

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 609

Recognizing widening threats to press freedom and free expression around the world, and reaffirming the vital role that a free and independent press plays in combating the growing threat of authoritarianism, countering misinformation and disinformation, documenting human rights abuses, informing local and international audiences about public health crises, and furthering discourse and debate to advance healthy democracies, in commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2022.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 3, 2022

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. KAINE, Mr. TILLIS, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. MORAN, Mr. COONS, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Recognizing widening threats to press freedom and free expression around the world, and reaffirming the vital role that a free and independent press plays in combating the growing threat of authoritarianism, countering misinformation and disinformation, documenting human rights abuses, informing local and international audiences about public health crises, and furthering discourse and debate to advance healthy democracies, in commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2022.

Whereas Thomas Jefferson, who championed the necessity of a free press for a thriving democratic society, wisely declared, “Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”;

Whereas Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in Paris on December 10, 1948, states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”;

Whereas in 1993, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the third day of May of each year to be “World Press Freedom Day”—

- (1) to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom;
- (2) to evaluate press freedom around the world;
- (3) to defend the media against attacks on its independence; and
- (4) to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives while working in their profession;

Whereas the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–166) expanded the examination of the freedom of the press around the world in the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices published by the Department of State;

Whereas, on December 18, 2013, and December 18, 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/163 and Resolution 74/157, respectively, on the safety of journalists and the problem of impunity by unequivocally condemning all attacks on, and violence against, journalists and media workers, including torture,

extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and intimidation and harassment in conflict and non-conflict situations;

Whereas the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and various State constitutions protect freedom of the press in the United States;

Whereas the United States Government has used the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (subtitle F of title XII of Public Law 114–328) to place targeted visa and economic sanctions on individuals, including for their roles in the targeted killings of journalists;

Whereas, in an effort to combat attacks against journalists, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken in February 2021 announced the Khashoggi Ban, a new policy allowing the Department of State to impose visa restrictions on individuals who, acting on behalf of a foreign government, are believed to have been directly engaged in serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activities, including activities that suppress, harass, surveil, threaten, or harm journalists, activists, or other persons perceived to be dissidents for their work;

Whereas the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, warns that the COVID–19 pandemic “illustrates the negative factors threatening the right to reliable information” and amplifies the many crises that threaten media freedom and pluralism;

Whereas the Freedom in the World 2022 report, published by Freedom House, marked the 16th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, with “some 38 percent of the global population liv[ing] in Not Free countries, the highest proportion since 1997”, and the organization’s Free-

dom on the Net 2021 report identified 11 consecutive years of decline in internet freedom;

Whereas worsening media freedom has been one of the key drivers of these global declines, including attacks and prosecutions against journalists, pressure on media outlets, repressive regulatory and legal frameworks, internet shutdowns, and blocks on online sources of information;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists—

(1) at least 27 journalists were killed in 2021, 21 of whom were singled out in retaliation for their work;

(2) India and Mexico had the most retaliatory killings in 2021;

(3) at least 293 journalists were imprisoned in relation to their work on December 1, 2021, marking the sixth consecutive year that at least 250 journalists were imprisoned globally;

(4) China, Myanmar, Egypt, Vietnam, Belarus, and Turkey were responsible for nearly 50 percent of all jailed journalists worldwide; and

(5) journalists around the world have been targeted by sophisticated spyware products that pose a severe risk to their safety and the safety of their sources;

Whereas the Freedom to Write Index 2021, published by PEN America, noted that at least 277 writers and public intellectuals, including columnists and editorial journalists, were jailed across 36 different countries during 2021;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders, 362 journalists, 93 citizen journalists, and 20 media assistants were imprisoned as of April 22, 2022;

Whereas since the start of Russia’s full-scale offensive against Ukraine, Reporters Without Borders has documented attacks directly targeting journalists wearing a “Press” armband including—

- (1) the killing of 7 journalists;
- (2) the torture by electric shock, beatings, and mock executions of journalists working for the international press; and
- (3) the targeted kidnappings of journalists and their families in occupied regions of Ukraine to put pressure on their reporting;

Whereas in the Ukrainian territory of Crimea, Ukrainian journalists and bloggers have repeatedly been threatened, arbitrarily arrested, and tortured for resisting Russian occupation, such as the detention of Crimean journalist Vladyslav Yesipenko and Crimean Tatar journalists Osman Arifmemetov, Rustem Sheikhaliev, and Remzi Bekirov;

Whereas media workers face heightened dangers in Russia, leading up to and following draconian censorship laws passed in the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine have intensified already wide spread harassment, repression, and government-driven retaliation, including in the cases of—

- (1) Sergey Mikhaylov, publisher of independent newspaper Listok, who was arrested for spreading “fakes” about the Russian military;
- (2) Mikhail Afanasyev, editor-in-chief of the online magazine Novy Fokus, who was charged with spreading false information about the Russian military;
- (3) Natalya Tyshkevich, Vladimir Metelkin, Alla Gutnikova, and Armen Aramyan, the editors of student

magazine DOXA, who were detained after refusing to take down a video informing Russian youth of their right to protest in support of Navalny; and

(4) Novaya Gazeta, a landmark independent newspaper, which ceased publication in Russia after receiving ominous warnings from Russia’s media regulator under its foreign agents law;

Whereas the Government of the People’s Republic of China, which according to Reporters Without Borders is currently detaining at least 127 journalists and forced 18 foreign correspondents to leave the country in 2020, has unleashed an onslaught of attacks on press freedom in China and Hong Kong, including through—

(1) state-sponsored censorship and disinformation campaigns limiting access to information about the novel coronavirus, including through its censorship of virus-related keywords on social media platforms;

(2) attacks on press freedom in Hong Kong, including the passage of the National Security Law, which poses an existential threat to the city’s tradition of press freedom, and the arrest and subsequent conviction of Jimmy Lai, owner of Hong Kong’s largest media outlet, Apple Daily, and an outspoken democracy advocate;

(3) arrests or other repressive actions against independent journalists and others in mainland China attempting to share uncensored news or opinion about the COVID–19 outbreak, including the detention of citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, who disappeared without explanation for longer than 600 days;

(4) the detention of journalists critical of the Government of China, including Chen Jieren, who remains in prison after being sentenced to 15 years in 2020, fol-

lowing 2 years of incommunicado detention, after blogging about allegations of corrupt local officials; and

(5) the 2017 disappearance of Uyghur journalist and poet Qurban Mamut following a visit to the United States to visit his son, and his subsequent detention and 15-year prison sentence for alleged “political crimes”;

Whereas Afghanistan under the Taliban remains one of the most repressive countries for journalists, with journalists subject to arrest, beatings and arbitrary restrictions on their work;

Whereas Belarus has witnessed sweeping attacks against the press since Alexander Lukashenka’s fraudulent election in August 2020, with journalists and media workers harassed, assaulted, imprisoned, or otherwise retaliated against for their work, including—

(1) Raman Pratasevich, a journalist in exile whose plane from Greece to Lithuania was illegally diverted by Belarusian authorities and forced to land in Minsk, allowing Pratasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega to be arrested;

(2) Andrey Kuznechyk, a journalist who, while working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was detained in November 2021 and is facing unspecified charges;

(3) Katsiaryna Andrejeva and Daria Chultsova, journalists sentenced to 2 years in prison (on charges of violating public order) for filming live coverage of the violent dispersal of a protest against President Lukashenka;

(4) 15 journalists and other employees of leading independent media outlet Tut.By, including respected chief editor, Maryna Zolotava, were arrested in May 2021, and most of them remain in custody on charges of tax evasion;

(5) Ihar Losik, a blogger who is also affiliated with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was sentenced to 15 years in prison in December 2021 for allegedly violating public order; and

(6) Aleh Hruzdilovich, a Narodnaya Volya and former Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent who was sentenced in March 2022 to 1½ years in prison for allegedly participating in protests;

Whereas Reporters Without Borders asserts that “press freedom in [Burma] has been set back ten years in ten days” after the February 2021 military coup, since—

(1) media workers were forced into hiding and confronted censorship, harassment, internet blocks, beatings, interrogations, threats, and injuries at the hands of the military;

(2) multiple independent media outlets had to cease operations or close altogether or had their licenses revoked by the military; and

(3) journalists were detained at alarming rates, with 26 journalists in prison at the end of 2021;

Whereas Cuba remains a highly restricted environment for independent media, marked by internet restrictions and constant harassment of journalists and news outlets, including—

(1) Luz Escobar, a journalist who was repeatedly barred by security forces from leaving her home;

(2) new regulations imposed in August 2021 that criminalize the online dissemination of “false” or “offensive” information; and

(3) the detention of at least 7 journalists during the July 2021 anti-government protests;

Whereas Egypt’s restrictions on the media have accelerated under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi since 2013, with at least 25 journalists imprisoned during 2021, including—

(1) Alaa Abd El Fattah, a blogger, who was sentenced to 5 years in prison for “broadcasting false news” after having already endured torture and a hunger strike during his time in jail;

(2) Ismail Alexandrani, an Egyptian freelance journalist, who was detained in November 2015 and later sentenced to 10 years in prison by a military court for his counterterrorism research in the North Sinai;

(3) Hisham Abdel Aziz, an Al Jazeera journalist who is on the verge of losing his eyesight following untreated glaucoma while in prison; and

(4) Mahmoud Abou Zeid, who was released after 5 years in prison, but remains subject to a 5-year probation term that requires his continuous presence at a police station between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. every night;

Whereas assaults on press freedom in El Salvador imperil its fragile democracy and include both verbal attacks on journalists by political leaders and the use of state power to intimidate independent media, such as—

(1) the ongoing criminal investigation against outlet El Faro, which was launched after it reported damaging information about the administration;

(2) the online attacks and threats to journalists from the outlet Revista Factum, which has been banned from press conferences at the presidential residence; and

(3) the adoption of a new law that imposes prison sentences ranging from 10 to 15 years for certain reporting on criminal groups, such as gangs;

Whereas, according to Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House, Indian authorities have recently imposed internet and communication blackouts, detained and charged journalists covering political demonstrations, and called for the temporary blockage of journalists and media accounts on Twitter;

(1) Gautam Navlakha, a journalist and activist, who has been awaiting trial since April 2020 on charges of “instigating caste violence”, has been denied bail on medical grounds multiple times, and is currently detained in solitary confinement; and

(2) Anand Teltumbde, a columnist and writer, who has been detained since April 2020, charged with illegally associating with a Maoist group, and has been denied bail 3 times despite a serious medical condition and overcrowded jails during the COVID–19 pandemic;

Whereas Iran remains the fourth-highest jailer of writers and public intellectuals worldwide, promoting an extremely hostile environment for the press, severely restricting freedoms of the press and of speech, and subjecting media workers to aggressive intimidation, arbitrary summons, arrests, travel bans, conditional releases, torture, inhumane treatment, and unsubstantiated and unjust sentences, including—

(1) freelance journalist Fariborz Kalantari, who was sentenced on February 7, 2021, to 7 years in prison and 74 lashes for using his telegram channel to circulate articles about corruption charges brought against the ex-Vice President’s brother;

(2) the editor of weekly *Agrin Rozh*, Mahmoud Mahmoudi, who was arrested by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence in Sanandaj after issuing an open letter calling for the release of detained Kurdish activists;

(3) freelance blogger and activist Seyed Hossein Ronaghi Maleki, who was forcefully taken to an unknown location by unidentified security forces on February 23, 2022, after condemning the ratification of the “User Protection Bill,” a piece of legislation that restricts Iranians’ access to the internet;

(4) freelance photojournalist Nooshin Jafari, who was arrested in 2021 and sentenced to a 4-year prison term for “spreading anti-state propaganda” and “insulting sanctities”;

(5) Iranian journalist Navid Seyed-Mohammadi, a Kurdish reporter for the state-run Islamic Republic Radio and Television broadcaster, who was arrested in May 2020 and is serving a 7-year prison sentence for “espionage for hostile states”; and

(6) Iranian journalist Khosrow Sadeghi Borojeni, who is serving a 7-year sentence in Tehran’s Evin Prison for “colluding against national security and insulting the Islamic republic’s founder” in relation to his critical writing. After being arrested and released on bail in May 2019, he began his prison sentence in August 2020;

Whereas Reporters Without Borders reported that Mexico continues to be one of the world’s deadliest countries for journalists, where reporters covering stories on political corruption and organized crime are frequently assaulted and murdered, including—

(1) 8 journalists killed during the first 4 months of 2022;

(2) Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera, a reporter who covered crime and politics and who was gunned down in front of his son;

(3) Ricardo Domínguez López, the founder and editor of news website InfoGuaymas; and

(4) broadcast journalist Lourdes Maldonado López and photojournalist Margarito Martinez, who were killed in Tijuana within a week of each other in January 2022;

Whereas Haiti is the second deadliest country in the Western Hemisphere for journalists, with 3 journalists killed during the first 4 months of 2022, following a steady uptick of near-fatal and fatal violence against the press over the last several years;

Whereas the years-long persecution of journalists in Nicaragua continues, including news outlets forced to close and individual journalists being threatened, harassed, sued, surveilled, jailed, and forced into exile, including—

(1) Miguel Mendoza, who was given a 9-year prison sentence in February for undermining national integrity and disseminating false news; and

(2) Miguel Mora, former director of 100% Noticias, who was given 13-year prison sentence in February 2022 for “conspiracy to undermine national integrity”;

Whereas Honduras remains one of the Western Hemisphere’s deadliest countries for journalists, where those working for opposition media or who are outspoken critics of the government are subjected to harassment, intimidation, and death threats by the country’s security forces and its affiliates;

Whereas in Peru, criminal defamation lawsuits and legislation have been used to harass and silence investigative journalists who write about prominent political figures;

Whereas the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has concluded that the murder of Washington Post journalist and American resident Jamal Khashoggi in

Istanbul in 2018 was approved by Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman;

Whereas impunity continues for the Saudi officials involved in the 2018 assassination of Saudi columnist Jamal Khashoggi;

Whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia maintains an especially hostile environment towards journalists through systematic and arbitrary arrests, torture and inhumane or degrading treatment, lengthy pre-trial detentions, political persecution, and conditional release restrictions, which inhibit reporters and columnists from traveling or returning to their professional work post-detention, including—

(1) Maha Al-Rafidi Al-Qahtani, a journalist and writer arrested in September 2019, held in solitary confinement, and physically abused while in prison;

(2) Abdulrahman Farhana, a columnist detained in February 2019, charged with membership in a terrorist organization;

(3) Zuhair Kutbi, a journalist jailed in January 2019, who reportedly suffers from torture, malnourishment, and denial of cancer treatment in prison; and

(4) Raif Badawi, a blogger who recently completed a 10-year prison sentence on blasphemy charges, and who remains subjected to a further 10-year travel ban which prevents him from uniting with his family who received asylum in Canada;

Whereas the battle for a free press continues to be fought in South and Southeast Asia, where—

(1) Bangladeshi journalists have repeatedly been arrested and charged under the Digital Security Act, some

of whom have been subjected to torture and one of whom died in custody;

(2) journalist and Nobel Prize laureate, Maria Ressa has been targeted by the Government of the Philippines’ aggressive campaign against independent media after her reporting on, among other topics, President Duterte’s “war on drugs”;

(3) Vietnamese journalists Pham Chi Dung, Nguyen Tuong Thuy, and Le Huu Minh Tuan were each sentenced to more than 10 years in prison; and

(4) Pham Doan Trang, a Vietnamese journalist and writer, following a year in detention, was sentenced to 9 years in prison for “anti-state propaganda” in a judicial proceeding and imprisonment declared “arbitrary” by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention;

Whereas press freedom continues to face challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, including in—

(1) Ethiopia, where a crackdown on the press amid the ongoing civil conflict has included—

(A) the 1-week suspension of the independent publication Addis Standard;

(B) the expulsion of New York Times reporter Simon Marks;

(C) the arbitrary arrests of numerous journalists who have been detained for up to several months, making the country the second-worst jailer of journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa;

(D) the exile of several other journalists who left the country afraid of persecution, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists;

(E) the November 2021 arrest of Bikila Amenu and Dessu Dulla, 2 journalists who remain imprisoned as of April 2022;

(F) the May 2021 killing of journalist Sisay Fida, which was documented by the Committee to Protect Journalists to have occurred in connection to his journalistic work; and

(G) the January 2021 killing of another journalist, Dawit Kebede Araya, for reasons that remain unclear;

(2) Nigeria, where journalist Luke Binniyat was arrested in November 2021, was released on bail in February 2022, and faces 3 years in prison if convicted of sending false information under the Cybercrimes Act; and

(3) Eritrea, where—

(A) Medhanie Haile, co-founder of the Keste Debona newspaper, has been detained incommunicado since September 2001 and is suffering from serious health issues due to harsh prison conditions;

(B) Temesgen Ghebreyesus, editor of the Keste Debona newspaper, has also been detained incommunicado since September 2001;

(C) Idris Said Aba Arre, a freelance journalist and author, has been detained incommunicado and without charges since October 2001 after denouncing the mass arrest of a group of politicians known as the G-15;

(D) Dawit Isaak, co-owner of the newspaper Setit, since his arrest in September 2001, has been tortured, has been held in solitary confinement, and has been suffering from medical conditions which have worsened during detention; and

(E) Amanuel Asrat, a poet and editor-in-chief of Zemen, has been detained incommunicado since 2001;

Whereas the Turkish Journalists' Association reported that—

(1) in 2021—

(A) 115 journalists faced physical violence; and

(B) 73 journalists were detained, with at least 44 journalists remaining in prison at the end of the year;

(2) 3 out of every 5 journalists face threats during their career; and

(3) Turkey is maintaining its standing as—

(A) one of the world’s most oppressive environments for press freedom; and

(B) one of the world’s leading jailers of journalists;

Whereas in Turkey, the continued persecution of journalists and writers, initially targeted in 2016 during a nationwide crackdown on dissent following the failed 2016 coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has resulted in lengthy sentences and judicial harassment, including Gültekin Avcı, a writer and former columnist with now-shuttered Bugün, who was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in December 2020 for “conspiracy”, where his columns were used as evidence of his alleged crime;

Whereas Morocco has experienced severe crackdowns on freedom of expression and supporters of a free press, including—

(1) Taoufik Bouachrine, the publisher and editor-in-chief of Akhbar al-Youm, who was arrested in February 2018 on retaliatory charges related to his journalism and is serving a 15-year sentence;

(2) Soulaïmane Raïssouni, a columnist and editor-in-chief Akhbar al-Youm, who succeeded publisher Taoufik

Bouachrine and was arrested on similar retaliatory charges in May 2020 and is serving a 5-year sentence;

(3) Ali Anouzla, a journalist and editor of the news website Lakome, who has been repeatedly arrested on retaliatory charges relating to his journalism including “appologism for terrorism”, “material aid for terrorism”, and “incitement to terrorism”;

(4) Maati Monjib, a historian and advocate for free press, who was detained in December 2020 for 3 months on specious national security and fraud charges and remains subject to restrictive bail conditions; and

(5) Omar Radi, a journalist who was arrested on suspicion of espionage in June 2020 shortly after Amnesty International reported that the Moroccan authorities hacked his phone and monitored his activities;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela continues to target independent media outlets, restricting the exercise of freedom of expression and severely limiting Venezuelan access to accurate information;

Whereas American journalists have been victimized while covering conflicts abroad, including—

(1) Christopher Allen, who was killed while covering the conflict in South Sudan on August 26, 2017, and whose killing has yet to be investigated by authorities after nearly 5 years;

(2) Austin Tice, who was kidnapped in Syria and has been held in captivity since August 12, 2012; and

(3) Brent Renaud, who was killed by Russian forces while covering the war in Ukraine on March 13, 2022;

Whereas, under the auspices of the United States Agency for Global Media, the United States Government provides financial assistance to several editorially independent

media outlets, including Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, the Office of Cuba Broadcasting, and the Middle East Broadcast Networks—

(1) which report and broadcast news, information, and analysis in critical regions around the world; and

(2) whose journalists regularly face harassment, fines, and imprisonment for their work; and

Whereas press freedom—

(1) is a key component of democratic governance, activism in civil society, and socioeconomic development; and

(2) enhances public accountability, transparency, and participation in civil society and democratic governance: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) declares that a free press—

3 (A) is a central component of free societies
4 and democratic governance;

5 (B) contributes to an informed civil society
6 and government accountability;

7 (C) helps to expose corruption;

8 (D) enhances public accountability and
9 transparency of governments at all levels; and

10 (E) disseminates information that is essen-
11 tial to improving public health and safety;

1 (2) expresses concerns about threats to the ex-
2 ercise of freedom of expression, including by the
3 press, around the world;

4 (3) recognizes and commends journalism’s role
5 in providing trusted, accurate, and timely informa-
6 tion and in holding governments and leaders ac-
7 countable to citizens;

8 (4) is dismayed that, under cover of the
9 COVID–19 pandemic, many governments have re-
10 stricted the work of journalists reporting on the pub-
11 lic health crisis and on peaceful protests on a variety
12 of issues;

13 (5) pays tribute to journalists who made tre-
14 mendous sacrifices, including the loss of their lives,
15 in the pursuit of truth and justice;

16 (6) condemns all actions around the world that
17 suppress press freedom;

18 (7) calls for the unconditional and immediate
19 release of all wrongfully detained journalists;

20 (8) reaffirms the centrality of press freedom to
21 efforts of the United States Government to support
22 democracy, mitigate conflict, and promote good gov-
23 ernance domestically and around the world; and

24 (9) calls on the President and the Secretary of
25 State—

1 (A) to preserve and build upon the leader-
2 ship of the United States on issues relating to
3 press freedom, on the basis of the protections
4 for freedom of the press afforded the American
5 people under the First Amendment to the Con-
6 stitution of the United States;

7 (B) to transparently investigate and bring
8 to justice the perpetrators of attacks against
9 journalists; and

10 (C) to promote the respect and protection
11 of press freedom around the world.

○