



Committee to Protect Journalists

Svetlana Prokopyeva, Russia

CPJ's 2020 Award Acceptance Speech

As delivered on November 19, 2020

I've never thought I'd be worthy of such an award. Where am I and where are world awards? What should be done for an ordinary journalist from a small Russian town to be at the center of international attention? The Russian state did everything to make it happen.

I should thank not only the Committee to Protect Journalists but also the Russian Federation—the huge soulless decision-making machine—from clerks at [the state media regulator] Roksomnadzor to the judges in [a local court in Pskov]. They turned me, an ordinary citizen, into a criminal. But also into a “victim of the regime,” a “fighter for the truth” and a “defender of freedom of speech.” I've been called all that after a criminal case was launched against me—the absurd case with fabricated motives and trumped-up charges. In fact, the state apparatus turned my journalism into a crime.

The case was so outrageous that it attracted the attention of the whole world.

In my broadcast, I spoke about a terrorist attack in Arkhangelsk: I said that Russian law enforcement provoke crimes against them, because they bring charges against every citizen demanding rights instead of having a debate.

And their response? Yes, criminal charges!

Freedom of speech, right to an opinion and the right to openly criticize the state—these are simple axioms that lost their meaning for state servants. In today's Russia, many officials, including prosecutors and judges, do not understand journalists' mission, or why we need freedom of speech.

In today's Russia, journalism is often equaled to crime. It sends a clear signal that the country's democratic development has stalled. We are sliding into totalitarianism—again. Because if there is no freedom of speech, other freedoms are out of reach.

I am grateful for this award because it gives us an opportunity to draw attention to this important issue. In Russia, freedom of speech needs support. Thank you all!