

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2526

To establish the Office of Press Freedom, to create press freedom curriculum at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 26, 2023

Mr. SCHATZ (for himself, Mr. YOUNG, Mr. BROWN, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. OSSOFF, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. WYDEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To establish the Office of Press Freedom, to create press freedom curriculum at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Global Press Freedom
5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Freedom of the press is fundamental to an
9 open and free society and is foundational in the

1 United States’ democratic system and enshrined in
2 the First Amendment of the United States Constitu-
3 tion, which states (in part) “Congress shall make no
4 law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or of the
5 press . . .”.

6 (2) Historically, United States foreign policy
7 has advanced freedom of the press as a central
8 tenet, at home and abroad.

9 (3) The United States led the drafting of the
10 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in
11 Paris on December 10, 1948, which enshrines the
12 commitment of countries around the world to protect
13 and promote universal human rights and values that
14 are indispensable for human dignity, including free-
15 dom of expression.

16 (4) Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of
17 Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to
18 freedom of opinion and expression; this right in-
19 cludes freedom to hold opinions without interference
20 and to seek, receive and impart information and
21 ideas through any media and regardless of fron-
22 tiers.”.

23 (5) A free and independent press has long been
24 recognized as an important aspect of the United
25 States’ national security and actions taken by for-

1 eign governments or organizations that weaken free
2 press protections are a national security threat to
3 the United States.

4 (6) International press freedom is under re-
5 newed and, in some cases, increasing assault, with
6 rhetoric delegitimizing and discrediting the media or
7 journalists, online harassment, physical attacks, gen-
8 der-based violence, legal campaigns, censorship, and
9 surveillance, all of which threaten the ability of jour-
10 nalists to do their jobs safely, freely, and without
11 fear of reprisal.

12 (7) In the past decade, the world has seen a
13 significant deterioration of press freedoms.

14 (8) According to Freedom House’s “Freedom in
15 the World” and “Freedom on the Net” reports—

16 (A) the number of countries and territories
17 scoring a zero for media freedom has ballooned
18 from 14 countries to 33 countries since 2005;

19 (B) people in 53 countries faced arrest or
20 imprisonment for expressing themselves online,
21 including online journalists targeted for their
22 reporting;

23 (C) 40 countries blocked websites featuring
24 political, social, or religious content, including
25 many news outlets; and

1 (D) journalists, bloggers, human rights ac-
2 tivists, and other people experienced physical vi-
3 olence in retaliation for expressing themselves
4 online in 40 countries.

5 (9) According to Reporters Without Borders’
6 2022 World Press Freedom Index—

7 (A) approximately 74 percent of the coun-
8 tries of the world are classified as “problematic
9 situation” or worse with respect to journalistic
10 freedom, with a record number of 28 countries
11 receiving a “very bad” rating for press freedom
12 situations;

13 (B) approximately 26 percent of the coun-
14 tries of the world have “satisfactory” or “good”
15 press freedom environments;

16 (C) among the jurisdictions that have re-
17 cently suffered the largest declines in press
18 freedom are Hong Kong, Myanmar, Afghani-
19 stan, Russia, Ukraine (attributable to Russia’s
20 invasion), Georgia, Greece, Nicaragua, the Pal-
21 estinian Territories, Tunisia, and Mali; and

22 (D) democracies are being weakened by the
23 asymmetry between open societies and despotic
24 regimes that control their media and online

1 platforms, while waging propaganda wars
2 against democracies.

3 (10) According to the Committee to Protect
4 Journalists, in 2022—

5 (A) at least 363 journalists worldwide were
6 in prison, a new record high and a 20 percent
7 increase from the 302 journalists in prison in
8 2021, with Iran, China, Myanmar, Turkey, and
9 Belarus all ranking among the top 5 jailers of
10 journalists;

11 (B) of the journalists detained—

12 (i) 131 journalists were detained with-
13 out charge;

14 (ii) 199 journalists were imprisoned
15 on anti-state charges; and

16 (iii) 354 detainees were local journal-
17 ists covering events in their own countries;

18 (C) at least 67 journalists and media work-
19 ers were killed, which is the highest number of
20 journalist killings since 2018 and almost a 50
21 percent increase from the number of journalists
22 killed during 2021;

23 (D) at least 41 journalists and media
24 workers were killed in direct connection with
25 their work; and

1 (E) there was complete impunity in nearly
2 80 percent of the 263 cases of journalists mur-
3 dered in the last decade, with perpetrators fac-
4 ing no judicial consequences.

5 (11) Congress has recognized the importance of
6 freedom of the press by enacting—

7 (A) the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press
8 Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–166);

9 (B) the Global Magnitsky Human Rights
10 Accountability Act (subtitle F of title XII of
11 Public Law 114–328); and

12 (C) S. Res. 501, 115th Congress (recog-
13 nizing threats to freedom of the press and ex-
14 pression around the world and reaffirming free-
15 dom of the press as a priority in efforts of the
16 Government of the United States to promote
17 democracy and good governance).

18 (12) The importance of freedom of the press
19 has been recognized by numerous United States
20 presidential administrations that span ideological
21 and party lines, including—

22 (A) a 1786 letter to James Currie, in
23 which Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson
24 wrote “our liberty depends on the freedom of

1 the press, and that cannot be limited without
2 being lost.”;

3 (B) an address to Congress on February 6,
4 1986, in which President Ronald Reagan stat-
5 ed, “Victories against poverty are greatest and
6 peace most secure where people live by laws
7 that ensure free press, free speech, and freedom
8 to worship, vote, and create wealth”;

9 (C) a statement by Secretary of State
10 Condoleezza Rice on April 11, 2007, stating
11 that “there is no more important pillar of de-
12 mocracy than a free and active press”;

13 (D) a statement by former Secretary of
14 State Madeline Albright on May 31, 2018, re-
15 porting that “Freedom of the press is a basic
16 aspect of democracy, invented by Americans.”;
17 and

18 (E) a statement by Secretary of State
19 Mike Pompeo on May 3, 2019, stating, “A free
20 and independent media is indispensable to a vi-
21 brant, functioning democracy. Despite some
22 progress, journalists around the world continue
23 to be persecuted, targeted with violence, or even
24 killed—all too often with impunity.”.

1 (13) Protection of a free and open press is not
2 a partisan issue.

3 (14) It is imperative that Congress further en-
4 shrine the Department of State's role in protecting
5 international press freedom and those engaged in
6 journalism abroad.

7 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

8 It shall be the policy of the United States—

9 (1) to condemn attacks on press freedom and
10 threats to the safety of journalists;

11 (2) to promote, and to assist other governments
12 in the promotion of, the importance of a free and
13 open press;

14 (3) to support press freedom abroad in all as-
15 pects of American foreign policy; and

16 (4) to work with foreign governments that af-
17 firm and protect press freedom—

18 (A) to develop multilateral initiatives to
19 combat suppression of the free and independent
20 press; and

21 (B) to promote accountability for individ-
22 uals, governments, and other actors that attack
23 press freedoms and threaten the safety of jour-
24 nalists.

1 **SEC. 4. OFFICE OF PRESS FREEDOM; AMBASSADOR-AT-**
2 **LARGE FOR PRESS FREEDOM.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established, within
4 the Department of State, the Office of Press Freedom (re-
5 ferred to in this Act as the “Office”), which—

6 (1) shall be situated in the Bureau of Democ-
7 racy, Human Rights, and Labor; and

8 (2) shall be headed by the Ambassador-at-
9 Large for Press Freedom (referred to in this Act as
10 the “Ambassador”).

11 (b) APPOINTMENT.—The Ambassador shall be ap-
12 pointed by the President, by and with advice and consent
13 of the Senate, and shall work with the Assistant Secretary
14 of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to ad-
15 vise the Secretary of State regarding matters related to
16 press freedom.

17 (c) DUTIES.—The Ambassador shall have the fol-
18 lowing duties:

19 (1) GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES.—Notwith-
20 standing the active role carried out by local United
21 States Ambassadors in the monitoring of press free-
22 dom violations in their host countries, the Amba-
23 sador shall have the primary responsibility—

24 (A) to advance the protection and well-
25 being of members of the United States and for-
26 eign press abroad;

1 (B) to denounce attacks on press freedom
2 and violations of freedom of expression by for-
3 eign governments or other actors; and

4 (C) to engage with foreign governments
5 and press freedom organizations around the
6 world concerning press freedom and freedom of
7 expression.

8 (2) SPECIFIC TASKS.—The Ambassador, with
9 the assistance of the Office and in consultation with
10 the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy,
11 Human Rights, and Labor, and in fulfillment of the
12 responsibilities described in paragraph (1), shall—

13 (A) coordinate efforts between relevant
14 United States embassy personnel and press or-
15 ganizations or threatened individuals in situa-
16 tions in which press freedom is threatened
17 abroad;

18 (B) publicly and privately denounce op-
19 pression of the press abroad;

20 (C) represent the United States in issues
21 concerning press freedom in diplomatic engage-
22 ment with foreign governments, intergovern-
23 mental organizations, the United Nations, and
24 other international organizations in which the
25 United States is a member;

1 (D) recommend appropriate responses by
2 the United States Government when press free-
3 dom is infringed upon; and

4 (E) provide Congress and the public with
5 a regular report describing the successes and
6 enduring challenges of the Office, based on
7 metrics that the Office shall develop.

8 (3) ADVISORY ROLE.—The Ambassador—

9 (A) shall be a principal advisor to the
10 President and to the Secretary of State regard-
11 ing matters affecting press freedom abroad; and

12 (B) shall make recommendations regarding
13 the policies of the United States Government
14 towards governments or other organizations or
15 individuals that—

16 (i) infringe on press freedom; or

17 (ii) fail to ensure the protection of
18 members of the press.

19 (4) REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES.—The Am-
20 bassador shall—

21 (A) work with the staff of the Office to en-
22 sure the success of the Office in carrying out its
23 mission—

24 (i) to promote press freedom abroad;

25 and

1 (ii) to protect members of the press in
2 foreign countries;

3 (B) not later than 1 year after being ap-
4 pointed, ensure that there is a reasonable proc-
5 ess for measuring the efficacy of the Office in
6 carrying out the missions described in subpara-
7 graph (A);

8 (C) not later than 18 months after being
9 appointed, and annually thereafter—

10 (i) submit a report to Congress that
11 describes—

12 (I) the outcomes of the activities
13 of the Office based on the process es-
14 tablished pursuant to subparagraph
15 (B); and

16 (II) the efforts of the National
17 Foreign Affairs Training Center to
18 train Foreign Service Officers about
19 press freedom in accordance with sec-
20 tion 5; and

21 (ii) make a copy of the report sub-
22 mitted pursuant to clause (i) available to
23 the public; and

24 (D) oversee the press freedom content in
25 the “Freedom of Expression” section of each

1 country reviewed in the annual Country Report
2 on Human Rights Practices.

3 (5) FUNDING.—The Secretary of State shall
4 provide the Ambassador with sufficient funds—

5 (A) to hire the staff for the Office to en-
6 able the Office to carry out the tasks and re-
7 sponsibilities described in paragraphs (1), (2),
8 and (3);

9 (B) to comply with the reporting require-
10 ments described in paragraph (4); and

11 (C) for necessary travel to carry out this
12 section.

13 **SEC. 5. PRESS FREEDOM CURRICULUM.**

14 (a) DEVELOPMENT.—The Secretary of State shall
15 ensure that there is a press freedom curriculum for the
16 National Foreign Affairs Training Center that enables
17 Foreign Service Officers to better understand issues of
18 press freedom and the tools that are available to help pro-
19 tect journalists and promote freedom of the press norms,
20 including—

21 (1) the historic and current issues facing press
22 freedom, including countries of specific concern;

23 (2) the Department of State's role in promoting
24 press freedom as an American value, a human rights
25 issue, and a national security imperative;

1 (3) ways to incorporate press freedom pro-
2 motion into other aspects of diplomacy; and

3 (4) existing tools to assist journalists in distress
4 and methods for engaging foreign governments and
5 institutions on behalf of individuals engaged in jour-
6 nalistic activity who are at risk of harm.

7 (b) **REQUIRED STUDY.**—Any Foreign Service Officer
8 who is assigned to function as a Public Diplomacy Officer,
9 a Political Officer, or a Consular Officer at an overseas
10 mission shall—

11 (1) complete the study of the curriculum de-
12 scribed in subsection (a) not later than 90 days after
13 the first day of such assignment; and

14 (2) benefit from knowledge sharing by civil soci-
15 ety actors who are at the forefront of the defense
16 and promotion of the freedom of expression.

17 **SEC. 6. GAO STUDY ON THE DANIEL PEARL FREEDOM OF**
18 **THE PRESS ACT OF 2009.**

19 (a) **STUDY.**—The Comptroller General of the United
20 States shall evaluate the implementation of the Daniel
21 Pearl Freedom of the Press Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–
22 166) by reviewing the Department of State’s Country Re-
23 ports on Human Rights Practices, prepared in select years
24 and for select countries, to examine—

1 (1) the process used by the Department for pre-
2 paring information regarding the freedom of the
3 press for such reports and the extent to which such
4 process changed after the date of the enactment of
5 such Act;

6 (2) the extent to which the Department of State
7 followed the process referred to in paragraph (1) in
8 preparing information regarding press freedom that
9 was included in its most recently published Country
10 Reports on Human Rights Practices;

11 (3) any challenges encountered by the Depart-
12 ment of State in collecting, corroborating, and re-
13 porting the information described in sections
14 116(d)(12) and 502B(i) of the Foreign Assistance
15 Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(d)(12) and 2304(i)),
16 as added by the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press
17 Act of 2009; and

18 (4) the extent to which the Department of State
19 measures the impact of its reports on freedom of the
20 press on foreign governments' behaviors or practices.

21 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the date
22 of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of
23 the United States shall submit a report to Congress and
24 to the Secretary of State that—

1 (1) summarizes the results of the evaluation re-
2 quired under subsection (a); and

3 (2) provides recommendations for any legisla-
4 tive or regulatory action that would improve the ef-
5 forts of the Department of State to report on issues
6 of press freedom abroad.

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