



Committee to Protect Journalists

**Shahidul Alam, Bangladesh**

CPJ's 2020 Award Acceptance Speech

As delivered on November 19, 2020

I first came across the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2001, when fellow award recipient Tipu Sultan was attacked and his arms and legs broken. Later, when Jahangir Alam Akash and Asif Mohiuddin were attacked, again it was CPJ which came to the rescue. In 2009, I was arrested by the Border Security Forces in India. They are a trigger-happy group, and had killed dozens of people in the previous months and weeks. I think it was the speed with which, and the vigor with which, CPJ and others protested that led to my release, which was within six hours.

In 1989, I set up Drik Picture Library as a platform for local storytellers to tell their own stories. Later I set up the school of photography, Pathshala, and later still the agency Majority World, which represents photographers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as Indigenous photographers, women photographers, marginalized photographers in the North. Collectively, they all work toward social justice.

Two years ago, I was alone in my flat uploading pictures when the police came for me again. I resisted. I screamed, I tried to delay things as much as I could. CPJ was the first, one of the first people, to come out with an alert on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August itself—the day I was picked up. I think it was the speed with which CPJ came out that led to me being alive today. What that campaign meant to us is indescribable. What it meant to my family. What it meant to me. What it meant to my fellow prisoners. We felt we were not alone. We felt that we were being supported. And in those dark days, that was very important.

The media is under threat worldwide, vigorously being attacked. I think it is important for the world to recognize the role of the media, the value it has, and the fact for those of us on the ground to recognize that we are not alone and that we're supported, and that there are campaigns and people who in very practical terms can come to our rescue, stand by our side. It is important for the world to recognize the value of journalists, the value of media, what it means to the democratic process and to freedom. It's the bail. I'm out on bail and I still potentially face 14 years in prison if convicted. The fact that I'm out. The fact that I can speak to you now is in no small part dependent on the campaign that CPJ and others played, and the vigorous campaign globally that they took up. That is very much part of the equation that allows me to be here speaking to you today. This award means a huge amount to all of us, and I think the fact that I'm here now owes a lot to this award.

Thank you.