



Committee to Protect Journalists

October 7, 2013

His Excellency Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
Washington, D.C.  
White House

*Via facsimile: +1 202-456-2461*

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to express our concern regarding a pattern of actions taken by your administration that impedes the flow of information on issues of great public interest and thwarts the free and open discussion necessary to a democracy. We cite specifically the use of secret subpoenas against news organizations, prosecutions that equate leaking classified documents to the press with espionage, and the increased limitations on access to information that is in the public interest.

These concerns have prompted us to commission the first comprehensive report on U.S. press freedom conditions in CPJ's 32-year history. The accompanying report, written by Leonard Downie Jr., Weil Family Professor of Journalism at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and former executive editor of *The Washington Post*, will be released on Thursday, October 10, at a press conference at the Newseum in Washington.

Based on the report, the Committee to Protect Journalists makes the following recommendations to your administration:

1. Affirm and guarantee that journalists will not be at legal risk or prosecuted for receiving confidential and/or classified information.
2. Be more forthcoming about the scope and nature of National Security Agency and other surveillance activities as they are being applied to domestic and international journalists. Develop policies to limit surveillance of journalists' communications to ensure the integrity of a journalist's right to protect his or her sources.
3. Implement revised Justice Department guidelines and prevent the filing of unnecessary, overly-broad, and/or secret subpoenas of journalists' records.
4. End the practice of bringing espionage charges against people who leak classified information to journalists, which could create a

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severe chilling effect and thwart the free flow of information on matters of public interest.

5. Make good on promises to increase transparency of government activities and end government intimidation of officials who might speak to the press. Enforce prompt and less restrictive responses to FOIA requests and more systematic and far-reaching efforts to reduce over-classification. Encourage administration officials to be open and responsive to press inquiries.
6. Advocate for the broadest possible definition of “journalist” or “journalism” in any federal shield law. Any federal shield law should protect the newsgathering process, rather than professional credentials, experience, or status, so that it cannot be used as a means of de facto government licensing.

We understand that your administration and its Justice Department have heard the strong criticism of its use of secret subpoenas and responded with revised guidelines still to be implemented. And we appreciate your clear statements on the need for Americans to know and be able to publicly debate their government’s practices regarding national security. But the actions of your administration do not lean toward openness.

Mr. President, we respectfully request a meeting with you or someone you designate to discuss our concerns and our recommendations for improving the press freedom environment in the United States. We thank you for your attention and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Sandra Mims Rowe  
Chairman

Joel Simon  
Executive Director

CC:

Jay Carney, White House Press Secretary

Eric Holder, Attorney General of the United States

Brian Fallon, Director of the Office of Public Affairs, the United States  
Department of Justice