

Olafur Eliasson (artist) and Kumi Naidoo (former Head of Amnesty International and Greenpeace) in conversation on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020

OE: Kumi, thanks for talking with me. We're still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and experiencing an acute need for global collaboration and empathy. With hourly updates, health facts, and strategies for curbing the virus being shared across the world, the freedom of press and unhindered access to precise information is as critical as ever.

KN: Looking at it on a global scale, the urgency of the moment – whether that is to tackle climate change, inequality, poverty or any present-day crisis – is to assert the right of ordinary people, citizens, to have access to high-quality, accurate and diverse media that allows them the capability to make informed decisions. We will never be able to make progress on these crucial issues if they are not able to be addressed openly through the media. This poses a big challenge, not only the challenges that these crises bring, but also the challenge to communicate them in a way that is accessible and people are able to engage with.

OE: Yes, I think it's a really important point that freedom of press affects everyone, all the way from heads of state and other people in power to the individual readers with a newspaper or a tablet in hand. I am particularly interested in emphasizing, as you say, that it's also about the readers and about seeing them as co-producers. By ensuring the safety and independence of journalists and news outlets, we are also insisting on the right of readers to be given broad and balanced reporting from which to draw their own conclusions about what is happening in the world.

KN: What is the media landscape today? In the past, the reader, the listener, the viewer, were totally passive. But today, access to Social Media has changed this quite considerably and so in that sense I want to endorse the idea of co-creation. If you were to focus on the readers of today and their rights, then there are three: the right to read, the right to know and the right to participate or act.

OE: These rights very much overlap with some of the values that I think define the field of culture. As an artist, I strive to make artworks that open a space for the viewers to articulate their thoughts, dreams, needs, and values. And I hope that my works are felt to be welcoming and to reflect some of these thoughts and emotions. The meeting up of artwork and visitors, the dialogue that opens between them, which is fundamentally defined by trust, is what really interests me. Trust is absolutely urgent to preserve, both in the field of culture and in the media. They are meeting places for evaluating what goes on in the world and for people to feel they are a part of society. And so when we express our gratitude to and respect for journalists and their platforms on World Press Freedom Day, we are, in fact, also celebrating that which enables us all to be engaged citizens.