

RECOGNIZING FLORIDA LAW
ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 12, 2020

Mr. WEBSTER of Florida. Madam Speaker, I am honored to recognize the fallen officers from the state of Florida who diligently gave their lives to protect their communities. This week marks the annual observance of National Police Week. Though we set aside one week a year to honor law enforcement across the country, I encourage all Americans to join me in recognizing the dedication, courage, and selfless sacrifice of our nation's officers every day.

The men and women being honored this week gave the last full measure of devotion to their country in the form of the ultimate offering—their lives. Every community is indebted to those individuals in uniform who voluntarily put themselves in danger for our safety and security.

Over three hundred officers' names from across the nation will be added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., this year for sacrificing their lives in the line of duty. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the 13 officers from Florida who bravely and selflessly served to protect the state. It is an honor to recognize them along with all men and women in law enforcement.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY IN
THE OSCE REGION

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 12, 2020

Mr. HASTINGS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to emphasize the urgency of global press freedom, particularly across the 57-nation region of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Earlier last week, we celebrated World Press Freedom Day, a day originally proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993 to celebrate the fundamental principle of a free and independent press. On this day and beyond, we honor journalists and media professionals for their tireless service in reporting the truth, sometimes at the risk of their own personal safety. World Press Freedom Day serves as an important reminder to governments around the world to respect their country's commitment to press freedom.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission, of which I am Chairman, is charged with monitoring compliance with human rights and security commitments in the OSCE region. Freedom of the press is a foundational commitment to human rights and democracy. Unfortunately, however, some leaders view the media as a threat and seek to silence individuals and outlets through financial, legal, and physical means. What these leaders truly fear is that journalists will expose corruption, human rights violations, abuses of power, and other undemocratic behavior.

According to the latest reports from the Committee to Protect Journalists, 250 journalists are imprisoned worldwide for their work, 64 journalists are missing, and 1,369 journalists have been killed since 1992. Additionally, Reporters Without Borders' 2020 World Press Freedom Index found that global press freedom has deteriorated by 12 percent since 2013.

Madam Speaker, I also rise to applaud the undaunted service of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Dé sir. His leadership as an independent monitor for these issues among OSCE participating States has offered candid review of our collective challenges, while demonstrating the importance of OSCE institutions. Mr. Dé sir's team has provided impeccable service to help nations implement their international commitments to this end through country visits and legislative review, as well as hosting expert conferences. I encourage my colleagues to closely follow his work and to learn more about his mandate by reviewing the proceedings of the U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing I chaired with Mr. Dé sir on July 25, 2019, addressing "State of Media Freedom in the OSCE Region."

Madam Speaker, amid this global pandemic, it is more important than ever that journalists and media professionals are able to work freely and without retribution. Unfortunately, too many journalists remain in jail throughout the OSCE region, while states like Russia, Azerbaijan, and Hungary criminalize providing essential information and transparency about the COVID-19 pandemic. Independent media continues to be assaulted under the pretense of punishing allegedly false, misleading, or unofficial information. This is unacceptable.

Earlier in April, I released statements expressing concern with the latest attacks on press freedom in Russia and the unchecked power granted to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán amid the coronavirus pandemic.

During these trying times, strong journalism and access to accurate, unbiased information are essential tools for countering the spread of the disease. I ask my colleagues to join me in urging states to recognize the indispensable role of the media during this time and to reverse policies that in any way discourage freedom of expression.