

HDIM.NGO/0140/13
25 September 2013



HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION

OSCE
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Group Session 4, Fundamental freedoms 1.
Freedom of expression, free media and information including
best practices for the protection of journalists.
25 September 2013

Check against delivery

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Last year marks the most dramatic year on record regarding the killings of journalists.

In the Russian federation alone, from January 2013 until August 2013 more than 173 cases of attacks against journalists were recorded, including 2 killings in the North Caucasus¹.

We welcome the important work done by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović and her emphasizes the serious and pervasive problem of impunity for attacks against journalists. Ensuring accountability is a key element in preventing future attacks. There need to be a swift and independent investigations in accordance with international standards into any allegations of violations. Perpetrators must be held accountable.

We call upon the authorities of the Russian Federation to ensure that investigations into threats and attacks against and murders of journalists and media workers are conducted effectively, promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially, and that those guilty are brought to justice.

In the country of Azerbaijan, few weeks before the upcoming Presidential elections, the number of arbitrary detained and imprisoned journalists has reached 9.

The Human Rights House Foundation resolutely condemns the latest detention of journalist and human rights activist Parviz Hashimli and the raid on his newspaper office on September 17 deeming it as a pre-election pressure on the media and civil society and calls upon the Azerbaijani government to release him immediately.

¹ See: "*Russia – Conflicts in the Media*"¹ lead by Glasnost Defence Foundation, International Federation of Journalists, Russian Union of Journalists and Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations.

As highlighted by Commissionaires on Human Rights and Representatives of Media in inter-governmental organizations like UN, EU, OSCE and CoE - “the existence and use of criminal offenses such slander, libel and defamation against journalists and other media professionals deters reporting on issues of public interest”.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan defamation and libel remain criminal offenses and are broadly used by the authorities as a tool to silence journalists and other critical voices in the country.

Those criminal offences have not only not been decriminalized, but on 14 [in] May 2013, the definition of slander and defamation was expanded to include “[opinions] publicly expressed in Internet resources.”

The country of Belarus has one of the worst records on freedom of expression, and the authorities are now concentrating efforts to restrict freedom online.

The Government of Belarus is now extending tight control to information distribute on online resources, **by applying a repressive legal framework**, including draconian laws such as criminal libel, legal prosecution and the misapplication of the administrative code **and by using new techniques, such as online surveillance, website blocking and filtering, and cyber-attacks** against independent websites and content manipulation.

We call on the government of Belarus to stop all disproportionate and unnecessary legal and extrajudicial practices, online and offline, that compromise freedom of expression.

On the day of his birthday, we would like to commemorate Ales Bialiatsky, arbitrary detained² by the Belarusian Authorities since 4 August 2011 for his legitimate work on the promotion of human rights and once again,³ we call upon the authorities of Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release Ales Bialiatski and all other political prisoners in Belarus, drop all charges against them and fully rehabilitate them.

Hence, The Human Rights House Foundation underlines that a clear public position should be taken at the highest levels of Governments regarding the important role of journalists in society and the need to prevent and sanction violations of their rights.

Thank you.

² Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 24 December 2012 (UN Doc: A/HRC/22/44).

³ See *inter alia* the Human Rights House Network letter of concern to President Alexander Lukashenko on 2 October 2012: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18695.html>.