

United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 12: Freedom of expression, free media and information

Specially selected topic

As prepared for delivery by Dr. Michael Haltzel
Head of the U.S. delegation to
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator,

Anna Politkovskaya once remarked, “My job is simple: to look around and write what I see.” For her and many of her fellow journalists, that task has cost them their very lives. This year marks the third anniversary of the murder of Politkovskaya and the fifth anniversary of the slaying of American journalist Paul Klebnikov, editor of *Forbes Russia*.

Investigative journalists who venture into sensitive subjects such as human rights abuses or corruption run the risk of dying as a result, especially in Russia and its turbulent North Caucasus region.

The various storylines of the murder of journalists reveal striking similarities. Almost all the journalists raise the ire of local officials through their exposés. A short time later they are gunned down by a drive-by shooter or attacked by assailants outside of their apartment or office. Investigations are opened, with few leading to arrests, and even fewer to prosecutions. Investigations linger, and linger . . . and finally conclude, without results.

Several Russian journalists have been killed in the past year alone: journalist and human rights activist Natalya Estemirova following her kidnapping, in Chechnya; newspaper editor Abdulmalik Akhmedilov, in Dagestan; Vyacheslav Yaroshenko, editor-in-chief of the Rostov-on-Don newspaper *Korrupsiya i Prestupnost*; free lance journalist Shafiq Amrakhov, in Murmansk; and Anastasiya Baburova and her colleague, human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov, on a sidewalk in downtown Moscow.

Others were fortunate enough to survive their assaults in a spate of other physical attacks on journalists throughout the Russian Federation. In late December, at least a dozen journalists were reportedly detained and beaten by special OMON forces dispatched by Moscow to the Far Eastern city of Vladivostok to suppress peaceful protesters organized by a grassroots car owners' group.

Kyrgyzstan has also seen several violent attacks on journalists, including Abduvahab Moniyev, deputy editor of the pro-opposition biweekly *Achyk Sayasat* and Syrgak Abdyldayev, a journalist for the regional news site *Ferghana*.

Several journalists in Kazakhstan were also violently attacked during the past year, including pro-opposition journalist Bakhytshan Nurpeisov; Yermek Boltai, a journalist for RFE/RL; and Artyom Miusov reporter for the opposition weekly *Taszhargan*, stabbed in Almaty. Then there was the case of Ramazan Yesergepov, editor of *Almaty-Ata Info*, physically removed from his hospital bed by the security forces in early January, shortly after reporting on alleged corruption by local judicial officials.

In Armenia, Argishti Kivirian, editor of the independent news site *Armenia Today*, and Nver Mnatsakanian, a prominent television journalist, have become the latest targets of increasingly frequent violent attacks on journalists in that country.

In Azerbaijan, numerous cases of violence against journalists—including the 2005 murder of Elmar Huseynov—remain unsolved. We are deeply concerned by a recent report from the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety that their regional correspondent Elman Abbasov has been receiving death threats again. We congratulate journalist Malahat Nasibova, who will be awarded the Norwegian Rafto Prize for “her courageous and unwavering struggle for a free and independent press.” We are deeply concerned by reports that she has also received death threats and has been physically attacked, arrested and harassed. We also congratulate investigative reporter Eynulla Fatullayev on his selection by the Committee to Protect Journalists to receive its International Press Freedom Award. Sadly, he is serving an eight and a half year prison sentence that international and domestic human rights organizations consider to be politically motivated.

In many cases of journalists attacked or killed in the OSCE region, we find a double tragedy: investigations and prosecutions by authorities have done little to ensure that justice is brought to the perpetrators or that future violence is deterred. The resulting climate of impunity can increase self-censorship and stifle the important role that independent media plays in society.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about a case in my own country. Chauncey Bailey, an American journalist, was gunned down in Oakland, California two years ago because of his investigation into a local business. One person was indicted shortly after the murder, and a second was charged this past April. After his death, other journalists, editors, and volunteers founded a project that has undertaken two tasks. First, they conducted their own investigation into Bailey's murder, shedding additional light on that case and the police handling of it. Second, they committed to finishing the news stories that Chauncey Bailey was working on when he was murdered.

As the Project says on its website, “You can't kill a story by killing a journalist.”

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.