



Committee to Protect Journalists

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Acceptance Speech

CPJ 2010 International Press Freedom Awards Dinner

November 23, 2010
Waldorf Astoria, New York

Respected Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues!

I come from the southern republic of Dagestan, which is part of the Russian Federation. Young Dagestanis who arrive in Moscow looking for a job sometimes hear this question from their potential employers: “So, is Dagestan part of Russia?”

They genuinely think that Dagestan is a foreign land.

Ten young Dagestanis were abducted in Moscow this fall by Russian Special Forces. Their whereabouts are unknown. We don’t even know if they are still alive. They were never officially charged with any crime. They had simply moved to Moscow with their families to escape the unending human rights violations committed by local law enforcement. But, as it turned out, the capital was no less dangerous for them.

Russia’s future will be decided in the North Caucasus. This is what President Dmitry Medvedev said in his first State of the Union address. If the future of Russia is decided through kidnappings, torture, and extrajudicial killings of Caucasus residents, then I fear such a future for Russia.

I and my colleagues are being criminally prosecuted for incitement of hatred toward representatives of law enforcement agencies because we criticize their heavy-handed methods. Law enforcement officials now consider themselves a separate “social group” – not unlike seniors and the disabled. If we follow that logic, it turns out that the Russian police need protection from “the aggression” of the free media.

Authorities have subjected around 50 of our articles to a so-called “psycho-linguistic analysis” to determine if they contain extremist statements. What they describe as extremist statements is none other than critical reporting on the Special Forces.

I trust that time will pass and the repression against my newspaper will be considered a farcical absurdity of the past. At the moment, however, I do feel the risks we run by practicing our profession.

But what frightens me more is the possibility that some day in the future, a reader of my newspaper might say to me: “When people were kidnapped, tortured, and executed without trial, you were silent.”

Such a future is dangerous not just for my country, but also for the world. I appeal to you now not to be indifferent to the events in my region; not to keep silent.

Thank you, CPJ, for this award.