

IMPUNITY FOR MURDERS OF JOURNALISTS: A CHALLENGE TO FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

Keynote speech, 11 December 2017, OSCE, Vienna

I

Let me start by thanking Harlem Desir, Frane Maroevic and everyone else here at the OSCE for organising this event and for inviting me and my brothers to speak today.

We speak to you today as the sons of a murdered journalist, our mother Daphne Caruana Galizia. But it isn't only murder that we want to speak about.

We are late - far too late - if we speak only about murder.

Before a journalist is murdered, they are harassed - physically, psychologically, financially.

And here too there is impunity.

- Veronica Guerin: countless death threats, two shots into her home, gun to her head, bullet in her leg.
- Anna Politkovskaya: countless death threats, military arrest, mock execution, near-fatal poisoning.
- Daphne Caruana Galizia: countless death threats, arson attacks, 57, 57 law suits, bank accounts frozen, arrests, tax investigations.

The death threats our mother received and the arson attacks on our home have gone unpunished. The law suits against her remain.

The last time she left our house was to go to the bank. She wanted access to her account; frozen by Malta's Economy Minister. She barely made it out of our drive, dying without access to her own money, while the Minister remains in cabinet, and we her heirs continue fighting him in court to have that money released.

Here again, we have impunity.

Journalists are killed for what they write. What they write remains after them as does their reputation and credibility. Those who harass journalists in life have the same reasons to harass them in death, seeking to undermine their reputation, destroy their credibility, and erase their memory.

Anna Politkovskaya's husband once said to his wife that what she did was "not journalism"; it was "a justice alarm."

An end to impunity for crimes against journalists means one thing: that they should only need to raise the alarm once -- and not by dying.

II

When those alarms ring they don't ring for journalists, they ring for all of us.

The impunity with which journalists are harassed and murdered is more our problem than theirs. Each blow they suffer hits each and every one of us, summing up to a social loss we see only too late.

And that's the strange thing about a journalist's death: that the collective loss outweighs the individual loss. The journalist loses their life, but we the living lose our right to know, to speak, to learn.

Neither is the impunity with which journalists are harassed and murdered simply an attack on media freedom.

The free flow of facts and opinions, the stock and trade of journalists, creates societies that are fairer and freer. It creates societies that are richer and more resilient: in other words, societies that are worth living in.

Veronica Guerin cried to the heavens for justice for the young victims of Ireland's drug barons. Every Sunday she told us, "They are destroying lives, and they are practically untouchable." She told us of Dublin and its "culture of violence, money and evil".

Alarm, after alarm, ringing louder and louder.

Veronica Guerin didn't live to see her subjects face justice. She raised one final alarm. Stopped at a red traffic light, she was shot fatally six times by two men.

Within a week, the Irish government enacted the Proceeds of Crime Act and established the Criminal Assets Bureau. Over 150 arrests, the seizure of drugs, arms, and assets followed.

But one day that "culture of violence, money and evil" will return and there'll be no Veronica Guerin to raise the alarm. That is our collective loss.

We can't keep trading journalists' lives for our short-run benefit. Neither do we need to.

III

The Committee to Protect Journalists tells us that over the last 25 years, the deadliest 'beat' for a journalist was not war. It was politics. More journalists were killed covering politics at home than embedded in a battalion in Kandahar or reporting on fresh barbarities out of Syria.

If we add corruption to politics, then we have two thirds of dead journalists in a single category. *Two thirds*. Two thirds of journalists are killed for covering corruption and politics at home.

That's the most dangerous area to cover if you're a journalist: corruption and politics.

And the worst thing about it is, that if you get killed doing your job, the same people you were investigating will be the same people leading or interfering in your own murder investigation.

Your surviving family, friends and colleagues meanwhile will live on in fear, knowing perhaps that the people who killed you are on the television, in parliament or, worse, linked to the police.

This makes no sense. It is in fact the best way to ensure impunity.

Investigative journalists will always, in one way or another, report on weak or flawed institutions. If it's a mining company bribing government officials or a bank holding the proceeds of corruption, it cannot happen without institutional complicity at some level.

The journalists' deaths are then investigated by the very same flawed institutions that so successfully ensured the first crime -- corruption -- and the second one, murder.

And here's what we get.

According to this year's CPJ Global Impunity Index, there has been full justice, including prosecution of those who commissioned the crime, in only *4 percent* of cases involving murdered journalists.

4 percent. A depressing statistic for me and my family. But for you, those working to change this, it means that with such a low starting point, it's almost impossible not to achieve progress.

When a journalist reporting on corruption and politics is killed by paid assassins, the first thing we should do, as individuals, civil society, governments and international organisations, is to make it our starting point that there was institutional complicity, at some level, in the murder.

Once we accept that, the next steps are clear: the investigation should not only be independent and impartial but it should, as a matter of course, have international observers with access to everything the national police look at.

In high profile cases, a complete international team of investigators should be sent in.

We need an international mechanism for whistleblowers and the sources of murdered journalists to go to with information. They can't be expected to go to national authorities.

IV

There is more we can do while these changes are set in motion

Professor Sarikakis' work here in Vienna on mapping out murdered journalists around the world is important and helpful.

Let's complement it with another database - one where we record the harassment journalists are subjected to every day. Harassment that they survive. And let's use that information to raise alarms of our own -- to save journalists before it's too late.

Let's empower organisations like the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders to support and protect journalists who, though they don't operate in war zones, face serious threats that are both fatal and non-fatal.

Let's support projects like Forbidden Stories to protect journalists' work as well as their lives.

But to end impunity for the harassment and murder of journalists, we need cultural and political change.

Let's be louder and clearer that governments and organisations have no business in targeting, in any way, journalists and their work.

Governments and organisations, criminal or corporate, have no business in trying to silence our alarms. Let's drop criminal defamation laws, let's set an evidence threshold, clearer parameters and lower fines on libel laws.

And when a journalist raises an alarm, let us listen closely and carefully and act before they are murdered.

Thank you.