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United States Mission to the OSCE

World Press Freedom Day

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 30, 2009

This weekend, we mark World Press Freedom Day. We do so with a somber note, for, as we acknowledge and praise media workers around the globe for their public service, we also remember those who have been harassed, jailed, physically assaulted, and even killed in the quest to make the truth known.

Media workers worldwide put themselves in harm's way, and not just in war zones. In countries around the globe, journalists risk their lives on a daily basis, when they shine a light into dark corridors of government corruption, expose intolerance, or otherwise displease powerful figures with something to hide. The ugly and unacceptable reality is that those who murder journalists – those who silence voices vital to democracy and freedom – far, far too often are getting away with it.

In its recently published 2009 Impunity Index, the Committee to Protect Journalists focuses on the disturbing trend of the murder of journalists that remain unsolved. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, on average, only one out of ten times is someone convicted when a journalist is murdered. In many cases, governments simply fail to act at all. In even more disturbing instances, governments may actually be involved in the murder or cover-up. This failure to aggressively pursue these crimes and prosecute the perpetrators sends a message to the killers that they can act with impunity – that they will not be brought to justice.

No country should be complacent about violence against journalists. In the United States, we witnessed in 2007 the shocking murder of an investigative reporter, Chauncey Bailey, in California. The full dimensions of this crime are only slowly being unraveled as the investigation, and the controversy over its handling by local law enforcement authorities, continues. In 2008, six journalists were killed in OSCE participating States because of their work, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. We call on these OSCE participating States to hold the killers accountable. According to that same NGO, sixteen journalists have been murdered in the Russian Federation alone since 1999 because of their reporting on crime, unrest, and corruption. Of these sixteen killings, only one case has been resolved.

The United States again commends the repeated efforts of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to sound the alarm on this growing problem and to remind OSCE participating States of our OSCE commitments on press freedom. As Miklos Harazsti has said, "Attempts at silencing critical voices with the help of violence should be seen and handled by law enforcement not as ordinary crimes, but as acts aimed to undermine the basic democratic value of free expression."

It is with this sentiment in mind that we should all pause to commemorate World Press Freedom Day and pledge to work together to turn our OSCE commitments into living reality.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.