

UPF Rome, Italy Inaugurates the International Media Association for Peace

Carlo Zonato
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Rome, Italy -- The inaugural webinar of the Italian chapter of International Media Association for Peace focused on the theme of media responsibility.

"The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword: Media and Social between Conflict and the Culture of Peace" was the title of the IMAP inauguration, which was held on May 10, 2023, in honor of World Press Freedom Day, which was established by the United Nations in December 1993.

The moderator of the webinar was **Maria Pia Turiello**, a forensic criminologist and mediator in conflict situations.



Carlo Zonato, the president of UPF-Italy, opened the meeting with an introduction to UPF. The federation, he said, "in recent years has produced a particular acceleration in its evolution through the worldwide inauguration of a series of projects operating in the main sectors of social life."

Among these, he said, was the International Media Association for Peace. He noted UPF's "concrete, I would say unprecedented, commitment to building a culture of peace through synergistic actions with an interreligious and interdisciplinary approach." To achieve this, he said, "the contribution of a free and responsible press" is decisive.

The webinar continued with a presentation about IMAP by the IMAP-Italy coordinator, **Vittorio Patanella**. Inaugurated during the 2020 World Summit held in Seoul, South Korea, "the project draws on an international network of professionals and scholars who care about press freedom, independence and

autonomy of information, social responsibility of the media and the highest principles of ethical journalism."

Mr. Patanella remarked on "the vital role of information and communication to counter totalitarianism, to spread and defend freedom, human rights and to promote more peaceful and inclusive societies."

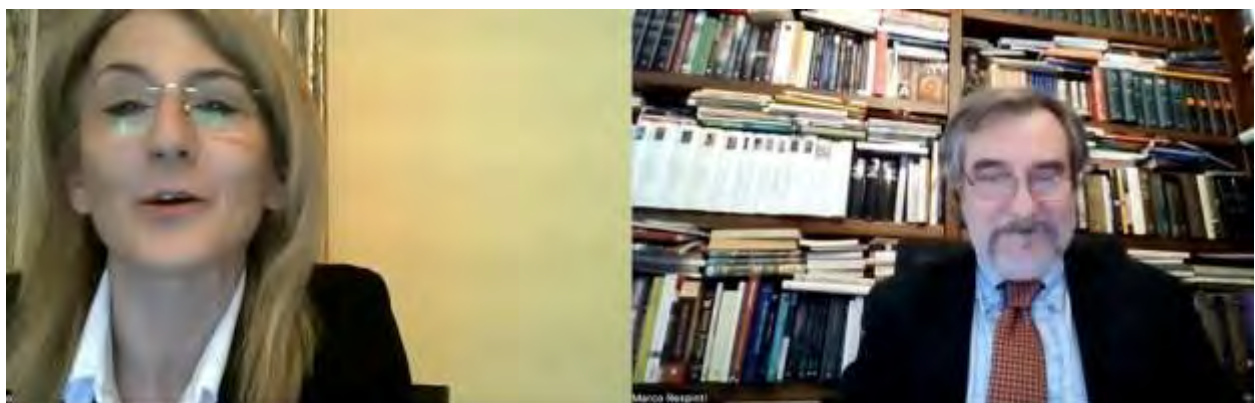


He recalled IMAP's commitment to supporting the goals of the United Nations. He cited the main international initiatives of the World Media Association, active since the 1970s, on whose foundation IMAP was born, and he read an excerpt from IMAP's Inaugural Resolution, signed at the 2020 World Summit.

After the showing of a film introducing IMAP, **Maria Pia Turiello** took the floor. "In the dialogue for peace, the importance of the media in conflict situations can be traced back to the general problem of the influence the media can have on the public."

She recalled the difficulties of war correspondents in the construction of news, because of the problem of verifying sources and accessing conflict areas, and she emphasized the importance of examining the origin of information in order to form an informed and critical opinion.

"Ultimately, the role of peace education remains decisive, as indeed the UNESCO charter states: Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be built."



Dr. Marco Lombardi, the director of the School of Journalism at the Catholic University of Milan, said: "We have been dealing with the issue of freedom of the press for 500 years because it is being taken away *de facto*. That is why there is a need to deal with the subject in order to protect it. The important starting point is the inextricable link that has always existed between power and the media and how to control them."

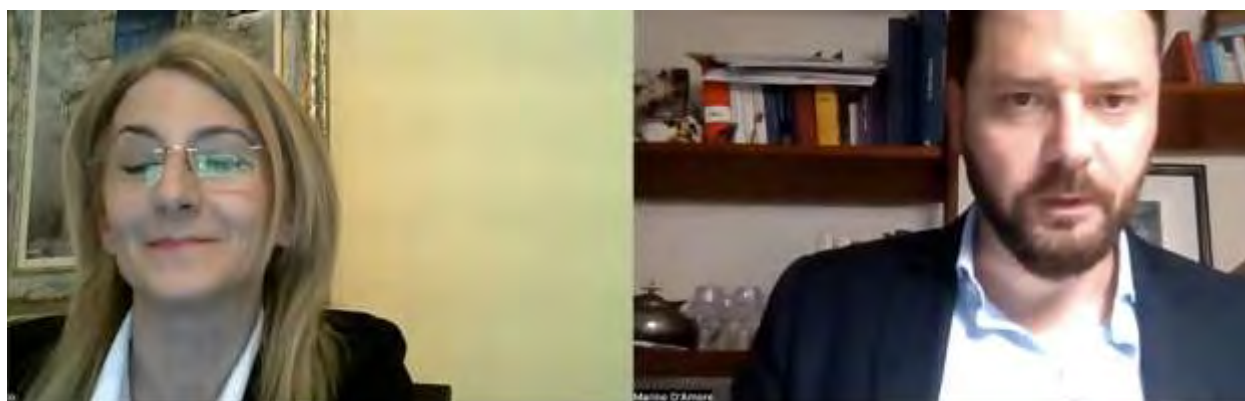
Referring to the recent annual report of the international organization Reporters without Borders, Dr. Lombardi highlighted the high number of dead, imprisoned and missing journalists. The reason, he said, is that the journalist "seeks the truth and does everything possible to make transparent those places that by their nature are opaque because of the interests they bring. So investigative journalists and investigative journalism are a panacea."

He talked about public opinion, whose current state of uncertainty enables communication strategies that make public opinion almost powerless and aware of being the recipient of fake news. The result is that public opinion "takes sides, becoming a fan of sources that are completely uncontrollable. The public cannot renounce these uncontrollable sources because it wants to reduce its condition of uncertainty. A condition it could not otherwise bear. ...

"This is the dramatic situation in which we live, which increasingly requires responsible awareness, on the part of media practitioners but also of the public, which must realize that in the complicated world of communication, new skills are needed in order to be conscious users."

For **Marino D'Amore**, a lecturer in social media and social networks at Niccolò Cusano University, "a fundamental concept also for press freedom and communication is dis-intermediation."

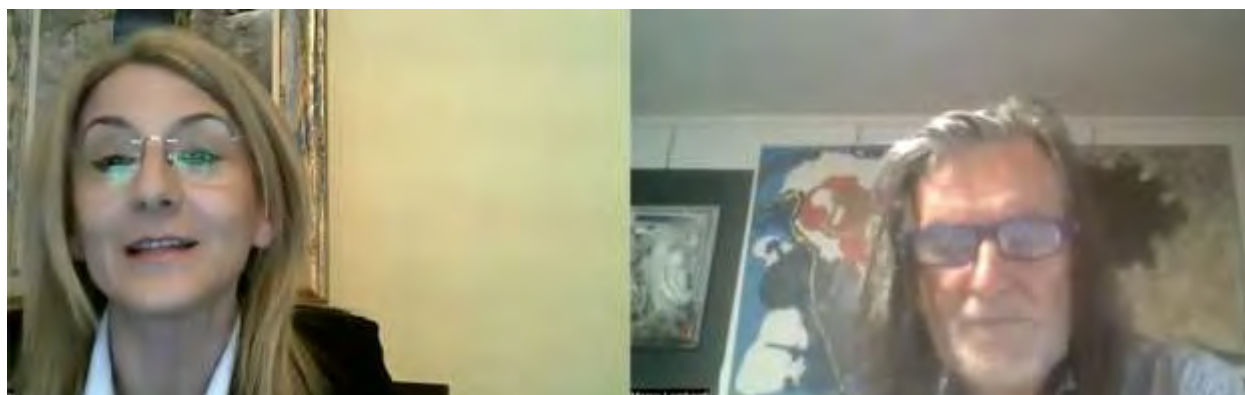
He explained: "Today, more than ever, we have the opportunity to be able to communicate directly with the source of information. Above all, this allows us to detach ourselves from the filter of the opinion leader who used to translate the media message to the public, and to activate confrontation by having different sources available."



Our tendency, however, is to deepen the positions we already believe in, activating "the manipulative action of a part of the media." Hyper-simplification, another concept illustrated, is the attempt "to tell what is happening in as simple a way as possible, which leads to a partial and most often distorted view of the facts."

He spoke of de-realization and post-truth, which do not explain what is really happening, but try to touch the emotions of the audience, bringing a biased and partial knowledge of reality. He reminded his listeners that an event becomes news when it responds to certain parameters, such as conflict and polarization, that is, placing two conflicting realities on the same plane, prompting the public to take sides.

"I think we should do cultural literacy and education work with respect to not only digital culture but also the appreciation of difference and otherness," he concluded.



Maria Pia Rossignaud, the director of Media Duemila and the vice president of TuttiMedia Observatory, said: "As a journalist, I believe that brand is still important, because even if you cannot be 100 percent certain, getting news from a reliable brand, such as a historical newspaper, where you practice a profession of journalism ethically bound by rules and norms, certainly makes a difference compared to getting it from a context that absolutely might not be so reliable."

She spoke about the "NewsMedia 4 Good" project of the TuttiMedia Observatory, of which she is vice president. She explained about the epistemological and cultural crisis that results from a different use of words that the algorithm uses to give orders, while humans tell stories that can be interpreted subjectively.

"We need a rebalancing of storytelling that takes into account the ongoing novelty such as generative artificial intelligence," she stated. Another picture of the epistemological crisis and the context of chaos in which we live are the inauthenticity of machine-created pictures and the possibility that generative AI can be mistaken for an oracle.

"We human beings must face a peace education, in a cultural context capable of mediating between all social, economic and cultural differences, to understand that we do not need an oracle, but a machine that simplifies our lives."

According to **Dr. Marco Respinti**, a journalist, essayist and lecturer, as well as the editor in chief of *Bitter Winter*: "The pen is mightier than the sword. ... The pen, and what the pen writes, that is, words, are very powerful weapons. In fact, there are those in the world, and always have been, who want to ban words and pens. There are those who restrict the freedom of expression, of speech, of writing, of the press. Those who are afraid of words and freedom."

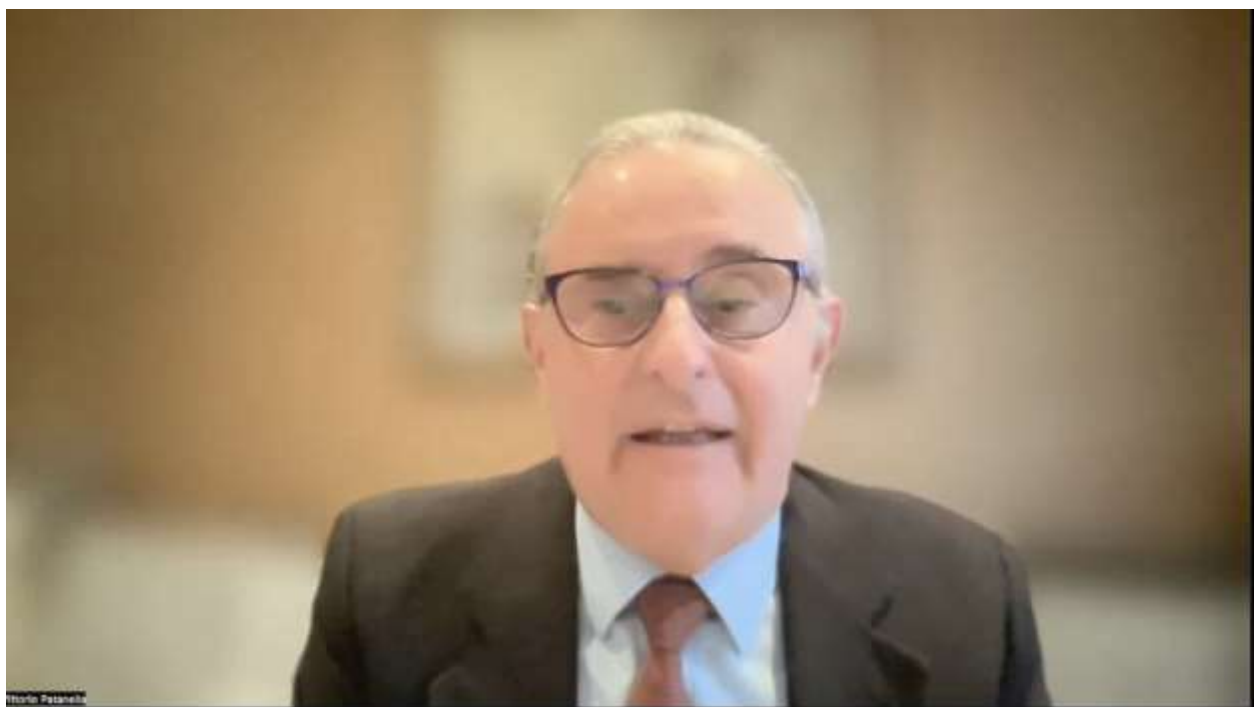
For the speaker, there are empty but disturbing words and words feared by many powerhouses when they

are faithful echoes of the truth. This word is considered out of date, Dr. Respinti said, "yet there is nothing else in the world but truth," whose absolute and inalienable value can be understood by trying to do without it.



For Dr. Respinti, journalists "must conceive of themselves as small and great, humble and powerful, loyal and faithful servants of Our Lady Truth" because of their enormous power.

The philosopher Edmund Burke is credited with the famous phrase "for evil to triumph, it is enough that good men do nothing." The speaker quotes it to assert that "it is enough that speech does not work for good to propitiate evil."



Dr. Respinti concluded by stating that "the journalist must choose whether to be a soldier of light or an armiger of darkness" and that if he wants to be objective, if he aims to be truthful, he needs to take sides. "That is why, as I have had occasion to repeat to friends who suffer ethnic and religious persecution in their own countries, the media can be the best allies or the worst enemies."

The webinar concluded with a lively question-and-answer session and a call to IMAP from the speakers and the audience to organize new opportunities for reflection and further study of these important issues.