



Committee to Protect Journalists

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Acceptance Speech

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I'm honored to receive this award from the Committee to Protect Journalists. This acknowledgement goes beyond my own work. It recognizes all Venezuelan journalists who, faced with multiple difficulties, from persecution to imprisonment, defend freedom of expression and the idea of democracy, today so devalued in my country.

As humor is the vehicle for my journalistic activities, I should say a few words about the importance of laughter in helping individuals construct a better world and societies to see themselves in a more critical light.

Humor helps us to be tolerant towards those with different viewpoints and helps us to overcome fear. Throughout history, when humanity has had to stand up to authoritarian or intolerant governments, humor has helped the people survive and criticize. From Greek comedy and the medieval carnival to modern humor, championed by the great Charles Chaplin, humor has been a forum for free expression of ideas and dissidence when other forms of communication become limited or blocked.

A new form of authoritarianism is taking hold in the world: that which uses democratic methods to put an end to democracy. In such models, those in power need people to fear expressing dissenting views. In the midst of these silences, governments go about the business of dismantling democratic institutions. The Venezuelan experience has shown me that it is essential for all citizens to be aware of the importance of free expression and, moreover, that this is not merely a concern for journalists and media workers, but for all citizens. In this context, it is crucial that we conquer our fears, because a fearful society is easy prey for tyranny.

Yet fear is not only a concern for citizens of countries enduring authoritarianism. Fear transcends borders and finds complicit silence in other countries and in international organizations that should speak up and take a position, but don't. The opposite of fear is doing what is right; it is fulfilling one's duty. It is trying to do, in each moment, what the conscience demands. And this, simple as it appears, can be very difficult in societies where arbitrary acts are the norm.

We who are honored here tonight are not extraordinary people; we are common citizens, like all of you. People that at some point decided to maintain coherence between what they think, what they say, and what they do. People that decided, as you did tonight, to do what was right—we just did it under more challenging circumstances... Thank you, CPJ, for not being afraid and for doing what is right to protect those who fight for freedom and democracy. Those of you here tonight form a sort of committee to protect the committee that protects...and true humanity is based on the solidarity of those who are able to give part of themselves to protect others...I thank you all.