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United States Mission to the OSCE



Session 1: Freedom of the Media

As prepared for delivery by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick
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Moderator,

As an Internet writer myself, I can imagine how many of my colleagues could feel a chill on their own work whenever our colleagues are murdered. Today marks 4 years since Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya was gunned down; the murder remains unsolved.

Those who intimidate and commit violence against journalists are attacking society at large, as the very purpose of journalism is to reveal the truth. If unpunished, the resulting climate of impunity inevitably paves the way for similar acts in the future and shrinks the space for freedom of expression which is vital to all other human rights and the healthy functioning of our democracies.

With this in mind, we cannot ignore that Ramzan Kadyrov, the appointed leader of Chechnya, has labeled independent journalists and rights activists as “traitors and enemies of the state.” Statements such as these, as well as pressure and harassment, including through misuse of the laws, against those who have called him to account, can contribute to a climate in which people are attacked, or even murdered; they also can be interpreted as a promise of impunity. We urge the Russian Federation to condemn these veiled threats, and to conduct meaningful investigations and just prosecutions of the murders of journalists, including Natalya Estemirova, American Paul Klebnikov, and too many others.

Last month, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkey failed to protect not only the freedom of speech but also the life of journalist Hrant Dink, who was murdered in 2007. We are aware of two arrests this week regarding the December 2009 death in Almaty of Kyrgyz editor Gennady Pavlyuk. In late July of this year, Serbian journalist Teofil Pancic was hospitalized for a concussion and arm injuries after being severely beaten in a targeted attack on a Belgrade bus.

Moderator, the United States joins the Representative on Freedom of the Media and others in expressing concern over the fate of missing Ukrainian journalist Vasil Klymentyev, editor of the weekly Novyy Styl. While the murderers of reporter Georgiy Gongadze have been tried and convicted, those who commissioned this crime have yet to be brought to justice a decade later. We are deeply concerned over the circumstances surrounding the death of Aleh Byabenin, a founder and manager of Charter97.org web site in Belarus.

In all these cases, we urge authorities in these countries to investigate and prosecute all those responsible for these attacks.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists at least sixteen journalists are known to have been jailed in participating States as of last December. While the release of Azerbaijani editor Genimet Zakhidov was welcome, the United States remains troubled over the continued imprisonment of editor Eynulla Fatullayev and video bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. We call upon the Government of Azerbaijan to release them without delay or condition. We likewise call upon the Government of Uzbekistan to release Muhammad Bekjanov, Yusuf Ruzimuradov, Gayrat Mehliboyev, Ortikali Namazov, Dzhamshid Karimov, Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov, Hairulla Hamroyev, and Dilmurod Saiid. The Government of Uzbekistan also should dismiss charges inconsistent with international standards brought against Voice of America journalist Abdumalik Boboev and Russian editor for vesti.uz Vladimir Berezovsky.

We urge authorities in Kyrgyzstan to ensure due process for those journalists detained in the wake of the June upheavals there earlier this year, including ethnic Uzbeks Azimzhan Askarov and editor Ulugbek Abdusalamov.

Next month, our discussion of free media issues will be resumed in Astana. We urge the Government of Kazakhstan to release imprisoned editor Ramazan Yesergepov so that he may participate in the Review Conference there.

Thank you.