

## ISOJ 2023: Day 1

### Global round up: *Lightning presentations on the state of the news media around the world*

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Chair: [Ann Marie Lipinski](#), curator, **Nieman Foundation at Harvard University**

- [Fahim Abed](#), independent journalist/former reporter for **The New York Times** in Kabul (**Afghanistan**)
  - [Adefemi Akinsanya](#), international correspondent and anchor, **Arise News** (**Nigeria**)
  - [Sheikh Sabiha Alam](#), senior reporter, **Prothom Alo** (**Bangladesh**)
  - [Pinar Ersoy](#), Istanbul editor, **BBC Monitoring** (**Turkey**)
  - [Bopha Phorn](#), independent journalist based in Phnom Penh (**Cambodia**)
  - [Taras Prokopyshyn](#), publisher and CEO, **The Ukrainians Media** (**Ukraine**)
  - [José Zamora](#), chief communications and impact officer, **Exile Content** (**Guatemala**)
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**Ann Marie Lipinski** I want to give a little bit of context before we jump into our conversations with the journalists. Reporters Without Borders offers this very elegant definition of press freedom: the effective possibility for journalists as individuals and as groups to select, produce and disseminate news and information in the public interest, independent of political, economic, legal, and social interference and without threats to their physical and mental safety. Simple enough, but abhorrent to autocrats and demagogues and in direct opposition to what prolific Putin propagandist Margarita Simonyan revealed in a Russia One television broadcast. “No great nation,” she said, “can exist without control over information.” This tension is not just present in Russia, where journalism and journalists continue to be crushed, but increasingly across the globe. Reporters Without Borders has judged journalism in more than 70% of the countries it monitors, to be totally blocked, seriously impeded or constrained. This is not just a story about journalism. It is a story about contagion and our international democracy recession. As Freedom House reminds us, although the press is not always the first institution to be attacked when a country's leadership takes an anti-democratic turn, repression of free media is a strong indication that other political rights and civil liberties are endangered.

I'm here today because Rosental and I were in conversation about the evolving nature of my Nieman Fellow classes, and the fact that countries that were not that long ago deemed relatively healthy for journalism have been regressing. Looking out across my class the other evening, I asked whether any of the fellows would be returning to countries where they felt press conditions had improved this past year. We could not name one, but several had taken notable turns for the worse or been challenged by war. You will hear about some of that today. I'm so grateful to Rosental for centering this issue, and before we hear from these amazing journalists, I just want to stress to the journalists from the United States that this is not just an issue for our international colleagues. Our country only ranks 42nd out of 180 on the Press Freedom Index. While that is up this year from 44th place, we are bested by many European and African countries, among others, giving us a really anemic standing for a nation that likes to boast of its historic free press protections.

The anti-press rhetoric that has grown common among senior government officials has been honed as attacks on fundamental protections, including the landmark Supreme Court decision that protects the press and defamation suits. That decision, *The New York Times* vs. Sullivan, freed journalists in this country to investigate public figures without threat of career or publication ending financial penalty. But efforts are now underway by Florida Governor DeSantis and others, to revisit and overturn Sullivan, stripping journalists of protections that have been in place for nearly 60 years. In this way, we inch closer to the very conditions we decry in other parts of the world.

So we're going to hear now from these seven journalists about conditions in their countries, after which we will then be able to pose some questions to them. Please read their full bios online — each of them awesome and righteous in their work. So we'll start first with Fahim Abed, who's an independent journalist who was last working in Afghanistan as a local reporter for *The New York Times*. Please welcome Fahim.

**Fahim Abed** Thank you for having me today here. I assume you have an idea about the situation in my country of Afghanistan. After the collapse of the government in 2022, in August, and that was followed by the Taliban takeover of the country, journalism was one of the industries that was heavily impacted by the situation. Hundreds of journalists with their families were military evacuated to Western countries, including the United States. But a bigger chunk of journalists remained in the country and kept doing their job. The pressure from the Taliban was enormous. The group didn't accept the idea of free speech and used every opportunity to suppress journalists. Several journalists were badly tortured just for covering a woman protest weeks after the Taliban takeover. Beating, harassing and insulting become a daily issue for journalists.

The pressure only increased with time. The Taliban carry out raids on some media outlets and take journalists for questioning. TV shows hosts who challenged Taliban officials were forced to quit their jobs within the first six months of the Taliban rule. There was another wave of Afghan journalists fleeing to the neighboring countries as the circumstances didn't allow them to do their job. A few journalists are still in Afghanistan, and they are trying best, despite the heavy restrictions, to cover their country. One of those journalists is Sirat Noori from a local news agency. He was wounded last month in an ISIS explosion on a ceremony in northern Afghanistan. When brought to the hospital, he heard a conversation between two Taliban fighters who wished all journalists got killed. The conversation felt heavier than the sound of explosion, he told me. Another Afghan journalist challenged a Taliban official during a TV show when he accused all schoolgirls of committing adultery during their public life. He asked for proof. The Taliban official got angry. The show ended and the journalist resigned in a couple of days. A post on social media said he is not able to continue his work due to pressure and demands. He left to Pakistan, where he has been living for nearly a year now, with right to no work and lots of financial problems. Salmajer Hish, another Afghan journalist who fled to Pakistan after spending a while in Taliban custody... After facing financial problems for a long time in the country where he was not able to work, he wrote on his social media last February, "I am out of money. We have no bread to eat. I want to sell my kidney."

Sixty percent of media outlets in Afghanistan are closed or are on the verge of collapse. In the past year and a half of the Taliban regime, 115 journalists were arrested, tortured, beaten or insulted. Five journalists were killed just in the last year. Eighty percent of media content is restricted by the Taliban. Media coverage is limited to only the Taliban statement. Women journalists are faced to cover their faces with mask when they appear on TV shows or events. Many journalists have given up on their jobs due to the restriction

and have been working in bakeries, restaurants, and other labor jobs. We journalists in exile are working hard to cover Afghanistan with limited resources in our approach to keep a record of the current atrocities and leave some evidence for history. Or give up on journalism and become truck drivers or deliver food. At the end of the day, we all have bills to pay. The world is silent about Afghanistan and the country is not interesting topic for the major media outlets anymore. Me and many other Afghan journalists lost our country and our careers. Thank you.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you. Thank you, Fahim. And now we'll hear from Adefemi Akinsanya, who's a Nieman Fellow this year from Nigeria.

**Adefemi Akinsanya** I'll take a round of applause, too, thank you. I was joking. All right. Thank you very much for having me and having us. We're really grateful for the hospitality and for the warm welcome. Looks like the slides are. There we go. There we go. All right.

Journalism, as is the case with life, will come to an end by dying one of two deaths: a sudden one or a gradual one. It's our job as people who do the work of journalism to ensure for the duration of our careers that we do not avert that reality by trying to extend the life of one type of journalist but instead contribute to this life span by giving birth to healthy forms of journalism. Much like the journey of parents, journalists should have the innate desire to ensure a newborn or their newsborn thrives despite the difficulties and wickedness rampant in the world it has been born into. In Nigeria, the state of journalism appears in my mind as a sobering infant mortality statistic. Journalism in Nigeria dies both suddenly and prematurely.

That demise is felt for most when I recall the coverage of the #EndSARS anti-police brutality protests across Nigeria from 2020 to this day. At the time of those protests, Nigeria had for years been grappling with its international image, which wasn't great. Themes of corruption, terrorism and incompetence were the elephant in the room, even when the greatness of the country's entertainment and educational talents were being discussed. #BringBackOurGirls, the hashtag born after some 276 schoolgirls were kidnaped from their homes in a remote part of the country, was slowly waning from international memory. But then came another hashtag #EndSARS, and that again catapulted a dirty secret for the world to see. Social media and the news doing the work of broadcasting the historic event. The protests were put down when the Nigerian military opened fire on largely unarmed protesters on October 20th, 2020.

*Arise News* covered the protests as they were, harnessing social media in its coverage to reach the youth who do make up the greatest number of the Nigerian population. As a result, the network grew in popularity, at last giving an alternative to the news products that solely catered to politicians and the elite. That made the network and its journalists a target. In 2021, while covering the one-year anniversary of the massacre shooting at the toll gate, myself and members of the *Arise* crew were involved in a violent scuffle with police who wanted to confiscate equipment and to arrest us, including our cameraman, Opeyemi Adenihun. The event was condemned by the Committee to Protect Journalists and indeed members of the public, but it's done very little to stop the threats and violence to this day. This is a photograph of Opeyemi taken in March 2023, just last month, while he was covering the general elections in Nigeria. Opeyemi was beaten and detained by police before being released to a senior member of the *Arise* staff several hours later.

With experiences like ours, it's no surprise that in 2021 Reporters Without Borders ranked Nigeria 120 out of 180 countries on its Press Freedom Index. In 2022, Nigeria slipped

further to 129 out of 180 countries, and we await this year's rankings. The problem is that powerful institutions and people want to be the only parents of the media. Their handholding means protection from their wrath. They want to raise their children, these newsborns, in their own image so that they serve their own purposes. This happens in the flexing of hard and soft muscles — repression, censorship and violence, but also law and economics. Cybersecurity legislation and the interpretation and the interpretation of defamation as a crime allows the strangling of the media to continue.

Further, the work of journalists is not inherently profitable. Journalists are relatively poor everywhere in the world, but they're really poor in the Global South. Often journalists are paid late or not at all. This makes them susceptible to being brown envelope journalists, exchanging favorable stories for pay. It's fast becoming a jungle, the weeds of which are off-putting to young and aspiring journalists. That's a great threat to the potential of journalism and offers a reason why, as I said earlier, that journalism in its current form in Nigeria is dying an unavoidable death. But newsbabies like *Arise* and *Stears* data, though young, are strong. They are challenging the belief that good journalism can only be found in the United States or in Europe or in any developed part of the world.

I must also proudly concede that the fellowship at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard has been one of its kind in its restorative and educational experience for me, which I look forward to taking with me as I continue along my journey as a news parent. As I wrap up my remarks, I do want to share a quote from the poem “Death of a Hired Man”, written by Robert Frost. In it, he talks about one of the characters in the poem called Silas, and he says that “Silas has nothing to look back to with pride and nothing to look forward to with hope.” I thought of that quote a lot while preparing my remarks today, and I'd like to leave you with the fact that when we discuss the state of journalism in Nigeria, there may not be much to look back to with pride, but there is undoubtedly plenty to look forward to with hope. Thank you very much.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Adefemi. And please welcome Sabiha Alam, a journalist from Bangladesh.

**Sheikh Sabiha Alam** It's a privilege to be here. Thank you for having me and having us. Bangladesh's constitution guarantees every citizen's right to freedom of speech, expression and the press. But there is a dark joke around it that Bangladeshis enjoy the freedom of expression, speech and press before they exercise these rights, but there is no guarantee after. Some recent incidents should help you understand the joke. As you know, I represent Bangladesh, a small South Asian country, according to RSF's Media Freedom Index, Bangladesh positions 162 among 181 countries. Our country became independent in 1971, and our Independence Day is on the 26th of March. I'm making all these points to navigate you to the core. Two days after Independence Day, plainclothes officers picked up one of my colleagues, a *Prothom Alo* journalist Shamsuzzaman Shams, from his house and arrested him more than 30 hours later. He is facing a case under the Digital Security Act. He was accused of smearing the government's image with false news and raising questions about the achievements of Bangladesh, on the day of independence. His story was about the rising price of commodities, in which he quoted a day laborer who said, “I can't afford rice.” On the same issue, a pro-government lawyer filed another case under the same act, adding a few more defendants, including the editor of that newspaper. *Prothom*, which Shams is a reporter as I am, is the most popular Bangla News Daily, and Bengali is one of the most spoken languages in the world.

But Shams is not alone. Over 200 journalists, writers and activists are facing cases under the Digital Security Act since the parliament passed this law in 2018. There are certain sections in the law that the pro-government people, allegedly under the government's guidance, applied to silence their dissents. I must include some names who are facing these charges, among them are cartoonists, writers and Bangladeshi-born journalists who are living abroad and writing for Bangladesh.

I have been in this profession for the last 17 years, but I have never felt so depressed as I feel now. I never thought that the Prime Minister would ever so heavily criticize my newspaper. She said, "*Prothom Alo* is the enemy of the government, democracy and people." That newspaper is anti-establishment since its inception, but it was never an enemy, I can assure you. But still, I think the reporters who are working from outside our country are lucky enough. Because if you think about the reporters who are working in several districts remote from the capital, they're suffering a lot. Like ten days ago, miscreants beat up one of the reporters, threw him down from a building. He lost his ribs because he wrote a story about illegal encroachment of hills and jungles. And not only this, there are some other issues. Some families like their kids or their relatives who are reporters to get arrested rather than be kidnaped. Because there are a lot of kidnappings right now. There are two persons who were kidnaped in recent years. They say that unknown miscreants picked journalists up, and they remain missing. One of them remained missing for 53 days. Their families filed cases with the police station, nobody took care of that, and there are allegations that the law enforcement agencies were doing those kidnaps. They are always denying these accusations.

Yes, the situation was never easy for journalists in Bangladesh. Authorities never liked the press, and challenges were always there. Though our media played a defiant role during our liberation war. Pakistani militaries bombed our Press Club and two or three other newspapers offices. But what did we see after that? Within three years of independence, the Printing and Publication Act came into being. Under this under this act, the district magistrate can permit the publication of any newspaper or cancel the declarations. In a highly politicized country like Bangladesh, it soon became a tool to terrorize the press. Only a few months ago, the government banned the publication of one pro-opposition party newspaper. We saw wholesale banning of newspapers in 1975, and the attempt to control the media went on during the subsequent regimes — be the democratic, full, semi hybrid democracy or autocratic or authoritarian regime. Sometimes I feel really sad for this.

Then there is an intense surveillance of journalists. I am a victim of such an incident. My conversation with my dad was like last year while discussing a sensitive issue I filed with the police station and nobody ever talked about it. I went to the police station, and nobody responded. Only the intelligence agencies have the interception things, it's alleged. Everybody knows that nobody else can have these interception things with them. I feel bad that I'm telling so many unpleasant things about my own country, but sometimes I think I shouldn't blame the government only. It's time we should consider the role of the media owners, too. They invested in media to woo the government and let the reporters work on their behalf. I talked with some of my colleagues to know the type of threats they are frequently receiving for reporting. The higher-ups of the newsrooms get calls from the quote-unquote higher-ups from the government for taking down specific news. We should look into some major editorial mistakes and judgments over the years, that incited hostility and that were not good examples of journalism either. Attempts to strangle independent media and the media houses owned by the pro-government owners only made the journalists and the future of journalism in my country vulnerable. We have lost our credibility to a great extent. People are withdrawing their trust from the mainstream media

and resting it on Facebook and other social media platforms. It is making room for misinformation and disinformation and hate speech. And last but not least, Bangladesh made it to international media at least twice during last two years, and it's all about the persecution of journalists. That's the people who need, like the climate change victims of Bangladesh... They remain underrepresented or not represented at all. Our women and children who made progress despite numerous challenges can't make it to the international media. Sadly, journalism in my country is failing every day. Thank you.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Sabiha. Pinar Ersoy is the Istanbul editor for the BBC in Turkey.

**Pinar Ersoy** Hello. Thank you for having me. What a privilege to be here and to talk to you about journalism in Turkey. Turkish journalism has come under significant political and economic pressure during President Erdoğan 20-year rule. A large majority of national newspapers and broadcasters are now owned by pro-government business groups, which are often reliant on state contracts. That ownership structure has eroded editorial independence at top media companies. It is not unusual, for example, for several newspapers to lead with the same story or even have the same headlines, usually quoting President Erdoğan. Turkish officials defend us, they say a national and local media, as they describe it, is imperative to Turkey's strategic goals.

On the other hand and on the other end of the spectrum, there are several very popular pro-opposition outlets. Their reporting sheds light on abuse of power and frankly, they offer very brave coverage. But they're also sometimes partisan in their editorial approach, which can cast doubt on some publications' credibility. This said, it is not an even playing field for proposition outlets. Authorities regularly issue bans and fines over their coverage. Their journalists are harassed and arrested, and they are more prone to the impact of economic woes, as most are not backed by large holding companies. Heavy pressure on journalists reporting on Kurdish issues also persists, a phenomenon that we witnessed for decades. Reporters for Kurdish media outlets are regularly detained, tried and arrested, and their websites are repeatedly blocked. Turkey continues to be among the worst jailers of journalists, according to CPJ, with 40 in prison as of December 2022.

The digital landscape is very vibrant and full of potential, although also under pressure. Over 94% of households in Turkey have access to internet. Some 83% of adults say they use it every day. However, Turkish newsrooms have not really embarked on a full-scale digital transformation. They all have websites, obviously, but with clickbait tendencies, agency copy and little to no original reporting. Therefore, the digital news outlets make an effort to offer different and more user-friendly experiences, but there's little experimentation with data or other new forms of reporting. There is, however, an increasing number of ambitious newsletters, podcasts and fact-checking websites mimicking international trends. They, of course, generally appeal to a younger and more educated audience rather than a wide mainstream one.

Social media is a rising, shining star in Turkey. It has replaced TV as the most widely used source of news, according to the *Reuters* Oxford survey. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok are all very popular. The country also has its own Reddit like platform, *ekşi sözlük*. All of these host lively discussions on politics from across the spectrum. We're especially seeing a rise in the popularity of political debate programs and vox pop channels on YouTube, filling in a big gap for mainstream media. We've also seen over the last decade scores of prominent journalists migrate to online platforms after they were

either fired or forced to quit. Some have put together full-scale broadcasting operations. Others report the news and offer on-the-day coverage with interviews and analysis.

However, the government has increasingly sought to bring social media under control, too. Blocking access to content is not unusual. In fact, in March, a website that lists locked websites was itself blocked in an ironic twist. Companies like Twitter and Facebook are now required to set up offices in Turkey, presumably increasing the government's authority over their operations. Most strikingly, in October 2022, the parliament passed a law that seeks up to three years in jail for people who disseminate false information. Government officials say it's a move against what they describe as digital fascism and fake news. Critics say the law allows prosecutors to arbitrarily decide what fake news is and that it aims to censor free speech. What is next? Elections are scheduled in Turkey on May 14, and President Erdoğan is facing a strong opposition. Who wins and with how stronger majority will have a large impact on the future of Turkish journalism. Thank you.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Pinar. And please welcome Bopha Phorn, who's Neiman's first-ever fellow from Cambodia.

**Bopha Phorn** Thank you all for having me, and thank you all for having us today. I feel privileged to be here also to share this story with you all. Eleven years ago, I was shot at while I was reporting on a story on illegal logging in Cambodia. Sorry. Before and after that I was detained and threatened while reporting on topics such as corruption and then beaten by powerful people. Threats and intimidation to journalists... From the government officials and powerful, well-connected people who were not more and they are still not more now. But the point I am trying to make here is that even with that hostile environment, there was still space for me and for my colleagues to do our job. There was still space for me and for my colleagues to do in-depth journalism, to investigate and expose abuse of power and craft.

Since 2017, the government has launched a persistent attack on independent journalists and newsrooms across the country. They have forced independent newsrooms to shut down and put journalists in jail. The message is clear: don't write any negative story about the government or even about your country. My career has encompassed the peak fall and ends of free press in Cambodia. At its peak, several local newspapers and two strong duo Khmer-English newspaper, *The Cambodia Daily* and *Phnom Penh Post*, for investigating corruptions, abuse of power and many other topics. *The Cambodia Daily* was forced to shut down in 2017— where I use to work. While *Phnom Penh Post* was sold to a businessman who is friendly with the government.

Although there are more than 2000 registered local print, online and TV outlets in Cambodia, they would not touch these subjects, as most are closely related to the government. *The Cambodia Daily*, where I worked, played a huge role for me and my colleagues, Cambodian and international. Not only did this show national and international spotlight on our country and our authoritarian government, but also to train people like me who did not go to journalism school or go through any journalism training to do in-depth reporting.

We expose corruption practices at the National Assembly, we expose corruption within a big international NGO, and we have done much more. We gave a voice to people whose voices cannot be heard. The newspaper was also pressed to learn from some of the best reporters and editors around the world. I pretty much learn everything from the newsroom, from the English language, to asking questions, to thinking critically about the story.

For almost four years, Cambodia has been led by one man, Hun Sen. Now he wants to hand power directly to his son. He has spent the last ten years stripping away freedoms in order to do this. He has banned opposing party, which got close to winning the election in 2013. He has arrested labor unions leaders, NGO activists, opposition supporters, and he started shutting down news outlets. In an example of how it has become even more of a dictatorship country, previously they would come up at least with a bogus legal case against the outlet to push them to close or to threaten them. But now they don't even care. They don't even bother to do that. This year about a month ago, Hun Sen ordered one of the last fully independent outlets, *Voice of Democracy*, to close. After the closing of the outlet, Hun Sen told journalists who work there that they could get a job with the government. Some of them had no choice, so they took the job. Some of them stay independent and try to do their best to be independent journalist. Some chose otherwise, delivering food. Before my fellowship as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, I was asked to leave *Voice of Democracy*.

All these years, many stories of my country have been told by foreigners. I have been working hard on my career as a journalist to make sure that one day we will be able to tell our stories by ourselves, and we will pass on our skills to the next generation. *Voice of Democracy* planned to hire me as their newsroom leader. I was ready to be a leader of the newsroom; I would have trained a new generation to report and write stories. Now, that opportunity is gone. Thank you very much for listening.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Bopha. Next, we'll hear from Taras Prokopyshyn from Ukraine.

**Taras Prokopyshyn** Hi, everyone. I will wait for a minute for the presentation. So. Hi, everyone. My name is Taras Prokopyshyn. I'm a Nieman Fellow here at Harvard University, but also I'm a co-founder and publisher of The Ukrainians Media. It's a bootstrap, independent media company focusing on high quality and long form journalism in Ukraine. It's my pleasure and honor to be here. I have a just a couple of minutes, so I will tell just a few stories today.

The war in Ukraine started in 2014. Exactly nine years ago, in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and began the occupation of Eastern Ukraine. In February 2022, Russia started a full-scale invasion. One year later, Ukraine is still under attack. Russian tanks and warplanes do not only ravage Ukrainian cities and kill people, but also undermine the economy and institutions. In extremely dangerous conditions, Ukrainian media outlets are holding their informational frontline, reporting from the forefront, explaining what's going on, what's happening, and fighting Russian propaganda.

This is Mark Sliding, one of the best Ukrainian photojournalists. He worked there at the frontline as a photojournalist in the beginning of the war in 2014, documenting the war crimes of the Russians. Mark has collaborated with many international photo agencies and published his stories in leading world media outlets. He had a dream to make a photo that would stop the war. In 2014, he was fortunate enough to witness and survive at the bloody siege of Ilovaisk quarry — more than 1,000 Ukrainians died. Eight years later, he is amongst the disappeared on the outskirts of Kiev. Weeks later, his body was found lying face down just north of the capital when it was liberated from the Russian troops. Because of this, two bullets in his body and shrapnel in his head.



According to the Ukrainian Institute of Mass Information, 52 media workers have been killed in Ukraine, as the result of a Russian aggression. Eight of them died while performing their journalism duties, and fifteen as a result of shelling or torture. This is the office of *Free Radio* in Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine. The Russian army completely destroyed it with the target strike. Fortunately, the media continues to work. As a result of the widespread Russian invasion, at least 233 media outlets have partially or completely shut down due to the direct threat from Russian occupiers, confiscations, inability to work in occupation, and the financial challenges caused by the war.

Fragile financial models of news media organizations were completely destroyed. The advertising market is nearly dead, and the reader driving a revolution has not begun yet. The support of donors has become one of the most important elements in preserving the Ukrainian media market. This is my colleague and photo editor at The Ukrainians Media. This photo was taken a few weeks after the start of the Russian full-scale invasion for the project called "Displaced Twice." In 2014, he was forced to move from Donetsk to Kyiv due to the Russian invasion. In 2022, again, he had to leave Kyiv, along with our entire Kyiv office, due to the threat of encirclement of the city and the inability to work. You can see him sitting in a sleeping bag on the floor of our podcast studio in the office, which served as a journalist shelter during the first months of the invasion. Later, like other colleagues, he returned to Kyiv and continued to work as a photojournalist, capturing devastating stories of the four frontline cities.

This photo is of my colleagues from Kyiv. At first glance, it looks romantic with the candles and darkness, but the reality, of course, is far from it. The war has numerous challenges making work much more difficult for Ukrainians — blackouts, the scattered teams around the world, drafted male workers, lack of funds, DDoS attacks, constant sleep deprivation and burnout are all part of our daily reality. Furthermore, the constant stress and mental health challenges have taken a toll on anyone because every day you see pain, tragedies and lose friends. Since February 2022, Ukrainian media has found itself navigating a new reality with a significant shift in the game rules, because we have a martial law leading to an adherence of self-censorship. At the same time, the government has attempted to utilize certain information, channels and platforms more actively, such as national television, but journalism remains out of their control. In fact, investigative reporting has increased not only exposing Russia's war crimes but also uncovering corruption among Ukrainian politicians and high-ranking officials. One such example is the ongoing investigation into corruption with the Ministry of Defense.

Almost every media outlet in Ukraine is a war media outlet, and even glossy magazines are publishing guides on how to behave in bomb shelters or what to do in the case of a nuclear strike. That's a new reality. Despite the immense challenges faced by Ukrainian media during this period, they have done an extraordinary job. As a media manager, my responsibility is to ensure the survival and growth of my media organization, and personally, I have not been to the frontline yet. However, many of my brave Ukrainian journalist colleagues report from the frontline every day, risking their lives in pursuit of the truth. In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the global media community for their huge support. It has been essential in allowing us to continue our work in the face of such adversity. It's important because it's not only about Ukraine, it's about Jews, about freedom and about democracy. Thank you very much.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Taras. Now we hear from José Zamora, who is a journalist in Guatemala, currently living and working in Miami, but his family has paid a very particular price for journalism in his country.

**José Zamora** Hello and thank you. Thank you, Rosental. Thank you, everybody, for being here today.

José Rubén Zamora has been in prison in Guatemala for 259 days today. He has been charged with money laundering, blackmail and influence peddling, and he's awaiting trial. He's innocent. His real crime was investigating and publishing 144 investigations about corruption during the first 144 weeks of the Giammattei administration. José Rubén Zamora happens to be my father. Giammattei's government is keeping the country near the bottom of the Transparency International Corruption index. But his administration has distinguished itself by conducting systematic attacks on democracy and democratic institutions, persecuting anyone who tries to fight corruption, promote liberty or rule of law. Giammattei and his attorney general, who, by the way, was designated by the U.S. Department of State as a corrupt and anti-democratic actor, have been hounding journalists, prosecutors and judges with arbitrary criminal proceedings during their administration. Some of the highest-profile judges, prosecutors, activists and journalists have been targeted by the regime. There are over 25 judges, jurists and journalists in exile, and anybody who hasn't been focused on fighting corruption in the state and in the country has been in prison.

For over 26 years, *El Periódico's* work has brought down corrupt members of Congress, cabinet ministers, and even president. Imprisoning my father, Giammattei's regime had three goals: to punish him directly because he's a pain to the administration and to anybody who's involved in corruption, to shut down *El Periódico*, and to send a message to all journalists in the country that in Guatemala journalism is a crime. It has failed on all three objectives. My father is still occasionally writing from prison, even though *El Periódico* stopped printing its print edition. It had to lay off 130 members of its staff. It's still publishing investigative reporting online. Finally, the persecution has strengthened the ties between journalists from different news organizations who put in their mission over corruption have kept denouncing corruption and abuses by the regime.

The support of the journalism community and of everyone here gives me hope. This persecution will eventually end. What gives me the most hope is to see my friends and colleagues from Nicaragua here today. I admire them, my colleagues on this panel, and they are an example. We admire them and follow very example. They give my father, *El Periódico*, and his family strength through their will to continue doing journalism that helps communities live in a more just and democratic society.

One of the thoughts that I been thinking about during this entire process is that these abusive and repressive regimes and administrations, they had been building for years something that I call the Repressive Regime handbook. Originally, they had only two tactics: one was attacking journalists' credibility because they know that's the only asset a journalist has, and from the opposite side, it was death threats and assassination attempts. But this handbook has become more and more sophisticated. They have moved from those two different things to not only attacking credibility and sometimes even leading to assassination attempts, but they do fiscal terrorism. They send the governmental entities to do all this in media organizations and to persecute journalists. They also started using SLAPPs or spurious lawsuits to persecute journalists. They know that by having journalists have to focus on going to hearings and defending themselves with lawyers, they would lose their focus and resources.

Ultimately, what they found that is most effective — it's being used everywhere from Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Philippines and in Russia — is using criminal law as a tool to persecute journalists. That's what they are doing now, and it's extremely effective. They build cases because they control the entire government. They control all the branches of the government, and that allows them to arrest journalists, and put them in prison. From one side, it attacks their credibility, but from the other side, it sends a message to all the journalists that journalists need some suffering. So I hope we can all continue to work together and build our own handbook on how to fight these repressive regimes. Thank you.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** So some of us a couple of months ago heard Sabiha give a talk where she laid out some of the challenges, really huge challenges she's dealing with in her country. Somebody rightfully asked the question, do you ever think about not doing journalism? She looked so horrified, and like her head kind of railed back and she said, "Never." I would just actually like to ask each of you if you could just give us one minute on sort of what continues to motivate you. What do you get up thinking every day? What keeps you in journalism after all the challenges you've faced or are facing? Or do you ever think about not doing journalism? And let's just start with José and work our way back down the line.

**José Zamora** Thank you. I think it's really hard not to think about journalism and not doing it. I think that in the case of my family and, especially my father, he has had many opportunities to stop doing it. In the end, he has never taken any. He has this deep belief in the mission of journalism and that is something that is needed to improve the communities where you live.

**Taras Prokopyshyn** From my perspective, I think that high-quality journalism, of course, it's super important, but at the same time, we should think about the media infrastructure and how to make this high-quality journalism possible. So I think that it's super crucial to build independent media companies, which could be a role model for another company and for changing the whole media market in the country. So that's my biggest inspiration for the future.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Bopha.

**Bopha Phorn** Thank you for the questions. Yeah. I think you all must seem to say, why are you still doing this, because of everything that happened to us. I think it's very important because it's about, especially what's happening in Cambodia right now... I think it's even more important than it was for journalists to do their job because it is what our job is for, for us to go against what is not right. For me personally, I do love telling stories, and I just love chasing secrets, and I love catching people lying. I would say the other thing as well... Being in this job, it's almost like a curse and also some sort of magic. A curse and magic at the same time because it put you in a terrible situation, but also it gives you such satisfaction when you are successful telling a great story, especially when it comes to corruption or exposing illegal logging or any things like that. The world needs us, and I still believe that. Regardless of what will happen to us in the world, I think of we all come together and keep doing it, we're going to win. I believe there's hope out there; I don't know where it is, but it's out there.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Before Pinar starts, I just want to say if anyone has questions that they want to come up to that mic. Oh, we're late so maybe we'll take one, and if anyone has one online to post it there.

**Pinar Ersoy** Thank you for the extra time. Well, first of all, journalism is the only thing that I know how to do, so I have to keep doing it. But more seriously, my career... I started 20 years ago when Turkish media was very vibrant, very competitive, and I was lucky enough to see that. Now I practice it in the environment that I just described to you. So it's very clear to me what happens when you're not able to practice journalism in a country. Democracy does die in darkness. So I think it's very important that we keep doing it. But a more personal reason is... I did journalism school, but I really learned the job from other journalists, and a lot of people have invested their time in me, and they've shared their wisdom with me. I feel like I'm responsible to teach the next generation so that we have this tradition carry on for decades to come. So, thank you.

**Sheikh Sabiha Alam** In my case, it's a passion to write stories. I believe only journalism can protect democracy everywhere in the world. If I stopped writing stories, who would look after the people whose voice remained unheard?

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you. Adefemi?

**Adefemi Akinsanya** For me, it's one of two. One, I actually really like the work. I like it itself. I love writing and reading and telling stories and finding creative ways to share information. So it's very easy for me to choose this occupation and continue to do it. But why I do it in the face of repression or threats is because I think that when you confront any higher power, whether it's a government or a powerful person or even a bully on the playground, you can't let people push you around. I think sometimes that defiance teaches bullies in all different types of contexts that they can't continue. That even if they've been able to exercise their power and abuse their power, they can't do it with me, and because of that, perhaps they'll stop. So I think that's what it is for me. The representation, too.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you. Fahim?

**Fahim Abed** I have thought about it, and I tried to convince myself to give up on journalism, but I didn't succeed. There are a couple of reasons for that. One is that in my country, history always kept repeating in the same way, and I think one of the reasons is that if there were not enough evidence to challenge the rulers, so the rulers were able to write the history. I got this responsibility toward my country to do accurate journalism and leave it as a legacy for the next generation, so they can learn it from it.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you. I think the boss is telling...Okay, go ahead.

**Audience Member** First of all, thank you all for reminding us why we do what we do. I think I speak for everybody in the room when I say it's really an honor to be in your presence. My question is, what is the one single thing that people who care about democracy and journalism could do to help you continue to do what you want to do?

**Ann Marie Lipinski** It's a great question. Thank you. Any thoughts?

**Pinar Ersoy** Several of us here are Nieman Fellows this year and the sort of support that the Nieman Foundation has given us time to think about how we do what we do and why we do what we do and how to do it better. I think that's one of the ways that journalism can be supported around the world.

**Sheikh Sabiha Alam** I think networking can help us. If we get a chance to get our stories published elsewhere in the world in other news outlets, it would be great for us. Also, we need some support, like we don't have independent journalists working in our country, because who would protect them from all those cases and stuff. If we get legal support from different organizations, it would help us to thrive. Thank you.

**Bopha Phorn** Speaking from personal experience, I think there's a bunch of things that you could do if you're interested in keeping our work going. One of the main things is the resources that could help us when we are in trouble. For example, we might have a problem in our country that we cannot work there for that moment, but we did not want to leave completely, we want to come back. So I think we need a place that we can station for a while, but still in the journalism environment, so we can keep our spirit up and so we can come back. At the same time we might be able to get some new skill and some training and stuff, so we can come back continue. The other thing is that I think there are so many journalists right now that could not write a story or expose corruption from their own countries, so it would be somewhere outside their countries. I think they need support in terms of facility, equipment, and other financial support in order to keep their operation running. I think that would be a great help, and make sure you give it to the right person who will really do the job. Thank you.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thanks, Bopha.

**Fahim Abed** Give us the space to write the stories of our country.

**Haggai Matar** Hi. Haggai Matar from *+972 Magazine* in Israel Palestine. I think a very similar question, but about the U.S. government. We're all visitors here. Is there anything that the U.S. government has done or could do in those different instances that you mentioned that could help you and other journalists more?

**José Zamora** I think just to tackle both questions. One is that the best defense for journalists among the attack is more journalism. So I agree with everything you said. The best way to help is to also help by a network to publish the stories, or don't stop covering our countries. Make sure the eyes of the world are there and everybody is watching. That's really important. In terms of what the U.S. government can do, I think they have become really good at something that is not necessarily very useful, which is Twitter diplomacy. Tweeting about supporting their work for journalists in other countries and also creating these lists where they put corrupt actors, which used to be helpful or I don't anymore. So there need to be stronger measures because in many of our countries, the people who are now on those lists see it as an award. They don't mind. So there need to be stronger and better sanctions.

**Fahim Abed** In the case of Afghanistan, the U.S. government can put more restrictions on the Taliban. It's a terrorist group and it has a whole nation in its custody. So restrictions will work.

**Bopha Phorn** I think it worked the same way for Cambodia as well. I think the other thing that the U.S. government could do is that... From my own experiences, a few years ago, I was really lucky to be supported by the U.S. government to come and study journalism for a year. After that, I got a great opportunity — one of a lifetime — to work at a big news organization like *AP* and *ABC*, which I learned a lot. Countries like mine need that very much.

**Adefemi Akinsanya** I think for me — very quickly because I know we were very fast running out of time — I think for Nigeria and for indeed countries on the African continent, one thing the United States government can do and people in the United States is raise the level of expectation of developing countries. If we look at some of the comments that came from your former president when he was referencing Nigeria; he referred to Nigeria and many other countries not as whole countries. I think that as much as we can dismiss ridiculous comments as being ridiculous, they do have a lasting effect and they do influence people for better or worse to continue to perpetuate stereotypes and negative connotations of African countries or of people of color. So I think one thing the American people can do, and indeed the government, is to raise its personal expectations and understand that while the United States is a developed country and a superpower, it is not perfect and it's not the barometer or the bar of another person's perfection, too.

**Ann Marie Lipinski** Thank you, Adefemi. The last thing I want to say is there's just this line from a Freedom House report that I always remember about press freedom not being this kind of consistent state that you can just achieve and then walk away from. Things improve and things get worse, and sometimes they happen back-to-back in the same region.

I just want to express my deepest thanks to each of you individually and this group as a whole for what they and their colleagues do to keep at this in their parts of the world. It reflects on all of us and on the profession more broadly. So I'm so grateful to you for today, but grateful for what you do every day. Please join me in thanking them.