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Acceptance Speech

CPJ International Press Freedom Award 2013

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As prepared for delivery

Ladies and gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to be recognized by the Committee to Protect Journalists. It is really amazing to get this award, considering the fact that I am not even a journalist.

So, last chance for you guys: Was this award meant for me? Are you sure? Can I take this home with me? Sweet!

Again I would like to thank the Committee for this great honor, and I have to say that I am quite impressed by how the Committee chose the date of the ceremony to be held in Thanksgiving week. So if you are a journalist who survived death threats, legal harassment, and imprisonment, good luck going through the Black Friday stampede. And if you survive that, you always have a chance to feel horrible about yourself because of a drunken uncle at a traditional Thanksgiving dinner! Well played, CPJ. Well played.

I already did my Thanksgiving shopping yesterday at an outlet mall, so I am safe!

I am extremely honored to be even mentioned in the same sentence with those incredible freedom fighters from Turkey, Ecuador, and Vietnam. Those people really went through a lot. They are facing prison sentences and continuous physical and emotional threats just because they want to report the news and exercise freedom of speech.

So in order to honor them and many other journalists, I tried to look up some smart quotes—not just to make them feel better, but to try to impress you and give you the false impression that I can actually read.

So here it comes, the feel-good quote: James Connolly once said: “The apostles of freedom are ever idolized when dead but crucified when alive.”

So don't worry, guys. In a couple of hundred years, people will start loving you. Meanwhile, they just want to put a bullet in your head, throw you in a car trunk, and bury you somewhere in Jersey.

But in 200 years' time, you will be fine.

I have to say that when I read the bios of my esteemed colleagues, I felt quite humbled by their struggle. I did have my share of "love" where I come from, and all I did was crack some newsy jokes.

But it seems that even if you stayed on the lighter side of things, that would still put you in trouble—like people who report the news with a straight face.

For some reason, a joke would piss off a lot of people although the same people were laughing at the same joke before, but it only hurts when the joke is on you. So the same people who defended our freedom a few months ago as I was taken for questioning on accounts of blasphemy, insulting the president, and threatening national security are now quite indifferent when I am faced with charges like disturbing the peace, grand treason, and, of course, the gift that keeps on giving: threatening national security.

Many will pretend to have a sense of humor until this claim is actually tested.

And when that happens, they will be angry, they will accuse you, they will try to label you, but the truth is: They are just too lame.

Frank Moore Colby once said: "Men will confess to treason, murder, arson, false teeth, or even a wig. How many of them will own up to a lack of humor?"

Freedom of expression is not a privilege; it is a universal right. Now, you don't have to be a journalist or a reporter. You can just be an ordinary citizen with a camera and a YouTube channel. This is how we started. I don't know how this will end. ... But at least this is how we started.

Speaking of how we started, I would like to thank my incredible team who are the real reason behind me standing here, especially those who have been with me since day one.

This is a dream that many people contributed to, and it all started by watching something called "The Daily Show" by Jon Stewart.

Jon, you are a true inspiration for me and my team back home, and tonight I want to thank you for your friendship even more than your inspiration.

But if I get killed or if I die in prison, my soul will come back and hunt you down.

This is one of those moments that I wish that my mom was here to watch. She passed away a few months ago, and I am sure she is watching over me now. My awesome, incredible, and really cool father is here tonight, and we both know what this means to her.

I would like to thank Hala, my wife, for being so patient and so understanding and so supportive. She has me and our 20-month-old little destructive ball of energy called Nadia. And it is hard to know which one of us drives her crazier.

Finally, I wish all of you happiness, freedom, and lots of laughter. It is said that the freedom of any people can be judged by the volume of their laughter. So my wish for humanity is to have the loudest laughs ever.

Thank you very much for such a great honor. I hope you are enjoying your dinner. Please loosen your pants, and save some room for your Thanksgiving turkey. Good night.