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H. RES. 1095

Responding to widening threats to freedom of the press and expression around the world, reaffirming the centrality of a free and independent press to the health of democracy, and reaffirming freedom of the press as a priority of the United States in promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance on World Press Freedom Day.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 6, 2022

Mr. SCHIFF (for himself, Mr. CHABOT, Ms. BASS, Mrs. BUSTOS, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Mr. LEVIN of Michigan, Mr. MALINOWSKI, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Ms. NORTON, Mr. PETERS, Mr. PRICE of North Carolina, Mr. RASKIN, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. VARGAS, and Mr. WELCH) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Responding to widening threats to freedom of the press and expression around the world, reaffirming the centrality of a free and independent press to the health of democracy, and reaffirming freedom of the press as a priority of the United States in promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance on World Press Freedom Day.

Whereas Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted at Paris, 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 May 3 of each year as “World Press Freedom Day”—

- (1) to celebrate the fundamental principles of freedom of the press;
- (2) to evaluate freedom of the press 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, on December 18, 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/163 on the safety of journalists and the problem of impunity, which unequivocally condemns 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 nonconflict situations;

Whereas the theme for World Press Freedom Day 2022 is “Journalism under Surveillance”, which will spotlight how developments in surveillance by state and nonstate actors, as well as big data collection and artificial intelligence, impact journalism, freedom of expression, and privacy, as well as the associated challenges to media viability during the digital age, threats to public trust that arise from surveillance, and digitally mediated attacks on journalists, and the consequences of all this on public trust in digital communications;

Whereas Thomas Jefferson, who recognized the importance of the press in a constitutional republic, wisely declared, “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”;

Whereas the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act of 2009 (Public Law 111–166; 22 U.S.C. 2151 note), signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, expanded the examination of the freedom of the press around the world in the annual country reports on human rights practices of the Department of State;

Whereas, Freedom House’s publication “Freedom in the World 2022” noted that global freedom has declined for 16 consecutive years and a total of 60 countries suffered declines over the past year, while only 25 improved, and, as of today, some 38 percent of the global population live in “Not Free” countries, the highest proportion since 1997;

Whereas according to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law—

(1) some governments have incorporated surveillance technology into their efforts to halt the spread of COVID–19 without fully considering the privacy and human rights implications, including building sunset provisions into emergency declarations;

(2) at least 112 countries have declarations of emergency in place in response to COVID–19 pandemic; and

(3) at least 62 countries have enacted measures in response to COVID–19 that negatively affect freedom of expression;

Whereas the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, notes, “journalism, which is arguably the best vaccine against the virus of disinformation, is totally blocked or seriously impeded in 73 countries and constrained in 59 others [out of 180], which together represent 73 percent of the countries evaluated”;

Whereas Reporters Without Borders also reports that since 2020, more journalists were deliberately targeted and killed in countries considered “at peace” than in conflict zones;

Whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, in 2021—

(1) at least 27 journalists were killed around the world for their work, of which at least 21 were singled out for murder;

(2) the two deadliest countries for journalists on assignment were India and Mexico;

(3) the vast majority of journalists killed were citizens covering the news in their home countries;

(4) 293 journalists worldwide were in prison, a new global record, with China, Myanmar, Egypt, Vietnam, and Belarus responsible for more than half of the jailed journalists; and

(5) at least 250 journalists were jailed in retaliation for their work for the sixth consecutive year;

Whereas online violence against female journalists has increased “significantly” according to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and International Center for Journalists 2021 report, with three-quarters of the 900 female journalists from 125 countries surveyed responding that they had experienced

online abuse, and one-quarter responding that they had been physically threatened, which is especially troubling given increasing evidence that online harassment against female journalists is correlated with increased violence offline;

Whereas the People’s Republic of China maintains one of the worst media environments in the world and seeks to curtail political speech inside and outside the country, including by—

(1) targeting independent and foreign media in China through systematic harassment including the denial of visas to foreign journalists, imprisonment, the denial of medical care to imprisoned journalists, and curtailing access to legal representation;

(2) pervasively monitoring and censoring online and social media content, including through the banning of virtual private networks;

(3) spreading propaganda to foreign audiences through the United Front Work Department and related activities;

(4) indiscriminately stifling dissent and freedom of expression in Hong Kong, especially through the arbitrary use of the 2020 National Security Law, which has led to the suppression of all meaningful political dissent, including the closure of several independent news organizations and the imprisonment of numerous journalists, including Jimmy Lai, the founder of Apple Daily, who is facing charges that could result in life imprisonment; and

(5) championing a “sovereign Internet” model and exporting technology to enhance the ability of like-minded authoritarian regimes to suppress dissent online and monitor the activity of their people;

Whereas the Russian Federation has escalated from restricting freedom of the press and expression to a full assault against all independent media actors both inside Russia and across the Caucasus region, including by—

(1) passing broad legislation which criminalizes any public opposition to or independent news reporting about the war against Ukraine;

(2) labeling independent news outlets as “foreign agents” and relying on restrictive legislation as justification to harass, fine, and freeze the assets of organizations, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty;

(3) arresting and detaining journalists covering peaceful protests;

(4) allegedly kidnapping, torturing, detaining, and disappearing journalists in Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine; and

(5) excessive blocking of internet access and applications, including independent news sites, social media platforms, and other tools Russian citizens rely on to access independent information and opinions and to connect with each other and the outside world;

Whereas the Belarussian regime has stripped the accreditation of and detained numerous journalists to suppress independent information and freedom of expression, including former Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalists Ilhar Losik and Aleh Hurzdilovich, who have been sentenced to 15 years and 18 months in prison, respectively, and Andrey Kuznechyk, who has been held in pre-trial detention on unpublished charges since November 2021;

Whereas a 2021 survey by Reporters Without Borders and the Afghan Independent Journalists Association shows a

total of 231 media outlets have had to close and more than 6,400 journalists have lost their jobs since the Taliban took power in August 2021, and female journalists have been most impacted, with 4 out of 5 no longer working;

Whereas freedom of the press continues to be under assault throughout Southeast Asia, especially in Vietnam, where more than 30 journalists and bloggers are being held in jails, some with sentences of up to 15 years for their independent reporting, including Pham Doan Trang, a female journalist who had been awarded the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Prize for Impact in 2019;

Whereas governments are enacting legislation, such as Cambodia's proposed National Internet Gateway, which would give them unprecedented power to monitor online activity, collect user data, and censor communications, further threatening already severely restricted freedom of expression;

Whereas Washington Post journalist and United States resident Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by a team of Saudi operatives while visiting the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, and it is likely that the perpetrators' trial in Turkey will be transferred to Saudi Arabia, making it unlikely that they will ever be held accountable;

Whereas the Senate unanimously approved a resolution stating that Mr. Khashoggi's murder was carried out at the behest of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman;

Whereas the detention of journalists without charges in Ethiopia, including Associated Press Freelance journalist Amir Aman Kiyaro who was detained without charges for

4 months, serves as an example of the country's deteriorating media freedom, following positive movements after the 2018 election of Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Abiy Ahmed;

Whereas across Latin America and the Caribbean, authoritarian regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela continue their long-standing practice of curbing dissent by threatening, harassing, and detaining independent journalists and other media actors;

Whereas in Mexico, which remains the most dangerous country in the Western Hemisphere for journalists—

(1) murders, death threats, and legal impunity cause journalists to self-censor their reporting out of fear;

(2) it is estimated that 12 journalists have been murdered in the first three months of 2022;

(3) the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists lacks the resources and political support to provide adequate protection to all journalists under threat who have requested protection; and

(4) Roberto Toledo, a camera operator and video editor for news website Monitor Michoacán, was shot and killed on January 31, 2022, in Zitácuaro, making him the fourth media worker killed in Mexico in less than a month;

Whereas across Western Europe, physical attacks on journalists have more than doubled between 2019 and 2021, with 33 attacks recorded in 2019, 51 in 2020, and 76 in 2021, according to the Council of Europe;

Whereas the world's growing cadre of ethical and hard-hitting investigative journalists, including those contributing to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project—

- (1) adhere to the highest professional standards;
- (2) uncover abuses and corruption being committed in their own countries; and
- (3) deserve the international community's support and praise for taking on the risky job of fostering accountability and transparency in their respective countries;

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, Radio y Television Marti, 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 freedom of the press—

- (1) is a key component of democratic governance 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 House of Representatives—

2 (1) condemns threats to freedom of the press
3 and free expression around the world;

4 (2) remembers the bravery of journalists and
5 media workers around the world who, despite threats
6 to their safety, play an essential role in—

7 (A) promoting government accountability;

1 (B) defending democratic activity; and

2 (C) strengthening civil society;

3 (3) remembers journalists who have lost their
4 lives carrying out their work;

5 (4) calls on governments abroad to implement
6 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/157
7 (2019) by thoroughly investigating and seeking to
8 resolve outstanding cases of violence against journal-
9 ists, including murders and kidnappings, while en-
10 suring the protection of witnesses;

11 (5) condemns all actions around the world that
12 suppress freedom of the press;

13 (6) reaffirms the centrality of freedom of the
14 press to efforts of the United States Government to
15 support democracy, mitigate conflict, and promote
16 good governance around the world; and

17 (7) calls on the President and the Secretary of
18 State—

19 (A) to preserve and build upon the leader-
20 ship of the United States on issues relating to
21 freedom of the press, on the basis of the protec-
22 tions afforded the American people under the
23 First Amendment to the Constitution of the
24 United States;

1 (B) to improve the rapid identification,
2 publication, and response by the United States
3 Government to threats against freedom of the
4 press around the world;

5 (C) to urge foreign governments to trans-
6 parently investigate and bring to justice the
7 perpetrators of attacks against journalists; and

8 (D) to highlight the issue of threats
9 against freedom of the press in the annual
10 country reports on human rights practices of
11 the Department of State and through diplo-
12 matic channels.

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