

Unfortunately, in most countries, defamation is still punishable by imprisonment, which threatens the existence of critical speech in the media. This is so despite the consistent rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, stating that imprisonment for speech offences, especially when committed by criticizing public figures, is a disproportionate punishment.

Let us again remind ourselves of the journalists and bloggers I have mentioned above when discussing violence against journalists. They are currently in prison because their writing was considered defamatory. Their fate reminds us all of the importance of the right to freely speak our mind.

This problem needs urgent reform not only in the new, but also in the old democracies of the OSCE. Although the obsolete criminal provisions have not been used in Western Europe for decades, their "chilling effect" remained.

Furthermore, the mere existence of these provisions has served as a justification for other states that are unwilling to stop the criminalization of journalistic errors, and instead leave these offenses solely to the civil-law domain.

Currently, defamation is a criminal offence in all but ten OSCE countries—my home country Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Ireland, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Last year, three OSCE countries decriminalized defamation, which I consider to be an enormous success: Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom; the last being the first among the Western European participating States to officially decriminalize defamation.

Some other countries, such as Armenia, are currently reforming their defamation provisions, and I hope that I can soon welcome the next country that carries out this important and very long overdue reform.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dear Chairmen,
Dear Commissioners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The above problematic areas—violence against journalists, restrictions of new media including the Internet, lack of pluralism and resistance to decriminalize defamation—are among the most urgent media freedom problems that need our attention and concentrated efforts today. However, we will also not forget about the many other fields where there is plenty of room to improve. Of course, I will not miss the excellent opportunity that we are here together today to raise your attention to the topic that my distinguished predecessor, Miklos Haraszti, has already raised with you: the establishment and the adoption of a federal shield law in the United States.

As you know, my Office has been a dedicated promoter of the federal shield law for many years. If passed, the Free Flow of Information Act would provide a stronger protection to journalists; it could ensure that imprisonments such as that of Judith Miller in 2005, and Josh Wolf in 2006, could never again take place and hinder investigative journalism. But the passage of such legislation would resonate far further than within the borders of the United States of America. It could send a very much needed signal and set a precedent to all the countries where protection of sources is still opposed by the government and is still not more than a dream for journalists.

I respectfully ask all of you, distinguished Commissioners, to continue and even increase your efforts to enable that the Free Flow of Information Act soon becomes the latest protector of media freedom in the United States.

And of course I cannot close my speech without mentioning my home country, Bosnia and Herzegovina. As you know, not only Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also most of the emerging democracies in the Balkans enjoy modern and forward-looking media legislation. We can openly say that they almost have it all when it comes to an advanced legal and regulatory framework enabling free expression to thrive. But it is not that simple. I use this moment to pose several questions: if there are good laws, then why do we still face severe problems in relation to media freedom, why do we stagnate and sometimes even move backward? Where does the problem lie? And, more importantly, how can we solve it and move ahead?

What Bosnia and Herzegovina shows us is that good laws in themselves are not enough. Without their good implementation, they are only documents filled with unrealized potential. In countries that struggle with similar problems, we must stress over and over again: without the full implementation of valid legislation, without genuine political will, without a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in a functioning democracy, without the creation of a safe environment for journalists to do their work, and without true commitment by all actors, these countries risk falling far behind international standards.

Apart from unmet expectations and disillusioned citizens, we all know that the consequences of politicized and misused media could be very serious. In conclusion, let me assure you, dear Commissioners, that I will not hesitate to openly and vigorously remind any country of their responsibilities toward implementing the OSCE commitments to the freedom of the media.

I am also asking you to use this opportunity today and send a clear message to the governments of all OSCE countries to do their utmost to fully implement their media legislation safeguarding freedom of expression. The governments have the power to create an environment in which media can perform their unique role free of pressures and threats. Without this, no democracy can flourish.

Thank you for your attention.

HONORING COLONEL EDWARD J. KERTIS FOR HIS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO THE RESIDENTS OF GEORGIA

HON. PAUL C. BROUN

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Mr. BROUN of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Col. Edward J. Kertis for a distinguished career and the outstanding help that he has been to me, my staff, and the people in my district.

Col. Kertis assumed command of the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, on June 29, 2007. Since his appointment, he has been responsible for a \$4 billion military design and construction program; water resources planning, design and construction; hazardous, toxic and radiological waste cleanup; and real estate activities.

Residents of my district are especially grateful for his help with water resources management during an historic drought. As the rains finally began to return, Col. Kertis took the unprecedented step of stopping flow from Thurmond and Hartwell Dams, allowing the lakes to fill while water was flowing into the Savan-

nah River from flooding creeks and streams. This common-sense decision provided economic relief to those communities who rely so heavily on the preservation of the beautiful lakes and parks of the upper Savannah River. But he has served his country in other ways as well.

Prior to his assignment to the Savannah District, Col. Kertis commanded the Walla Walla District, USACE, in Washington State from 2002–2004. He has also served as a platoon leader, staff officer, and battalion executive officer in the 27th Engineer Battalion; company commander in the 41st Engineer Battalion; and engineer company commander in the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment—Delta. He was also the inaugural commander of the Northern District, Gulf Region Division, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, where he managed construction projects in support of Coalition forces and the Iraqi government.

I ask my colleagues to join me in thanking Col. Kertis for his service to the nation and the dedication he has given his duties, and in wishing him all the best as he assumes his new assignment as Pacific Ocean Division Commander.

HONORING ROCK BRIDGE BOYS
HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS TEAM

HON. BLAINE LUETKEMEYER

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Mr. LUETKEMEYER. Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the Rock Bridge High School Boys Tennis Team on their outstanding season.

The young men and their coaches should be commended for all their hard work throughout the regular season and bringing home the Class 2 State Tennis Championship to their school and community.

I ask that you join me in recognizing the Rock Bridge High School Tennis Team for a job well done.

KEN GRIFFEY, JR.

HON. DAVID G. REICHERT

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Mr. REICHERT. Madam Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the recently retired Ken Griffey, Jr. Griffey retired last week from Major League Baseball after hitting 630 home runs, driving in 1,836 runs, and scoring 2,781 times. I won't even attempt to quantify the OOOHHS and AAAAHS.

Griffey joined the Seattle Mariners in 1989, when I was with the King County Sheriffs Department. At times, I was assigned to provide security at many of the sporting events held at the Kingdome. At these events, I watched an assortment of professional athletes practice their trade in Seattle. When Ken Griffey, Jr., took the field, he scaled walls, hit tape-measure home runs, and rounded the bases with a smile on his face that made spectators instant fans. His career was extraordinary, his accomplishments legendary, and his impact on baseball in the Northwest may never be equaled.