

Statement on World Press Freedom Day

May 3, 2011

On this World Press Freedom Day, the United States joins with people around the world in reaffirming the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association that provide the foundation for media to operate freely and keep citizens informed. We rededicate ourselves to the basic principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that every person has the right "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." And we recognize the courageous journalists who work every day to give meaning to these rights, often at great risk to their lives, as we have seen most recently with the tragic deaths of journalists in Libya.

Governments have an obligation to protect these rights and freedoms. Yet this year alone, at least 16 journalists have already been killed and more than 145 remain imprisoned around the world, simply for daring to report the truth. Dozens of countries continue to stand in the way of a free press. This includes recent crackdowns on the independent press in Bahrain, threats against and arrests of domestic and foreign journalists in China, political persecution of independent journalists and bloggers in Iran, arrests and detention of international journalists in Syria, and the Government takeover of independent media outlets in Venezuela. Countries such as Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Eritrea, Libya, North Korea, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan also continue to be notoriously repressive of press freedoms. Freedom of expression is also under attack through criminal violence and impunity in countries like Mexico, Honduras, and Russia.

As we witnessed in the historic events in Tunisia and Egypt, new media tools can also help empower citizens exercise their freedoms of speech and association, yet these same 21st-century tools can be used to filter, block, and restrict free expression. That is why we must always stand up for the free flow of information around the world.

History shows that one of the ingredients of successful, prosperous, and stable societies is a free press where citizens can freely access information and hold their governments accountable. On this World Press Freedom Day, we recognize the vital role that journalists play in strengthening democratic governance around the world and we honor all those who have given their lives in courageous pursuit of the truth.

Categories: Statements by the President : World Press Freedom Day.

Names: Hetherington, Tim; Hondros, Chris.

Subjects: Civil rights : Freedom of speech; Civil rights : Freedom of the press; Egypt : Democracy efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Holidays and special observances : World Press Freedom Day; Libya : Political unrest and violence; Tunisia : Democracy efforts.

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