

THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

Dear ACOS Executive Committee and Committee to Protect Journalists,

Thank you for your letter of February 16, 2016. I share your concern about the plight of journalists around the world, and I appreciate the opportunity to update you on the steps we've taken since we met in January 2015.

To give just a few examples of the initiatives we are pursuing: We've increased cooperation between our Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) and media companies. OSAC-provided security information enables private sector employers to better train and protect their employees. We also recently announced funding for a new program to equip journalists in Southeast Asia with tools and techniques that will allow them to safely pursue investigative journalism in places where they may face intimidation and/or violence. Today I am announcing we are increasing funding for the Security Access to Freedom of Expression (SAFE) Initiative to \$2.5 million in FY2016. Since 2013, the SAFE Initiative has provided digital and physical security training courses to more than 750 media practitioners in Central America, Eastern Europe, East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

SAFE is one of many great State Department initiatives. Overseas, the Department and USAID conduct programs that support independent media in more than 30 countries, and we will continue to enhance these programs in the coming months. In places like Kenya, Peru and Serbia, our embassies have conducted local journalist safety training sessions and pressured governments to cease censorship. As the Russian government continues to restrict both freedom of speech and freedom of the press, U.S. Embassy Moscow implemented a new array of digital tools to highlight the plight of independent journalists in Russia and to advocate for a free and open press. Russian journalist Zhanna Nemtsova was honored as one of the State Department's International Women of Courage awardees for her efforts to demand a thorough and transparent investigation into the murder of her father, Boris Nemtsov, and for her outspoken determination to expose the dangerous and irresponsible use of propaganda. We also promote dialogue between foreign journalists and their American peers, through Tech Camps, workshops, and other exchange programs and fellowships. One of the best ways we support press freedom is to connect journalists around the world with each other.

The President and I regularly raise press freedom with our counterparts around the world. At all levels of our bilateral relationships, our embassies and consulates advocate for healthy, uncensored media in their host countries and monitor reports of infringements on press freedom, particularly incidents of harassment, censorship, and intimidation—regardless of their nationalities, their status or the organizations for which they work. I'm proud that every day

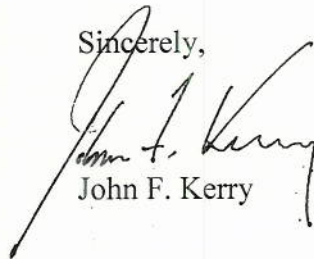
American diplomats demand answers and strive for accountability on behalf of imprisoned or threatened journalists, both publicly and in private meetings.

To ensure our posts overseas are better equipped to assist journalists, our training division, the Foreign Service Institute, has begun institutionalizing programs to increase awareness about journalist safety issues among our public affairs officers before they take up their postings. Additionally, we are drafting a comprehensive instruction sheet to guide State Department personnel who receive requests from journalists under duress.

I have asked Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Tom Malinowski and Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs John Kirby to lead our efforts on journalist safety. Tom and John already collaborate regularly, including on our annual on our "Free the Press" campaign for World Press Freedom Day. This year we highlighted the cases of six individuals spotlighted in previous campaigns but who remain incarcerated for their work. I know Tom and John will ensure the full breadth of State Department resources are utilized to promote journalist safety and will keep you updated on our progress.

Again, thank you for your letter and the important work you do every day to ensure all voices are heard and protected. I am grateful for the critical role you play. The State Department remains committed to continuing this conversation and working together with you to protect the rights of journalists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Kerry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

John F. Kerry