



United States Mission to the OSCE

On World Press Freedom Day

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor Jesse Walter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 9, 2024

In addition to joining the Group of Friends on Safety of Journalists statement - which was just delivered - I would like to say a few words in my national capacity. Today, the United States reflects on World Press Freedom Day by applauding the tireless work of independent journalists in newsrooms and warzones all over the world. Their work exposes corruption, documents conflicts, brings to light threats to public safety, and delivers to citizens the information they need to participate fully in their societies. We call on all participating States to uphold their OSCE commitments on freedom of expression, media freedom, and the safety of journalists.

Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin has banned, blocked, or targeted virtually all independent media in Russia as it tries to hide the true cost of its brutal war from the Russian people. Using its draconian “foreign agent” and other repressive laws, Russia has forced into self-imposed exile independent outlets such as *Meduza* and *Novaya Gazeta*. Euronews, France24, and the BBC are no longer easily accessible to the Russian public.

American journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva remain imprisoned. In late April, three Russian independent journalists who had worked with the AP, Deutsche Welle, Reuters, and other outlets were arrested in separate incidents in a span of just 24 hours.

As we’ve pointed out many times in this body, Belarus continues to punish journalists for simply doing their jobs. The Lukashenka regime currently holds nearly 1400 political prisoners, and the Belarusian Association of Journalists estimates 36 of those are media workers. Among them is RFE/RL journalist Ihar Losik, who is serving a 15-year sentence in a maximum-security prison on politically motivated charges. His wife Darya Losik was sentenced in January 2023 to two years’ imprisonment for allegedly “facilitating extremism” when she gave an interview about her husband to an independent media outlet. Regrettably, the Lukashenka regime has denied the Belarusian people unfettered access to information that is free of pro-regime, pro-Kremlin propaganda, and disinformation, having forced the closure of all major independent media outlets in Belarus.

Journalists and media workers are an essential part of any democracy and critical to building stronger societies. That is why President Biden announced on May 3rd that in the coming weeks, the United States will respond to these crackdowns and will authorize measures, including sanctions and visa bans, against those who take abusive actions to silence the press.

Russia and Belarus are not alone in unjustly incarcerating journalists for simply doing their jobs and in otherwise repressing media freedom. Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index for 2024 lists a number of other OSCE participating States as among the worst violators of press freedoms worldwide.

We once again call on all participating States to respect media freedom, and urge those who have unjustly detained or imprisoned journalists for doing their jobs to release them immediately.

We thank journalists risking their liberty and their lives around the world to ensure the free flow of information and ideas. A free and independent press is the lifeblood of free and open societies. Journalism is not a crime.

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