries of conference presentations and other information will be posted at www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/middle-east-conference-summaries.

Learn more about WAN-IFRA at www.wan-ifra.org or through the WAN-IFRA Magazine at www.wan-ifra.org/magazine.

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