

**Address by Miklos Haraszti,  
the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,  
to the participants of the XIV International  
Journalism Festival, in Dagomys, Russia, 24-29 September 2009.**

Unofficial translation

Dear Colleagues,

More than forty years ago, people like Andrei Siniavsky, Aleksandr Ginzburg and Natalia Gorbanevskaya were role models to those active in democratic movements in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and to me personally. These brave Russians were the first ones ready to sacrifice their freedom, at times even their life, for the sake of telling the truth.

When I think of Russia's journalism today, I feel the same sense of deep respect and pride. Igor Domnikov, Anna Politkovskaya, Stanislav Markelov and Natalia Estemirova all fell victim to the cruellest form of censorship, committed via violence and even murder.

Given the practical impunity of these crimes, it is amazing that Russia's journalists do not succumb to fear and self-censorship. There still remain journalists, who demonstrate the same great spiritual power and continue to fight against corruption and human rights abuses, even in the dangerous environment of the North Caucasus.

Of course, one cannot assert that the state stands behind violence against journalists. But the state's responsibility is unquestionable because of the practical indifference it shows towards these crimes.

The time has come for the Russian state to demonstrate its strength and prove its effectiveness against those who terrorize journalists. And it should not manifest its assertiveness, as is often the case, by restricting the media, non-governmental organizations, or the Internet.

While I welcome the recent statements by President Medvedev in support of reforms and the rule of law, I would like to make a call for the unavoidable tangible actions to protect press freedom. These measures must be carried out at the highest level.

As a first step, the official silence about the safety crisis faced by Russia's journalists must be broken. It must be recognized that there can be no true freedom of the press as long as journalists have to fear for their lives. The government must acknowledge that the murder of a journalist is not "crime as usual," but is an act that endangers democracy.

A second step should be a serious reorganization of the law enforcement agencies. How could journalists and society possibly trust those who so far, have been unable to bring to justice any of those responsible for the assassination of journalists?

As the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and as an admirer of the heroism of Russia's human rights defenders, I am convinced that these changes are imperative for the sake of press freedom. Moreover, they could serve the state itself, as they would transform its role from that of master of the press into that of its guardian.

"For your freedom and ours!" said the banner heroically unfurled on Moscow's Red Square by Natalia Gorbanevskaya and other Russian dissidents in August 1968. To this day, journalists in all fifty-six OSCE participating States rely on this principle of solidarity.

I wish you success in your – and our – struggle against fear.