

Testimony of Joel Simon

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Hearing on “The Dangers of Reporting on Human Rights”

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Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I want to commend you for holding this important hearing on the dangers of reporting on human rights, and for inviting the Committee to Protect Journalists to testify before you. My name is Joel Simon and I am CPJ’s executive director. The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide and defends the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal. CPJ protects the free flow of news and commentary by taking action wherever journalists are under threat.

CPJ employs roughly 55 experts around the world who research, track, and advocate on global press freedom violations. We are driven to do this because press freedom is among the most fundamental of human rights. It is essential to democracy, accountability, and global security. The U.S. plays a vital role in ensuring this right is protected.

I originally joined CPJ in 1997, after more than a decade as a reporter in Mexico and Central America. I regularly covered human rights issues, and it was an awareness of how local journalists reporting on these sensitive issues often faced violent attacks that led me to join CPJ. In the intervening two decades, the challenges for journalists covering human rights issues have only grown, as a number of high-profile recent cases make plain.

In Myanmar, Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were jailed for more than 500 days in direct reprisal for their groundbreaking reporting on violence against the country’s Rohingya Muslim minority. Their recent pardon, though welcome, does not undo the terrible injustice against them. In the Philippines, Maria Ressa and the staff of the news website *Rappler* face a series of crippling legal actions in response to the outlet’s courageous investigations into allegations of serious human rights abuses by the government of Rodrigo Duterte. And of course, the murder and dismemberment of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, by officials dispatched from Riyadh, is an abominable crime that has thus far gone mostly unpunished. Until all those responsible for Khashoggi’s murder are brought to

justice, journalists around the world, particularly those covering human rights, will continue to work in an environment of uncertainty and vulnerability.

The serious threat to press freedom, and in particular to journalists covering human rights issues, is further evidenced by the number of cases CPJ has documented of journalists imprisoned or murdered in retaliation for their work. Today, I will provide an overview of the dangers faced by journalists around the world who report on human rights, the methods governments use to prevent the free flow of information, and examples of country situations and individual cases. I will also present recommendations to the U.S. government.

Overview

Around the world, journalists reporting on human rights face a variety of threats. One of the ways that CPJ tracks and measures the state of global press freedom is by conducting a census and analysis of the number of journalists imprisoned or killed each year.

At the close of 2018, CPJ recorded at least 250 journalists behind bars for the third year in a row.¹ Of those, 151 reported on human rights issues. These imprisonments not only deprive journalists of their rights, they deprive citizens of the right to access information, and threaten global stability of society.

Consider the case of Azimjon Askarov, in Kyrgyzstan. Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek and contributor to independent news websites, documented human rights violations in his hometown of Bazar-Korgon amid ethnic violence that swept southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. He exposed fabricated criminal cases, arbitrary detentions, and the rape and abusive treatment of detainees in the Jalal-Abad region. He was arrested, convicted on charges that included incitement to ethnic hatred and complicity in the murder of a police officer, and sentenced to life in prison. A CPJ investigation found that authorities retaliated against Askarov for his reporting.² Askarov told CPJ that authorities had long threatened to retaliate against him.

Separately, at least 54 journalists were killed in 2018, 34 of whom were singled out for murder—an 88 percent jump from 2017.³ Of the 54 total killed journalists in 2018, 13 reported on human rights, and eight of those were targeted for murder.

¹ CPJ special report. “Hundreds of journalists jailed globally becomes the new normal”

<https://cpj.org/reports/2018/12/journalists-jailed-imprisoned-turkey-china-egypt-saudi-arabia.php>

² CPJ special report. “In Kyrgyzstan, injustice and torture in Askarov case” <https://cpj.org/reports/2012/06/in-kyrgyzstan-injustice-and-torture-in-askarov-cas.php>

³ CPJ special report. “More journalists killed on the job as reprisal murders nearly double” <https://cpj.org/reports/2018/12/journalists-killed-murdered-afghan-saudi-us.php>

Two of those were Raed Fares, founder and director of the independent radio station Radio Fresh and the Kafranbel Media Center, and his colleague Hamoud al-Jnaid, a reporter and photographer for Radio Fresh,⁴ who were shot dead in eastern Kafranbel, Syria, on November 23, 2018. Fares was known for creatively defying demands from the Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front (currently known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) that Radio Fresh stop playing music on air or get rid of female news readers. In his last Facebook post—dated October 5, 2018—he posted a video of a demonstrations in Kafranbel calling for the downfall of the regime.

Since CPJ began collecting data in 1992, at least 1,340 journalists have been killed in relation to their work around the world. At least 285 of those covered human rights.⁵ Among the best known was Russian reporter Anna Politkovskaya, who was shot dead outside her Moscow apartment in October 2006. Her murder, allegedly carried out in reprisal for her reporting in human rights violations in Chechnya and the North Caucasus, has had a profound impact on our understanding of the human impact of that conflict, and the fragile peace that endures today.

CPJ has found that in nine out of 10 cases of murdered journalists, the killers go unpunished. Murder is the ultimate form of censorship, insofar as the murderers seek to kill a story by killing a person. Impunity sends an empowering message to those who seek to censor and control the media through violence, and has a chilling effect on journalists who see that their government will not protect them.

Key Threats

The numbers of imprisoned and killed journalists around the world are an expression of the global threats to journalism, and in particular, human rights reporting. New threats seem to emerge every day. The following is a summary of those CPJ considers to be the most pressing:

Anti-press rhetoric and the criminalization of journalism

One way governments censor reporting on human rights is by criminalizing the act of journalism. CPJ has documented several ways that governments employ this strategy. Perhaps the most prevalent is the use of national security or anti-terror laws to justify crackdowns on the press.

In 2018, 70 percent of all imprisoned journalists were jailed on anti-state charges, including accusations of terrorism. The false dichotomy between national security and free expression and journalistic practices makes it increasingly difficult for journalists and media organizations to

⁴ <https://cpj.org/data/people/raed-fares/index.php>

⁵ Explore all CPJ data: <https://cpj.org/data/killed/>

report freely and independently. The case of Aasif Sultan in India is instructive.⁶ Sultan, a journalist with the monthly magazine *Kashmir Narrator*, was arrested during a raid on his home in Srinagar on August 27, 2018. Jammu and Kashmir police accused Sultan of being in touch with a militant group and promoting it on social media. A month earlier, Sultan wrote a cover story for *Kashmir Narrator* on Burhan Wani, a Kashmiri militant whose killing by Indian security forces set off anti-government demonstrations in July 2016. Sultan's story included interviews with non-combatant members of Wani's militant group. Sultan's editor, Showkat Motta, told CPJ that police pressured Sultan to disclose his sources. Indian outlets reported that police subjected Sultan to repeated interrogation during his detention, including questions about why he reported on the conflict in Kashmir, why he had not reported on development in the state, and questions about headlines that had appeared in *Kashmir Narrator*.

The national security framework is also used to put pressure on technology companies to remove content and undermine encryption, which in turn undermines reporting on human rights cases. Since 2012, 13 countries have used Twitter's "country withheld content" tool to effectively censor content, according to the social media platform's transparency reports. Governments usually cite laws around national security, counter-terrorism, defamation, or hate speech when requesting such removals. Figures from Twitter transparency reports show that legal demands to remove content on the platform went from 432 requests in the first part of 2014 to 6,651 requests in the second part of 2017. Turkey and Russia were responsible for 74 percent of all requests during that period. As legal demands can specify more than one account and/or tweet, over 78,000 accounts were reported by governments during that period. Twitter complied fully or partially with 24 percent of legal demands from Turkey, compared with about 9 percent for the rest of the world. Facebook's transparency reports for the same period show it made close to 154,000 content restrictions worldwide. In the second part of 2017 in Turkey, more Twitter accounts were withheld and Facebook content restricted than in any other country.⁷

Another concerning trend is the increased passage and use of "false news" statutes to jail journalists. In 2018, the number of journalists imprisoned on charges of false news rose to 28 globally, compared with nine such imprisonments in 2016. Of those, 19 are imprisoned in Egypt.⁸ But government attacks on the press for "false news" are not limited to Egypt.

In recent weeks, several countries have moved to criminalize "fake news." On March 7, Russia's parliament advanced legislation that would allow courts to jail and fine people who use the internet to spread "fake news" or disrespect government officials and state symbols, including President Vladimir Putin. The bills would also allow Russian authorities to block websites that

⁶ <https://cpj.org/data/people/aasif-sultan/index.php>

⁷ CPJ blog. "How Turkey silences journalists online, one removal request at a time" <https://cpj.org/blog/2018/08/how-turkey-silences-journalists-online-one-removal.php>

⁸ CPJ alert. "CPJ calls on Egyptian authorities to release journalists held on false news charges" <https://cpj.org/2018/07/cpj-calls-on-egyptian-authorities-to-release-journ.php>

publish the offending material.⁹ And just last week in Singapore, the country’s parliament approved a bill that gives all government ministers broad and arbitrary powers to demand corrections, remove content, and block webpages if they are deemed to be disseminating falsehoods “against the public interest” or to undermine public confidence in the government.¹⁰

Usually, such criminalization is accompanied by strong anti-press rhetoric that lays the groundwork and builds popular support for legal restrictions. It is no coincidence that in states that have moved to pass “fake news” statutes, leaders are on record using the term to delegitimize critical news and human rights reporting.

Even in robust democracies, notably the U.S., elected officials have accused legitimate news organizations and journalists of being “fake news.” Some democracies with strong institutions have resisted most legal threats to reporting. But rhetoric itself is deeply troubling. It undermines public confidence in the media, which can open the door to legal restrictions. It inspires threats against journalists and media outlets. And it empowers autocratic leaders around the world who are seeking a justification for their own repressive media policies.

When direct attacks on the press fail, governments and individual actors sometimes opt to attack journalists through criminal defamation laws. In certain places, such as Latin America, provisions inhibit reporting on public officials.¹¹ Similar provisions that exist in many African and Asian countries prohibit public insult.¹²

Defamation laws are easily misused by governments to suppress critical speech and intimidate reporters with the threat of criminal prosecution, fines, or jail time. In January, Pekin Ünker, a reporter for *Cumhuriyet* in Turkey, was the first journalist to be found guilty for her participation in the international “Paradise Papers” investigation. She was sentenced to 13 months in prison for “defamation and insult” and fined 8,860 Turkish lira (US\$1,629) after reporting on the alleged offshore dealings of Turkey’s former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his two sons. She is currently free pending the outcome of her trial.¹³ Similarly, last month in Myanmar, the military’s Yangon Region Command filed a criminal defamation complaint against *The Irrawaddy* news outlet’s Burmese-language editor, Ye Ni. The criminal complaint was filed

⁹ CPJ statement. “Russia advances legislation on ‘fake news’ and ‘disrespecting authorities’” <https://cpj.org/2019/03/russia-advances-legislation-on-fake-news-and-disre.php>

¹⁰ CPJ alert. “Singapore passes ‘fake news’ legislation that threatens press” <https://cpj.org/2019/05/singapore-passes-fake-news-legislation-that-threat.php>

¹¹ For example, see “Critics Are Not Criminals: Comparative Study of Criminal Defamation Laws in the Americas” https://cpj.org/reports/critics_are_not_criminals-english.pdf

¹² In a 2013 report, the special rapporteurs on freedom of expression at the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization for American States jointly called for the repeal of criminal defamation in favor of civil laws: <https://www.osce.org/fom/99558?download=true>

¹³ CPJ blog. “Turkey Crackdown Chronicle: Week of January 7, 2019” <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/01/turkey-crackdown-chronicle-week-of-january-7-2019.php>

under the Telecommunications Law's Section 66(d), a provision that permits two-year prison sentences for convictions.¹⁴ The complaint was prompted by an April 1 report in *The Irrawaddy* on assaults by the military on March 18 and 19 that allegedly resulted in civilian casualties in Rakhine state's Maruk-U town.

Elections

Elections are often a dangerous time for journalists. Autocrats who seek to control the narrative around an upcoming election will, if they have not already, seek to censor what the press can publish, and punish news organizations or journalists who cross a perceived line. For example, ahead of elections in Cambodia last year, the Information Ministry ordered local internet service providers to block 17 websites—including the U.S. Congress-funded Radio Free Asia—for 48 hours ahead of the election because their coverage was perceived as “provocative” and “very political.”

Threats to journalists during elections are especially intense when the campaigns are marked by protests and violence. Journalists covering unrest related to elections often find themselves caught between protesters and police. Just last week, CPJ issued an alert about election-related violence on journalists in India.¹⁵ To ensure elections are transparent and fair, there must be an open media environment that ensures public debate and accountability.

Technology

Technology has had a complex impact on reporting on human rights. On the one hand, the advent of smartphones and social media has allowed individuals who witness human rights violations to immediately publish evidence, in the form of videos or photographs, to millions of people around the world. The advance of protected communication services has allowed activists to connect more safely, and journalists and advocates to speak with victims of human rights violations through more secure communication methods.¹⁶

But social media platforms and communication services have also allowed governments to censor dissent. The earlier case of Turkey’s crackdown on Twitter is one example. The “false news” law in Singapore is another, as it gives government ministers power to demand corrections, remove content, and block webpages on public websites and within private chat programs such as WhatsApp.

¹⁴ CPJ alert. “Myanmar military sues The Irrawaddy for criminal defamation over conflict coverage” <https://cpj.org/2019/04/myanmar-military-sues-the-irrawaddy-for-criminal-d.php>

¹⁵ See <https://cpj.org/2019/05/journalists-injured-in-election-related-violence-i.php>

¹⁶ *The Washington Post*. “U.N. report: Encryption is important to human rights — and backdoors undermine it” https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2015/05/28/un-report-encryption-is-important-to-human-rights-and-backdoors-undermine-it/?utm_term=.b4b9903ba6b0

Targeted surveillance is also deeply concerning. The Saudi government was likely spying on *Washington Post* columnist Khashoggi by using a piece of spyware known as Pegasus. A digital rights group reported that Pegasus—one of the world's most advanced cyber weapons, which is sold by the Israeli spyware company NSO Group—likely allowed the Saudi government to listen to phone calls between Khashoggi and the Saudi dissident Omar Abdulaziz.¹⁷

Technology has also allowed for members of society—often backed by governments—to use social media platforms to harass those who report on human rights, a problem that is particularly acute for female journalists. In some cases, including that of Gauri Lankesh in India,¹⁸ the harassment has led to death. Lankesh was shot dead outside her home in Bangalore as she returned home from work on September 5, 2017. She published and edited *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, a Kannada-language weekly tabloid known for its coverage of communal violence and the caste system, and criticism of right-wing extremism and the establishment. Lankesh had spoken publicly about threats against her.

Governments also have the authority at borders to search electronic devices of journalists and activists. Electronic device searches threaten the protection of sources, have a chilling effect on journalists that impacts broader society, and raise serious privacy rights issues. Canadian journalist Ed Ou said that when he was stopped on his way to the U.S. to cover the Standing Rock protests in October 2016, many of the questions from U.S. border agents concerned his interest in covering indigenous groups in America, and that an officer told him “covering a protest is not a valid reason to come into the country.” Ultimately, border agents denied Ou entry to the U.S. after he refused to give them the passwords for his electronic devices.¹⁹

Additional Case Examples

CPJ tracks press freedom around the world, broken into six regions: Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa, North America. The following is a summary from each region of some of the most severe attacks on journalists seeking to report on human rights.

Africa

In **Cameroon**, Ahmed Abba, who reported on the impact of the militant group Boko Haram, was sentenced to 10 years in prison on terror-related charges. He was eventually released in late

¹⁷ CPJ blog. “How the Saudis may have spied on Jamal Khashoggi” <https://cpj.org/blog/2018/10/how-the-saudis-may-have-spied-on-jamal-khashoggi.php>

¹⁸ <https://cpj.org/data/people/gauri-lankesh/>

¹⁹ CPJ blog. “Security risk for sources as US border agents stop and search journalists” <https://cpj.org/blog/2016/12/security-risk-for-sources-as-us-border-agents-stop.php>

2017, but in late 2018, at least seven other journalists were still behind bars in Cameroon. Two cases stand out:

- Thomas Awah Junior, a correspondent for the privately owned Afrik 2 Radio in Yaoundé, and publisher of the monthly *Aghem Messenger*, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison by a military court in Yaoundé on May 25, 2018.²⁰ He was found guilty of terrorism, hostility to the fatherland, secession, revolution, insurrection, the spreading of false news—including by electronic means—and contempt for civil authority. Awah Junior was tried along with two other journalists and four Anglophone detainees on charges relating to the crisis in Cameroon’s two English-speaking regions that began in late 2016, with protests by teachers and lawyers about the perceived marginalization of English by Cameroon’s majority French-speaking government.
- Michel Biem Tong, editor of the privately owned *Hurinews* website, who was detained on October 23, 2018, after being summoned to the State Secretariat for Defense in Yaoundé.²¹ Tong published articles criticizing the government's handling of grievances of Anglophone Cameroonians from the western regions of the country in the run-up to presidential elections in October. He was charged with apologizing for terrorism, false declarations, and outrage to the head of state.

In **Tanzania**, CPJ has documented attacks on journalists reporting on human rights issues:

- Azory Gwanda, a freelance journalist who frequently wrote for *Mwananchi* and *The Citizen*, has been missing since November 21, 2017.²² In an interview with *Mwananchi*, Gwanda’s wife, Anna Pinoni, said that although little was clear about the case, she believed that her husband’s disappearance might be linked to his reporting on a series of killings in Tanzania’s Coast region. In April 2019, CPJ launched a campaign to help locate Gwanda.²³
- In November 2018, two CPJ staff—Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator, and Muthoki Mumo, CPJ's sub-Saharan Africa representative—were detained while in Tanzania for a fact-finding and networking trip to better understand local press freedom conditions. Immigration and security officials detained Quintal and Mumo at their hotel in Dar es Salaam, before taking them to an unknown

²⁰ <https://cpj.org/data/people/thomas-awah-junior/index.php>

²¹ <https://cpj.org/data/people/michel-biem-tong/index.php>

²² <https://cpj.org/data/people/azory-gwanda/index.php>

²³ CPJ press release. CPJ's #WhereIsAzory campaign to highlight missing Tanzanian journalist <https://cpj.org/2019/04/cpjs-whereisazory-campaign-to-highlight-missing-ta.php>

location, and interrogating them about their work. After several hours of questioning, they were allowed back to their hotel. During their detention, Quintal and Mumo's passports, phones, and computers were seized. While they were detained, a false tweet saying they had been released was sent from Quintal's personal Twitter account, and repeated attempts were made to access Quintal's email. After more than five hours, the two CPJ staff members were released and safely left Tanzania. Tanzanian officials falsely claimed they were in the country without proper visas. However, both were traveling on valid visas, on a legitimate trip.²⁴

Asia

In **Myanmar**, armed forces and the police have engaged in severe human rights violations in their crackdown on Rohingya Muslims. Journalists seeking to cover this story have been threatened. Many are local reporters who do not have the same protections as international journalists.

- In December 2017, Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested after they had dinner with, and received documents from, two police officers in Yangon. In September 2018 they were sentenced to seven years in prison under Myanmar's colonial-era Official Secrets Act. The reporters insisted throughout legal proceedings that they had not committed any crime. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were investigating a massacre of Rohingya men and boys by Myanmar security forces in Rakhine state; their reporting was subsequently published by Reuters in February 2018 and led to seven soldiers being sentenced to prison for their involvement in the killings, according to reports. They were awarded a Pulitzer Prize for their reporting this year. In April, Myanmar's Supreme Court rejected their final appeal. One month later, the two reporters were released under a presidential pardon.²⁵
- In May 4, the *Washington Post* reported that Myanmar police used Cellebrite, a cellphone-breaching technology from an Israeli company, to hack reporters' phones.²⁶ Cellebrite equipment pulled documents from the reporters' phones including itineraries for Pope Francis's visit to the country and the vice president's travels, as well as details of the military's campaign in Rakhine.

²⁴ CPJ statement. "CPJ outraged at Tanzania's treatment of its Africa program team" <https://cpj.org/2018/11/cpj-outraged-at-tanzanias-treatment-of-its-africa-.php>

²⁵ CPJ statement. "Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo freed by pardon in Myanmar" <https://cpj.org/2019/05/reuters-wa-lone-kyaw-soe-oo-freed-myanmar-pardon.php>

²⁶ *The Washington Post*. "Security-tech companies once flocked to Myanmar. One firm's tools were used against two journalists." https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/security-tech-companies-once-flocked-to-myanmar-one-firms-tools-were-used-against-two-journalists-/2019/05/04/d4e9f7f0-5b5d-11e9-b8e3-b03311fbbbfe_story.html

In the **Philippines**, President Rodrigo Duterte has launched a full-scale war on drugs and has attacked news outlets that publish information critical on his policies.

- The online news outlet *Rappler* and its executives, including CEO and Executive Editor Maria Ressa, have faced a myriad libel, tax, and regulatory lawsuits, and has paid an estimated 2 million pesos (US\$38,260) in bail and bonds as of March 29, 2019, according to the news website. Ressa has been arrested twice this year, although she has been released on bail and has been able to travel internationally after posting bond. *Rappler*'s reporting focuses primarily on political corruption and the impact of President Duterte's policies on civil society. In April 2019, Duterte alleged that media and legal groups orchestrated a "plot" to discredit and oust him.²⁷

In **China**, the government aggressively polices and cracks down on any reporting on human rights violations. At least 47 journalists were imprisoned in China at the end of 2018, making it the second largest jailer of journalists worldwide, after Turkey. Two incidents in March illustrate the risks of human rights coverage and of anti-press rhetoric.

- In March, police arrested Wei Zhili, editor of *ILabour*, in the city of Guangzhou, in Guangdong province, on charges of disturbing public order.²⁸ Ke Chengbing, another *ILabour* editor, went missing the day prior and is believed to also be in custody. The website's editor-in-chief, Yang Zhengjun, remains in prison after he was arrested in January and charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," according to *ILabour*. Prominent feminist writer Zheng Churan told CPJ that she believes authorities arrested Wei and his co-workers because of their reporting on labor rights issues and on the prevalence of black lung disease among workers. She told CPJ that she does not believe Wei did anything illegal, and was just "telling workers' stories and helping them get justice."
- Also in March, officials used attacks on the media in the U.S. to downplay reports on human rights abuses in China. After the release of the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said the U.S. report was filled with "ideological prejudice" and advised "that the United States take a hard look at its own domestic human rights record, and first take care of its own affairs."²⁹ China responded to the State Department with its own

²⁷ CPJ alert. "Philippine news and human rights organizations accused of 'plot' against Duterte" <https://cpj.org/2019/04/philippine-news-and-human-rights-organizations-acc.php>

²⁸ CPJ alert. "Labor rights website editor Wei Zhili arrested in China; another is missing" <https://cpj.org/2019/03/labor-rights-website-editor-wei-zhili-arrested-in-.php>

²⁹ Reuters. "China hits back at 'prejudiced' U.S. with own rights criticism" <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-rights-china-idUSKCN1QV0MR>

report, which stated “Press freedom has come under unprecedented attack” and “Reporters’ legal right to report has been violated” in the U.S., and that “The U.S. government continues to publicly and fiercely accuse the media and journalists of creating ‘fake news’ and creating an atmosphere of intimidation and hostility.”

Americas

In **Venezuela**, autocratic leadership and civil unrest have given rise to ongoing attacks on the press and restrictions on media outlets, the internet, and social media platforms.

- On March 4, 2019, opposition leader and self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaidó, who faced possible arrest by the authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro, returned to Venezuela. The majority of Venezuela's TV and radio stations, which are controlled by the government, ignored Guaidó, and Venezuela's dominant state-run internet service provider temporarily blocked Twitter, streaming portals including YouTube and Soundcloud, and numerous websites that are among the only sources of independent news.³⁰ In the civil unrest that followed, the government has continued to censor the internet³¹, and seek to intimidate³² and detain journalists.³³ During a pre-arranged interview with a Univision team led by reporter Jorge Ramos, in February 2019, Maduro shut down the interview after being asked about democracy in Venezuela. The team was detained for more than two hours and had their equipment confiscated by security agents.³⁴

In **Nicaragua**, imprisonment numbers are low and murders are down, but violations persist.

- In December 2018, Nicaraguan police entered the offices of 100% Noticias, a privately owned cable and internet news station in Managua, ordered the station off the air, and arrested the channel's director Miguel Mora and news director Lucía Pineda Ubau.³⁵ Authorities charged Mora with crimes including “inciting hate and violence” and did not grant him access to a lawyer. Police also confiscated

³⁰ CPJ blog. “Venezuelan authorities restrict internet, block outlets amid unrest”

<https://cpj.org/blog/2019/03/maduro-venezuela-internet-blackout-censored-guaido.php>

³¹ CPJ alert. “Venezuelan authorities restrict internet, block outlets amid unrest” <https://cpj.org/2019/05/venezuelan-authorities-restrict-internet-block-out.php>

³² CPJ blog. “Venezuela's intimidation tactics include arbitrary arrests, deportation”

<https://cpj.org/blog/2019/03/venezuela-crisis-detained-journalist-weddle-maduro.php>

³³ CPJ alert. “Venezuelan police detain reporter Danilo Gil while covering protests, charge him with resisting authority” <https://cpj.org/2019/04/venezuelan-police-detain-reporter-danilo-gil-while.php>

³⁴ CPJ alert. “Venezuelan authorities must return equipment to Jorge Ramos, Univision crew”

<https://cpj.org/2019/02/venezuelan-authorities-must-return-equipment-to-jo.php>

³⁵ CPJ alert. “Nicaraguan police raid independent news station, arrest two journalists”

<https://cpj.org/2018/12/nicaraguan-police-raid-independent-news-station-ar.php>

broadcasting equipment from the station. A week earlier, police broke into the Managua office of the privately owned *Confidencial* news website and its sister television programs, “Esta Noche” and “Esta Semana,” and confiscated equipment and documents.

In **Mexico**, at least 48 journalists have been murdered since 1992. Several were prominent national journalists who covered human rights and related issues. The targeting of journalists has received attention from Congress, including a January 2018 letter from U.S. senators to then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.³⁶

- Javier Valdez Cárdenas, an investigative reporter and editor, was fatally shot on May 15, 2017, near the editorial offices of *Riodoce*, the investigative weekly he co-founded in 2003, in the northern Mexican city of Culiacán.³⁷ *Riodoce* focuses mostly on organized crime, corruption, and regional politics. Valdez was also the correspondent in Sinaloa for *La Jornada*, a Mexico City-based newspaper, and he gained national recognition for authoring a series of books that chronicled the Mexican underworld and the victims of Mexico's drug war. He was a 2011 recipient of CPJ's International Press Freedom Award.
- In March 2019, the Canadian research group Citizen Lab released a report documenting how Griselda Triana, his widow, was targeted by spyware identified as Pegasus in 2017, in an apparent spying attempt. According to the report, Triana received text messages on May 25 and May 26, 2017, containing links that, when followed, would have installed software on her mobile phone without her knowledge. That software would have allowed a third party to have access to, and even control, most functions of the phone. The spyware attack occurred 10 days after Valdez was shot dead. Mexican media first reported in June 2017 that spyware known as Pegasus was purchased by the Mexican federal government from Israeli security firm NSO Group.³⁸
- Miroslava Breach Velducea, a correspondent for the national newspaper *La Jornada*, was murdered on March 23, 2017, in Chihuahua City.³⁹ Breach covered, among other subjects, politics, crime, and the intersection of the two. Since January 2017 she headed her own news agency, MIR, and had long been a contributor to the Chihuahua news website *Norte*, which announced after her murder that it was closing. *La*

³⁶ U.S. Senator Marco Rubio press release. “Rubio, Colleagues Urge State Dept to Address the Targeting of Journalists in Mexico” <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=E6232169-B8F7-401D-A303-F775D7CA0093>

³⁷ <https://cpj.org/data/people/javier-valdez-cardenas/>

³⁸ Milenio. “PGR recibió Pegasus en 2015” <https://www.milenio.com/politica/pgr-recibio-pegasus-en-2015>

³⁹ <https://cpj.org/data/people/miroslava-breach-velducea/>

Jornada reported that a note was found at the scene of the murder that read: “For being a snitch. You're next, governor.--The 80.” Police say “The 80” refers to Arturo Quintana, who allegedly leads a criminal gang associated with the organized crime syndicate known as La Línea, which operates in the western half of the state. On March 4, 2016, *Breach* reported on alleged links between organized crime and mayoral candidates in several small towns in the mountainous region of western Chihuahua. The story mentioned “The 80” as supporting candidates for mayor in at least two towns, including the mother-in-law of the alleged gang leader. Chihuahua Attorney General César Augusto Peniche said *Breach* was killed because her reporting affected the interests of organized crime.

Europe and Central Asia

In **Turkey**, the world’s leading jailer of journalists, 68 journalists were imprisoned at the close of 2018. Most were detained following an attempted coup in 2016 and least 43 covered the human rights beat. All face anti-state charges. In some cases, authorities have targeted entire news organizations, including but not limited to the daily *Cumhuriyet*.

- In July 2018, İdris Yılmaz, a former reporter for the shuttered pro-Kurdish Dicle News Agency (DİHA) and an editor and reporter for the news websites *Ajans Erbil Haber* and *Gazete Yaşam*, was sentenced the journalist to 15 months in prison for “slander via the press.” The charge relates to a video the journalist published on *Gazete Yaşam* that showed militia groups—formed to assist the military in rural south and southeastern regions—allegedly mistreating a minor. On a separate occasion, Yılmaz and a colleague were beaten by people he was investigating for alleged corruption in October 2017.⁴⁰

In **Russia**, press freedom continues to suffer.⁴¹ At least 58 journalists have been killed since 1992, 38 of whom were targeted for murder. The government silences critical reporting through a variety of old and new laws. Protests are particularly dangerous for journalists, who are often attacked and/or arrested while covering clashes between protesters and police.

- Earlier this month, a group of at least five police officers assaulted and then arrested Timur Hadjibekov, a freelance photojournalist who works under the name George Markov, and arrested Oleg Nasonov, a photojournalist with the St. Petersburg-based online news outlet *Dva Stula*, while they were covering a Labor Day march in St.

⁴⁰ CPJ blog. “Turkey Crackdown Chronicle: Week of October 15, 2017” <https://cpj.org/blog/2017/10/turkey-crackdown-chronicle-week-of-october-15-2017.php>

⁴¹ <https://cpj.org/europe/russia/>

Petersburg.⁴² When police approached Hadjibekov and Nasonov, Hadjibekov identified himself as a journalist. Police then punched him in his ribs and head and arrested him, he told CPJ. Nasonov told CPJ that police threw him to the ground before arresting him.

- On April 2, deputies in the State Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament, considered amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses that would levy fines on individuals and companies for distributing print media from foreign outlets without permission from Russia's state media regulator, Roskomnadzor.⁴³

In **Ukraine**, controversy over the presence of Russia-backed militias in the eastern part of the country, and a two-year-old case of a murdered journalist, continue to cloud press freedom.

- Russian-backed separatists in the east continue to detain Donetsk-based journalist Stanyslav Aseyev. Aseyev, who has contributed to the Ukrainian service of the U.S.-government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty under the pseudonym Stanyslav Vasin, went missing on June 2, 2017. In August 2018, Russian state-run TV channel Rossiya 24 broadcast footage of an apparent forced confession, in which Aseyev said he was spying for Ukraine.⁴⁴
- Despite President Petro Poroshenko's vows for a swift investigation,⁴⁵ Ukraine has failed to make arrests in the July 20, 2016 murder of journalist Pavel Sheremet. The journalist was killed in Kiev when an explosive device detonated under the car he was driving. Sheremet wrote for the independent news website *Ukrainska Pravda* and hosted a morning show on the independent broadcaster Radio Vesti. In his work for *Ukrainska Pravda*, Sheremet commented on political developments in Ukraine, Russia, and his native Belarus. In the weeks before his murder, he had written about Ukrainian volunteer battalion fighters' joining criminal gangs after leaving the militias, petty corruption among police in Belarus, alleged corruption among Ukrainian government officials and police, and the work of Russian government propagandists. Sheremet was a 1998 recipient of CPJ's International Press Freedom Award.⁴⁶

⁴² CPJ statement. "Russian police beat at least 1 journalist, arrest 2 during May Day protests in St. Petersburg" <https://cpj.org/2019/05/russian-police-beat-at-least-1-journalist-arrest-2.php>

⁴³ CPJ statement. "Russian draft legislation would ban distribution of foreign print media without government permission" <https://cpj.org/2019/04/russian-draft-legislation-would-ban-distribution-o.php>

⁴⁴ CPJ statement. "Ukrainian reporter held by Moscow-backed separatists forced to confess in Russia state TV interview" <https://cpj.org/2018/08/ukrainian-reporter-held-by-moscow-backed-separatis.php>

⁴⁵ CPJ special report. "Justice Denied: Ukraine comes up empty in probe of Pavel Sheremet's murder" <https://cpj.org/reports/2017/07/justice-denied-ukraine-pavel-sheremet-murder-probe-journalist.php>

⁴⁶ <https://cpj.org/data/people/pavel-sheremet/>

Middle East and Northern Africa

In **Saudi Arabia**, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has sought to improve the country's image and usher in a new era, but the climate for journalism and human rights reporting is even more repressive, with at least 16 journalists imprisoned at the close of 2018.⁴⁷ Saudi Arabia's crackdown on the press extends beyond the country's borders.

- The Saudi government has come under international attention and pressure for the arrest and detention of four bloggers and women's rights activists—Eman Al Nafjan, Hatoon al-Fassi, Nouf Abdulaziz, Nassima al-Sada—over their writing and advocacy against the kingdom's ban on women driving. Al Nafjan⁴⁸ and al-Fassi have been released provisionally, but still have to stand trial. A Saudi court handling their case barred reporters and U.S. and European diplomats from attending the trial.⁴⁹ Abdulaziz and al-Sada remain imprisoned. Human rights groups report that al-Sada is being held in solitary confinement. Meanwhile, the roundup and detention of bloggers continues.⁵⁰
- The murder of *Washington Post* columnist and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, on October 2, 2018 was an outrageous act that has rightfully resulted in widespread condemnation. We were heartened that Congress responded with swift, bipartisan action.⁵¹ However, we are disturbed that the administration of President Donald Trump has downplayed or challenged reports that the CIA concluded with high confidence that the murder was directed by Crown Prince Salman,⁵² and ignored a requirement to report to Congress with a report on who the administration considers responsible for Khashoggi's murder, and what it has done to hold them accountable. We remain deeply concerned that the U.S. intelligence community may have intercepted communications in which Saudi

⁴⁷ CPJ blog. "New' Saudi Arabia ushers in even more repressive climate for journalists" <https://cpj.org/blog/2018/09/new-saudi-arabia-ushers-in-even-more-repressive-cl.php>

⁴⁸ CPJ statement. "CPJ welcomes release of Saudi blogger after 10 months, calls for charges to be dropped" <https://cpj.org/2019/03/cpj-welcomes-release-of-saudi-blogger-after-10-mon.php>

⁴⁹ BBC News. "Saudi Arabia puts women's rights activists on trial" <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47553416>

⁵⁰ CPJ alert. "At least four more journalists arrested in Saudi crackdown" <https://cpj.org/2019/04/at-least-four-more-journalists-arrested-in-saudi-c.php>; and, CPJ alert. "Saudi Arabia detains 3 more bloggers" <https://cpj.org/2019/04/saudi-arabia-detains-3-more-bloggers.php>

⁵¹ CPJ letter. "Senate Foreign Relations Committee must keep up pressure over Khashoggi" <https://cpj.org/2018/10/khashoggi-senate-foreign-relations-pressure.php>

⁵² *The Washington Post*. "Pompeo challenges accuracy of reports that CIA is confident of Saudi prince's involvement in Khashoggi death" https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/pompeo-challenges-accuracy-of-reports-that-cia-is-confident-of-saudi-princes-involvement-in-khashoggi-death/2018/12/12/8620629a-fe1e-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5_story.html

officials discussed a plan to capture Khashoggi. Under what is known as Directive 191, U.S. intelligence agencies are required to warn individuals of “impending threats of intentional killing, serious bodily injury or kidnapping.” Accordingly, CPJ has teamed with the Knight First Amendment Institute to file requests under the Freedom of Information Act to learn what intelligence agencies knew and whether they complied with their own processes.⁵³

In **Egypt**, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has continued to crackdown on the press and critical reporting on human rights. At least 25 journalists were imprisoned at the end of 2018, 14 of whom covered human rights. Leading up to the country’s election, the state’s media regulator used a new censorship law to block access to websites.⁵⁴ Journalists impacted by the crackdown include:

- Alaa Abdelfattah, a prominent blogger and activist who has written about politics and human rights violations for numerous outlets, including the independent *al-Shorouk* newspaper and the progressive *Mada Masr* news website. He was sentenced to a five-year prison sentence for organizing an illegal protest and assaulting a police officer.⁵⁵ Abdelfattah denied the charges, and his defense lawyers submitted cell phone records proving Abdelfattah was not at the site of the protest at the same time as the police officer he was accused of assaulting. The prosecution submitted as evidence tweets and quotes from Abdelfattah's writing in which he was critical of the judiciary and security forces. State media broadcast tweets and excerpts of Abdelfattah's articles and Facebook posts, branding them proof of his anti-state beliefs. After five years in prison, Abdelfattah was released on March 29, 2019—on the condition that he report to the police station each day at 6 p.m. and stay overnight.⁵⁶
- Mahmoud Abou Zeid, a freelance photographer known as Shawkan, was arrested in Cairo in August 2013 while covering clashes between Egyptian security forces and supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi during the dispersal of the pro-Morsi sit-in at Raba'a Al-Adawiya in Cairo. Shawkan contributed to the U.K.-based journalism and photo agency Demotix. On September 8, 2018, after more than five years of pretrial detention, a Cairo criminal court convicted Shawkan of murder and being a member of a terrorist group, and sentenced him to five years in prison and

⁵³ *The Washington Post*. “U.S. spy agencies sued for records on whether they warned Khashoggi of impending threat of harm” https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-spy-agencies-sued-for-records-on-whether-they-warned-khashoggi-of-impending-threat-of-harm/2018/11/20/21ef3750-ed21-11e8-8679-934a2b33be52_story.html?utm_term=.67ba2dc3f07b

⁵⁴ CPJ blog. “Egypt tests new censorship law with handling of al-Mashhad website block” <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/05/egypt-tests-new-censorship-law-with-handling-of-al.php>

⁵⁵ <https://cpj.org/data/people/alaa-abdelfattah/>

⁵⁶ CPJ blog. “In Egypt, 'freedom' ends daily at 6pm for Shawkan and Abdelfattah” <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/04/egypt-shawkan-abdelfattah-release-custody.php>

five years' probation. Shawkan was released on March 29, 2019—also on the condition that he report to the police station each day at 6 p.m. and stay overnight.⁵⁷

- Police on May 23, 2018 arrested the blogger Wael Abbas in his Cairo home and seized his computer, phones, books, and other personal items.⁵⁸ The government prosecutor accused Wael of “the crime of communicating with foreign organizations and organizations to spread their ideas... to incite against the state and promote the overthrow of the regime and the destruction of the Egyptian state.” The prosecutor did not cite any specific content or name the foreign organizations Abbas allegedly communicated with. Abbas denied the accusations and said that he expressed his opinion in a legitimate and peaceful manner. Abbas documented police abuse and torture in Egypt on his blog, Misr Digital (Egyptian Awareness). Abbas also had a YouTube channel, in which he posted a number of videos about sexual harassment, police abuse, and other human rights issues. Over the years, Abbas has received threatening phone calls, was detained at the Cairo airport, was pulled off the street and held for hours, and called a criminal on television and online. Authorities have repeatedly renewed his pretrial detention.

In **Syria**, reporters and photojournalists seeking to cover the civil war have done so at great personal cost.

- In April 2014, a group Syrian activists set out to document the abuses of Islamic State after the militant group declared the city of Raqqa to be the caliphate's capital. The activists, working anonymously for their safety, formed a group, Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS). RBSS was declared an enemy of God by the Islamic State group, and at least two RBSS members have paid the price with their lives. CPJ honored RBSS at its 2015 International Press Freedom Awards.⁵⁹
- The risks to journalists covering the Syrian civil war was brutally illustrated by the murders of U.S. journalists James Foley⁶⁰ and Steven Sotloff,⁶¹ and Japanese journalist Kenji Goto, who along with other Western hostages in 2014 and early 2015, were kidnapped, tortured, and then beheaded by Islamic State.
- Another journalist, Austin Tice, was detained while reporting in Syria in 2012. A U.S. freelance photojournalist who contributed to *The Washington Post*, McClatchy, Al-

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ <https://cpj.org/data/people/wael-abbas/index.php>

⁵⁹ <https://cpj.org/awards/2015/raqqa-is-being-slaughtered-silently-syria.php>

⁶⁰ <https://cpj.org/data/people/james-foley/>

⁶¹ <https://cpj.org/data/people/steven-sotloff/>

Jazeera English, and several other news outlets, Tice was last heard from on August 13, 2012. U.S. intelligence suggests he is still alive, and the FBI maintains a \$1 million reward for information leading to his location, recovery, and return.⁶²

United States

In the **United States**, press freedom enjoys strong legal protections, but reporting on human rights can still be a risk.

- In October 2018, CPJ released a report documenting cases of journalists crossing U.S. borders being pulled aside by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents for secondary screenings, being questioned about their reporting, and having their electronic devices searched without warrant.⁶³ In February 2019, CPJ documented several cases of journalists covering the migrant situation at the U.S.-Mexico border being asked invasive questions about their reporting.⁶⁴ Less than one month later, NBC San Diego broke a story based on leaked documents that the U.S. and Mexican governments were working together to track journalists through a secret database.⁶⁵ CPJ considers these policies and practices detrimental to press freedom and, along other press freedom organizations, has engaged with CBP and the Department of Homeland Security over two administrations to address these issues.⁶⁶ That includes a recent series of meetings with CBP officials. After the NBC San Diego report, however, CBP canceled its meetings with us and other press freedom groups.⁶⁷
- Aggressive investigations into intelligence leaks and related prosecutions under the Espionage Act also pose serious threats to press freedom in the U.S. The trend began under the Obama administration, whose Justice Department prosecuted at least eight Espionage Act cases, more than all previous administrations combined.⁶⁸ No journalist has been directly prosecuted under the Espionage Act. However, while prosecutions slowed in Obama's second term, they have picked up again under

⁶² ABC News. "US believes Austin Tice still alive as FBI offers new \$1 million reward"

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-believes-austin-tice-alive-fbi-offers-million/story?id=54609046>

⁶³ CPJ special report. "Nothing to declare: Why U.S. border agency's vast stop and search powers undermine press freedom" <https://cpj.org/reports/2018/10/nothing-to-declare-us-border-search-phone-press-freedom-cbp.php>

⁶⁴ CPJ alert. "Several journalists say US border agents questioned them about migrant coverage"

<https://cpj.org/2019/02/several-journalists-say-us-border-agents-questione.php>

⁶⁵ NBC San Diego. "Source: Leaked Documents Show the U.S. Government Tracking Journalists and Immigration Advocates Through a Secret Database" <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/investigations/Source-Leaked-Documents-Show-the-US-Government-Tracking-Journalists-and-Advocates-Through-a-Secret-Database-506783231.html>

⁶⁶ <https://cpj.org/campaigns/borders/>

⁶⁷ CPJ letters. "CPJ calls on US Customs and Border Protection agency to reschedule meeting"

<https://cpj.org/2019/03/customs-border-protection-cbp-border-journalists.php>

⁶⁸ CPJ special report. "The Obama Administration and the Press' <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/10/obama-and-the-press-us-leaks-surveillance-post-911.php>

Trump. Most recently, the Justice Department indicted Daniel Hale, a former U.S. intelligence analyst, for allegedly leaking information about a classified drone targeting program to *The Intercept*.⁶⁹ Hale is the fourth source to be indicated under the Espionage Act since Trump took office, and three other sources have faced criminal prosecution under other statutes. The Justice Department says that many other such cases are pending. People who leak information to the media have a variety of motivations, usually complex. But leaking to the media is not a form of espionage, and to prosecute it as such not only conflates leaking with spying, it chills media-source interactions and sets a dangerous precedent in the U.S. and around the world.

Signs of Progress

As this snapshot of cases illustrates, the state of press freedom globally, especially for journalists reporting on human rights, is grim. But, before concluding, I would like to recognize examples of progress.

Ecuador

When Lenín Moreno, who served as former President Rafael Correa's vice president from 2007-13, was elected president in April 2017, most Ecuadorans assumed he would serve as Correa's proxy, perhaps until the ex-president returned to power. But since Correa left office, numerous reporters and editors have described to CPJ a honeymoon between Moreno's government and the news media. The Moreno administration, they said, has sidelined the media regulator Supercom; sought to improve relations with the news media; encouraged newspapers, websites, and radio and TV stations to carry out investigative journalism; and pledged to reform the country's Communications Law, which was among the region's most repressive pieces of media legislation.

During a CPJ mission in March 2018, journalists said that Correa's policies had created both editorial and financial havoc for independent news organizations, and that until Moreno made good on his pledge to strip the Communications Law of its most repressive articles and to dissolve the Supercom, Ecuadoran journalists will continue to work in fear.⁷⁰

Together, the Supercom and the Communications Law put tremendous pressure on Ecuador's media. The country's two major newspapers, *El Universo* and the Quito daily *El Comercio*, and

⁶⁹ *Columbia Journalism Review*. "The real threat to press freedom is prosecuting leakers"
<https://www.cjr.org/watchdog/daniel-hale-intercept-leakers.php>

⁷⁰ CPJ special report. "The U-turn: Moreno steers Ecuador away from Correa's media repression"
<https://cpj.org/reports/2018/07/U-turn-moreno-steers-ecuador-away-correa-media-communication-law.php>

the two largest privately owned television channels, Teleamazonas and Ecuavisa, both broadcasting nationally from Quito, repeatedly found themselves in the government's crosshairs for offenses ranging from failing to reprint flattering stories to publishing a controversial cartoon.

In December 2018, however, the Communications Law was reformed and, as a result, Supercom is being phased out.⁷¹

Even in cases where pressure does not create immediate change, it sets precedent. President Moreno, seeking to distance himself from his predecessor, recognized that press freedom reform was one way to do so.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia was one of the most-censored countries in the world and one of the worst jailers of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. For more than a decade, the government shut down newspapers and television stations, blocked internet services and social media platform, and used its harsh anti-terrorism law to target journalists, bloggers, and activists.

But Ethiopia has gone through dramatic reforms under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who took office last April. In 2018—for the first time in 14 years—CPJ recorded no journalists behind bars in its annual census. As recently as 2016, there were 16 journalists imprisoned. Those released included prominent journalists Eskinder Nega, Darsema Sori, and Khalid Mohammed, who were held for years on charges ranging from treason to inciting extremist ideology and planning to overthrow the government.

After a trip to Addis Ababa in January 2019, CPJ's Sub-Saharan Africa Representative Muthoki Mumo wrote that it was “impossible to miss the signs that Ethiopian media are enjoying unprecedented freedom.”⁷² A flurry of new publications were on the streets. At a public forum that CPJ attended, journalists spoke about positive reforms, but also openly criticized their lack of access to the government. At a press conference, journalists from state media and the Oromia Media Network, an outlet previously banned and accused of terrorism, sat side by side, she wrote.

Mesud Gebeyehu, a lawyer who heads the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations, an alliance of human rights groups, told CPJ he had been on television “many times” in the past year to speak about human rights, an issue that was previously taboo for the media.

⁷¹ Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas. “Ecuador’s National Assembly eliminates controversial sanctioning body with reforms to Communications Law” <https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-20435-ecuador%E2%80%99s-national-assembly-eliminates-controversial-sanctioning-body-reforms-communic>

⁷² CPJ blog. “Under Abiy, Ethiopia's media have more freedom but challenges remain” <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/04/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-press-freedom-reform.php>

The country has also ended its block of over 260 websites⁷³ and ban on media outlets forced to work in exile.⁷⁴

In recognition of this shift, UNESCO formally marked World Press Freedom Day 2019 with a conference in Addis Ababa.⁷⁵

Challenges still remain.⁷⁶ On February 23, 2019, two journalists with the privately owned online news outlet Mereja TV were briefly detained by regional police and then attacked by a mob in Legetafo, a town in Ethiopia's Oromia region.⁷⁷ But there is no doubt Ethiopia, as it pertains to press freedom, is on the right track. The global community must now make sure that the country does not revert to suppression.

Global Coordination

More broadly, news organizations, advocacy groups, and journalists have adapted to a changing press freedom landscape and advancing technology in myriad ways.

In recent years, press freedom organizations have ramped up their efforts to help journalists at risk. These efforts are both proactive and reactive: CPJ's Emergencies Response Team provides comprehensive, life-saving support to journalists and media support staff working around the world through up-to-date safety and security information, and rapid response assistance to journalists at risk.⁷⁸ The ACOS Alliance, of which CPJ is a partner, is a coalition of major news companies, journalism organizations, and freelancers, seeking to develop worldwide freelance protection standards.⁷⁹

When a journalist is killed or murdered, their colleagues are increasingly working together to keep their stories alive. Forbidden Stories is an organization established to continue the work of killed, imprisoned, or otherwise incapacitated journalists. After the murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, Forbidden Stories coordinated and led a group of 45 journalists representing 18 news organizations from 15 countries in starting the Daphne Project,

⁷³ CPJ statement. "Ethiopia allows access to over 260 blocked websites" <https://cpj.org/2018/06/ethiopia-allows-access-to-over-260-blocked-website.php>

⁷⁴ Africanews.com. "Oromo activist, Jawar Mohammed to return to Ethiopia as OMN opens Addis office" <https://www.africanews.com/2018/06/27/oromo-activist-jawar-mohammed-to-return-to-ethiopia-as-omn-opens-addis-office/>

⁷⁵ World Press Freedom Day 2019 <https://en.unesco.org/events/world-press-freedom-day-2019>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ CPJ case. "Two journalists detained, attacked in Ethiopia" <https://cpj.org/2019/03/two-journalists-detained-attacked-in-ethiopia.php>

⁷⁸ <https://cpj.org/emergency-response/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.acosalliance.org/>

designed to continue her work. The project was supported by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which facilitated the sharing of documents and information across the participating organizations and assigned researchers and reporters to investigate allegations about wrongdoing among Malta's elite.⁸⁰

Conclusion and Recommendations

A consistent and principled position in defense of press freedom is rooted in U.S. history and foundational legal documents. The 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights—that was echoed by the Declaration of Independence and which influenced the text of the Bill of Rights—stated, “That the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments.”

The U.S. record on press freedom is not perfect but, given its historical commitments, the U.S. has long been a leader in ensuring robust protections for freedom of the press, both at home and around the world. Given the extent and intensity of threats to reporting on human rights, it is as important as ever that the U.S. provide global leadership. Those whose rights have been violated should know the U.S. government stands with them. And those who have violated others' rights should know there will be consequences for their actions.

While there remain officials in the State Department who care deeply about protecting and advancing human rights, the present administration has not been a forceful advocate for press freedom. The administration has refrained from criticizing restrictive regimes and praised leaders who brutally crush dissent. Furthermore, attacks on the press in the U.S. have negatively impacted the ability of the U.S. to advocate for press freedom abroad, as they give repressive states ammunition to fire back at the U.S. and delegitimize U.S. asks.

To fill this void, Congress must step up its efforts to protect press freedom. In many ways, it has. Members of Congress are increasingly active on this issue, including an uptick in actions—especially bills, resolutions, and hearings—on or related to press freedom issues.

We applaud these efforts and make the following general recommendations for Congress:

- Ensure that the State Department applies maximum pressure on governments to release imprisoned journalists, ensure justice in the case of murdered journalists, and reform any laws or practices that infringe on the rights of journalists. Senior U.S. officials—including the President—should express public support for such efforts.

⁸⁰ <https://www.occrp.org/en/thedaphneproject/>

- Ensure that the State Department supports journalists who are forced, because of credible threats to their lives, to flee their countries. The U.S. government should provide visas or asylum for persecuted journalists.
- Consistent with the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act, Congress should ensure that the State Department produce robust reporting in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on the situation for press freedom.
- Congress should use its oversight to hold the administration accountable when it fails to meet, promote, or defend freedom of the press, and should insist on the compliance with the recommendations listed above.
- Congressional committees and subcommittees should hold a series of hearings on the unique regional and country-specific threats to press freedom, and what the U.S. can do to reverse violations.

Specific to certain cases, we urge Congress to:

- Mandate an unclassified report by the Director of National Intelligence detailing what the U.S. government knew about threats to Jamal Khashoggi prior to his murder, and what the U.S. government has learned about who plotted and carried out the killing.
- Take action to punish any individuals found to be involved or responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, or any other journalists.
- Urge the Philippines government to stop its attacks on independent media, including *Rappler* and Maria Ressa.
- Ask the Tanzanian government and U.S. administration what it is doing to help locate missing journalist Azory Gwanda, and hold those responsible for his disappearance accountable.
- Finally, as the author of a recent book on hostages and hostage policy, I have a special interest in the fate of American journalists taken hostage overseas. Congress should insist that the administration do all it can to ensure the safe recovery of journalist Austin Tice, who was detained in Syria in 2012 and is believed to be alive. Congress should insist that the two suspects in the murders of journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff (along with other American and British hostages), who are currently detained by Kurdish forces inside Syria, are brought to the U.S. to face trial in civilian court.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing on the dangers of reporting on human rights, and for inviting the Committee to Protect Journalists to testify before you.