

Nedim Şener

Posta, Turkey

Acceptance Speech

CPJ International Press Freedom Award 2013

November 26, 2013

Waldorf-Astoria, 301 Park Avenue, New York City

As prepared for delivery

Respected ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues:

Thank you for this award, which I accept in memory of my colleague Hrant Dink—a good man and a good journalist.

Hrant Dink was threatened by state officials because he had exercised his freedom of expression. He was murdered because state officials turned a blind eye to threats against him and failed to protect his life.

When police took me from my home on March 3, 2011, I left with this motto on my lips: “For Hrant, for Justice!” I spent 376 days in prison, but the strength of that motto never faded. And now, when I’m thousands of miles away from home, I am repeating it again—“For Hrant, for Justice!”

The officials who took me from my home that day are part of the apparatus complicit in Hrant’s murder. The government has protected those officials. Because I exposed their complicity and named the police and intelligence officers responsible for Hrant’s killing, I was tried as a terrorist. It was those same officers whose involvement in the crime I had exposed who decided my fate.

The whole Turkish judicial system became party to this injustice. I was released after a full year behind bars with no verdict against me. I am still on trial and can be imprisoned for 15 more years. This is how Turkish justice works—instead of bringing journalist killers to trial, journalists are tried as terrorists.

When authorities jailed me, they wanted to destroy the truth I had exposed. But the truth cannot be destroyed or imprisoned. Once it is revealed, it cannot be buried again.

We journalists disagree with politicians on the meaning of democracy. For politicians, democracy means allowing people to vote every four years. For journalists, democracy is an

everyday experience. And the essence of that experience is the people's right to be informed. It is no coincidence that the first act of an authoritarian government is to silence the press.

Today, it is harder than ever for governments to keep information concealed. We have never had more communication tools at our disposal. Journalists can gain access to the most secret of truths no matter how hard authorities try to hide them. At the same time, journalists have never faced more attacks than they do today. We risk assassination, abduction, prosecution, imprisonment, and exile—all for doing our job, and doing it well.

Tonight, we remember our colleagues who were abducted, killed, and imprisoned while on duty. Tonight, we remember Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon, who were abducted and murdered in Mali last month. We remember Marie Colvin and Rémi Ochlik, who were killed in Syria. We remember Bashar Kaddumi, who went to Syria on assignment. His wife and children did not hear from him for two years. We remember the dozens of journalists in jail in Iran, China, Eritrea, and in my country, Turkey.

Turkey is a record-breaker. Sixty journalists are jailed there on the accusation of being terrorists—that's more than anywhere else in the world. Most recently, several colleagues received life terms after a trial that shocked the Turkish press corps. I feel compelled to speak for them now. Don't be indifferent to their fate! Demand their release!

The events of Gezi Park over the summer revealed the scope of the press freedom crisis in my country. Thirty journalists were hurt, many were detained, and dozens were fired from their jobs because of their Gezi coverage. But perhaps the gravest problem was that many media outlets did not cover Gezi. Even though dramatic clashes were taking place right outside their windows, many newsrooms chose to self-censor for fear of official repercussions.

There is a red line now that journalists in Turkey know not to cross. The ones who do cross it pay a steep price, and we owe them a great debt.

Enemies of free expression more than anything want to hear the sound of our silence. They want to scare us, incarcerate us, and eliminate us so we cannot speak the truths that we have uncovered. And so we must speak at every opportunity. This is what Hrant Dink would have wanted.

Thank you.