

26th ISOJ Global Roundup: Challenges to Journalism Around the World

- Chair: Dawn Garcia, director, JSK Journalism Fellowship at Stanford University
 - Lina Chawaf, journalist and CEO, Radio Rozana (Syria)
 - Dieu-Nalio Chery, freelance photojournalist (Haiti)
 - Gregory Gondwe, managing and editorial director, Platform for Investigative Journalism (Malawi)
 - Luz Mely Reyes, co-founder and director, Efecto Cocuyo (Venezuela) and fellow, ICFJ Knight
 - Mikhail Rubin, deputy editor in chief, Proekt (Russian site in exile)
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Summer Harlow I hope everybody's back from the coffee break, because it is time for our next panel, which is the Global Roundup: Challenges to Journalism Around the World. And this panel will be chaired by Dawn Garcia, who is director of the JSK Journalism Fellowship at Stanford University, and one of our sponsors. So welcome them all to stage.

Dawn Garcia Good afternoon, ISOJ. I'm Dawn Garcia, and I'm the director of the John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford. I want to welcome you to our panel, the great panel, Global Roundup: Challenges to Journalism Around the World. He's sitting right in front here. I would like us to give a warm round of applause to the amazing Rosental whose vision, strategy, and heart makes all this possible.

So a few months ago, the day after the inauguration, I think, I just checked my email, the inauguration of a new US president, Rosental asked me to moderate this panel. At the time, as someone who follows international news closely and hosts international journalists from around the world at Stanford every year, I thought I had a pretty good idea of the categories of the challenges and threats to international journalism. Worldwide, journalists face harassment from authoritarian regimes, in-person and online, violence or death simply for doing their jobs. Growing political polarization, misinformation, and disinformation is causing increased hostility toward journalists. Of course, there's intense financial challenges and burnout and more. I was right, those challenges still exist, and I was also wrong. The world has changed dramatically since January 21. We have new and serious challenges and threats to journalism around the world, some we had not expected, and many we could never have imagined, especially the sweep and speed of these challenges, which have caused threat and pain for journalists everywhere.

I'm going to just highlight three before we start with our panel. One is the defunding of global newsrooms. All at once, almost all funds to the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, and the National Endowment for Democracy, which supports independent media around the world, that faucet turned off. And that decision has resulted in the disappearance of at least 180 million in annual funding and hundreds of newsrooms around the world have been affected. Cutbacks, layoffs, uncertainty, and the outright collapse of some independent media that are doing crucial accountability and investigative journalism around the world. So that's a huge cut for those journalists and those newsrooms, but less than three tenths of 1% of America's overall foreign aid budget. The second challenge that I'd like to highlight is this draft list of recommendations coming from the U.S. administration that would target the citizens of as many as 43 countries as part of a new ban on travel to the United States. This could stop journalists from international journals from traveling to fellowships like ours and stop them from coming to convenings and important ones like this one and other threats. Three is an increase in

legal threats, which can impede journalists around the world from doing their work. There are slap lawsuits and many more things that you've probably heard about. And also self-censorship is increasing because of those threats, so some important stories are not going to be told.

So here's the good news. Today we're going to hear from five journalists who are tackling these and other challenges with resilience and courage, and they're finding ways to continue to do their journalism in some pretty interesting countries. And they are going to tell you about that today. I'm going to do a quick introduction to these folks, and then we're going to begin. And we'll have time for your questions afterwards. So to my right is Mikhail Rubin who is Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Proekt in Russia. He is also a JSK Fellow at Stanford this year. To his right is Dieu-Nalio Chery, who's a freelance journalist from Haiti, and he's a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan. To his right is Gregory Gondwe, who's founder, editor, and managing director of the Platform for Investigative Journalism in Malawi. To his right is Luz Mely Reyes, who we all know. She's co-founder and director of Efecto Cocuyo in Venezuela, and she's a 2024 ICFJ fellow and a currently a Mellon fellow. And last but certainly not least is Lina Chawaf, who's a journalist and CEO of Radio Rozana from Syria. Let's give a round of applause for these folks. Okay, I think each of those panelists has seven to 10 minutes to do their thing, and then we'll have a chance for questions afterwards. Mikhail?

Mikhail Rubin Okay, I want to apologize in advance if I sound too, let's say, pompous, but I never expected these times to come. What I mean is that now at least some of my US friends are asking for tips and advice coming from Russia in case U.S. President Donald Trump wants to use Vladimir Putin's experience in suppressing freedom of speech. Well, I definitely think that it is really highly unlikely that it will get that terrible here in the United States, but on the other hand, given our experiences in Russia, you know it's never early to be alert or maybe fight.

So let me bring you, let me start with the very basic thing about the journalism in Russia today. So the path for a journalist in Russia now looks pretty straightforward. You either stay in the country and work for propaganda, which is an obvious way. On the other hand, you can decide to tell the truth to the people, but it leads you immediately to prison, and Russian authorities have a lot of legal ways to put you in that amazing place, somewhere in Siberia, for example. I want to emphasize legal ways to do that. But the news is that, and it's important to my mind to remember that leaders like Vladimir Putin are smart enough not to put too many journalists you know in prison, and that's why they prefer to send you a signal before. And my case is pretty regular, I would say, in that way. We were one of the first media to face terrible problems in Russia, even before invasion in Ukraine. And the authorities sent police to my and to my colleagues' apartments, they searched it for the whole day, took all devices, but late at night they took, that was the last thing they did, they found my passport that allows me to travel abroad, put it in front of me and left, which is definitely signal-like. Leave. And this actually brings me to the third path to any journalist and all independent Russian journalists you could think of these days are in exile abroad. This is, and it brings me to important thing. Definitely this way to this hell, when everybody have to leave the country, it wasn't forever, definitely. Vladimir Putin worked for a long time on it and created a situation when he caveated the situation when he can get rid of everybody. For a long, long time, opposition and all the journalists, and only the war allowed him to mobilize the country that much when he was able to get rid of all of us simultaneously.

So, sorry for bringing too many politics, but when current administration is saying today that maybe Vladimir Putin wants and is interested in making peace, it sounds that naive, the least naive. I don't want to use other words, or maybe not naive, I don't know, to say that because he definitely doesn't want peace. Again, war made all his dreams come true. Another thing, as I said, this road to all this hell was pretty long for Vladimir Putin before the war. He made a huge, huge work, which lasted for 25 years before he was able to get rid of all independent media. And he did it smartly enough for us not to resist enough. And this is important to understand also today. We didn't fight enough, unfortunately. Why? Again, they were smart enough. What they did, they started with something familiar, by the way, to the United States today. They got rid of maybe a couple journalists who were part of presidential press pool. Was it that bad? No, we decided not to fight because of that very much. But to give you a bigger picture, you know, I became a Kremlin press pool reporter in 2014, and as I was working for independent media, they made me, for most part of my time, to watch Vladimir Putin, not in person, but in the press center, where I was just watching videos made by Putin's personal cameraman. And now, it came even further. There is no Kremlin presidential press pool at all in Russia. There is only one journalist working for the state TV channel who is following Vladimir Putin, and this is it. This is the journey. And the main journey, and the whole journey for all Russian media, was really same. Again, as I say, they started with very good intentions. They said that, well, for TV channels, we want to free them from Russian oligarchs. Amazing. They freed them from oligarchs, took the control, and they were again smart enough to make us not to resist. Because it was a good thing. They even were smart enough not to fire the best journalist. They even promoted some of the best journalists, and for a couple years some of this TV channels became even better. But then in one second they turned everything into propaganda. Then came radio stations, then newspapers, big Internet sites, so by the year 2022, when Russia started the war there was nobody, practically. There were only very small media inside the country, and the war allowed, again, Vladimir Putin to get rid of all this, of all of us. Again with all this good, amazing intentions, and nobody resisted unfortunately for a long long time.

How did we survive for the last time, for the last years? It was YouTube. YouTube became something instead of a television for Russian people. People would be buying big TVs in their apartments to watch YouTube, and it allowed us to get an access to a huge audience, millions of viewers. But then two bad things happened. Unfortunately I want to say that after the war, Google terribly helped Vladimir Putin because they decided to cut Russians from monetization, and that's why we were not able to get money for what we are doing. Again, they had good intentions of fighting with Russian propaganda, but the problem is that there were us, independent media on the YouTube, but not the Russian propaganda. And then Vladimir Putin is now blocking the YouTube. So, unfortunately, we are losing even the YouTube. Yes, I'm trying to show with this slide the process of, let's say, natural selection we are going through right now, because given the situation with the YouTube, given the fact that Russian people are not able, common people, are able to donate independent media at all because we have all these special statuses, they can be put and sent in prison for giving at least, even a dollar for us. They can be sent for, I don't know, six years in prison for that. And now you know about the latest Trump's decisions about cutting the funds and USAID. Unfortunately, that's bad news. We were, a lot of Russian media were dependent on this, let's say institutional organizations who provided money, again, because of all the laws adopted by Russian authorities. So we are right now trying to even understand how many Russian media in exile would survive, good Russian media in exile, would survive this process. So again, process of natural selection. We'll see. But I think a lot of media are dying right now, unfortunately.

To wrap up with something good, I have a strong feeling that, and I want to use this amazing audience if you don't mind, I have strong feeling that Russian experience, and the experience of Vladimir Putin, and the whole story of Russia in the last 25 years might be important and of interest to the Western and to especially American audience today. That's why I think that some kind of a good video documentary based on what we investigative journalists are finding about Vladimir Putin and the Russian regime might be interesting. So if some of you have any ideas how to fund that or you would love to take part in it, I would be really grateful to talk about it. Thank you very much

Dieu-Nalio Chery Hello, everyone. Some few images you will see. It's about some journalists who were victims in Haiti. I am excited to share a short version of my story with you today, highlighting my experiences as a journalist from Haiti and the many challenges we face in this profession. First, let's take a moment to reflect on the state of journalism in my homeland. In 2022, Haiti faced a devastating reality with at least nine journalists losing their lives, making it the deadliest year for our profession, UNESCO report. Since the year 2000, over 50 journalists have been killed in Haiti, according to media organizations. This illustrates the risk many brave journalists take while pursuing the truth.

I grew up in a challenging environment, which inspired me to become a journalist. My journey took a dramatic turn after the massive 7.5 earthquake in 2010, which tragically claimed more than 200,000 lives. The quake devastated our community and severely impacted the media landscape. Many journalists lost their lives and countless newsrooms collapsed. In the middle of this chaos, I decided to join the international media scene and began working for the Associated Press. For over 11 years, from 2010 to 2021, I had the honor of covering significant stories for the AP. Haitian journalists face further chaos with the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. Sadly, this place, Haiti, has the third worst country in the world for justice regarding murdered journalists, just behind Syria and Somalia.

This reality is hard to swallow, but we continue to fight for accountability and truth. In December 2024, a group of journalists covered a government event celebrating the reopening of the General Hospital, just a block from the National Palace during the Christmas. While they were there, gangs swarmed the hospital and opened fire, resulting in the death of two journalists and a police officer, along with several injuries. The incident has instilled fear in journalists, leaving them uncertain about where to turn for safety. Many of my colleague journalists are tired of constantly moving from one location to another in search of safety, a situation that extends to government offices and the general population as well. Currently, 90% of the capital program is under gang control.

I wish to share a touching story about my late friend, colleague, photographer, Vladjimir Legagneur, who disappeared in 2018, while working in a slum in Port-au-Prince. His case is one of many that remain unsolved, highlighting the need for justice in the face of adversity. Talking about challenges to journalism worldwide, I am a perfect example from Haiti, in exile for almost four years. In September 2019, while covering the ratification of a new prime minister at the parliament, chaos erupted when a lawmaker brandished a gun during a protest. During a protest. Can you imagine that bullets were flying everywhere, one even grazed in my jaw. But despite the chaos, my instinct to capture the moment kept me focused. This video you will see, it's the video where I captured a shot, while I got shot also.

Video plays

Dieu-Nalio Chery So what really happened? So while I see the Senator go into his car, because it was militant activists shouting to him, try to stop him going away, because they said that he received like \$100,000 US dollar to vote for a corrupted prime minister. And then he went to his car, and the crowd followed him. As a journalist, I always anticipate what might happen. And then when I followed them, and then I saw the protesters open the door of his car, and he was like going out from his car, and just pull out his gun, and start shooting up and down. And then I wasn't in front of him. And then while the guy tried to pass in front of him, the guy that he tried to kill, I saw the guy trying to pass in front of my camera, but I was taking pictures. And it was so fast, I couldn't avoid having, you know, this kind of fragment of bullet. And then I know, because I saw in my viewfinder, in my lens, the bullet come through my camera. And then, I said, like, I can't do nothing. I keep shooting. And then after that he went to his car and left, and then in my mind, I said, "Okay if I don't fall down, I'm still okay. I'm still alive." And then I continued shooting, and then after that some friend, you know, I was looking where I got shot. And then actually a drop of blood going through my bullet proof, and then I said, "Hey, guys, I got shot." So they came to help me to stop the bleeding. And then I thought it was nothing because, you know, I do love this profession, and then I was about to continue working. And a friend told me, "Hey Chery, this is not a game. Go to the hospital to see what happened." And when I got to the hospital and the doctor said, "Oh, this is the input, where is the output?" And then, you know, they scanned my head, and they saw it stay in my jaw here. And then you know, they tried to like remove it. And it was very bad. We cut it outside. And then a friend of mine, a photographer from Reuters, because I work for AP, we kind of in a competition, and then he showed his picture to other people saying that, "You see my picture in the Guardian, everywhere?" And in my mind, I said, "What? I got a better picture than him." And then I told to the doctor, "Can you let me go, and we can remove this after?" It's like I give the importance more to the picture than to my life. And then, so the doctor accept with me, and then I went home. And I saw a lot of people in my yard. My wife crying, and I hug her. And I said, "Can you grab my laptop?" And I tell the people, "Give me a little time." And then I sent a few pictures. The editor said, "What Chery? You got shot, and you got the right picture?" So, this is the picture. So with this picture, I got finalists in the Pulitzer.

So, as you know, in Haiti, after I published the picture and then, so the Senator trying to reach out. And then, so the opposition was showing me to complain against him. But I know the country very well. If I complained against him, he will send someone to kill me to finish with everything. So I talked to the AP, I talked to my boss, and I said, "If I have to complain, I will have to leave the country. And I want to continue my career because I am well known in the country, it is easy for me." And then, so we discussed with my manager, and we said that we will send him a letter telling him I was, you know, my profession is a risky profession, and I wasn't his target, so I won't complain against him in a way to have peace in my mind to continue working. So I continued working in the county with peace in my mind. So the most life-changing moment came in March 2021, when I covered a protest related to a police union officers, named Fantom 509. As things heated up, I captured image of officers involved in released police prisoners in looting at a car dealership. Suddenly I was threatened by masked officers who warned me to stop. Moments later, gangs that the car dealership owner paid to secure the business — That's the way it works in Haiti. The owner of the car dealership or the rich people, they always pay the gangs to secure their business. — and so the gangs showed up, and start firing bullets to protesters because they considered them as looters. And then I was lucky enough to stay a little away. I hide behind a wall and flat on the ground taking some picture. And then, I take picture of them firing bullets, you know, stealing cars, you know to go away. And then I saw something unusual. I saw them dragging the bodies of the people they kill away. And then I said, "Oh wow, that's very unusual." So, and I talked to my driver,

motorcycle driver, I said to him, "So we're going to go very fast and in a zigzag way, if they shot at me, so I won't die." And then, so, we did that. Three days after I published the picture, so the gangs asked for me. The gang's leader asked a colleague journalist for me. They want to find me because, you know, there's a lot of interest in this picture. Because the car owner is a potential candidate for president, so they don't want the human rights to see this grim scene, so they want to finish to clear everything. And then in that moment, fear started to set in. So my blood pressure goes up, and I couldn't even discuss that with my wife, because we never discussed to leave the country. And then, so I discussed with the AP. AP tried to see if they can find a way in Latin America to put me, but they said because of COVID, they don't find anywhere to send me. And then I talked with local organization in Haiti, FOKAL, and FOKAL joined with Open Society, and U.S. Embassy gave us visa, and I got a fellowship. I mean, I got a full scholarship at CUNY University in New York. However, when I arrived in the United States, despite working as a freelance photo journalist for the big outlets, I began working on a significant project focused on the Haitian diaspora, which I organized into chapters. I published two chapters, one in the Washington Post and the other in The New York Times. Currently I am concentrating on the Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio, where I am documenting this vibrant community that has been in the news frequently over the last six months of 2024. Thank you.

Gregory Gondwe Hello, I don't want to run the risk of being asked where Malawi, where I come from, is because that's the question that I usually get asked. So I will try to quickly point where we are in Africa. Malawi is bordered with Tanzania on the north and the northeast side, and Mozambique in the east, south and southwest side, as well as Zambia on the western side. We are a former British colony. We got our independence in 1964. From 64 to 1994, we are under dictatorship of one party rule, which was given that kind of freedom to do that through the Cold War. But upon the crash of Cold War around 1994, we got a referendum in 1993, and we had the multi-party elections in 1994, where we put in a new government, a democratically elected government. Basically, I think within the 30 years of dictatorship, we had no media basically because the one party rule only allowed for one daily, and one weekly, and one radio station. Television was not allowed. So, when 1994 brought in the multi-party democracy, it also opened floodgates, where you would walk into the street and find 50 titles of newspapers, because everyone else now wanted to be in news, a publisher and a journalist somehow. So I think with that, it also brought its own challenges. Just to give you an idea, Malawi is the size of Pennsylvania. I hope I'm pronouncing it right. Or Ohio in terms of size, or Tennessee.

So when we try to look at the challenges as the media practitioners in Malawi, we look at at least, I'll concentrate on at least five issues, some of which I think Dawn mentioned. But the biggest of them all is I think political influence, because when you consider where we are coming from and where we are now, you could as well see that politics has not left the media to practice as you have expected it to. Because despite the constitutional guarantees for press freedom, there are still political figures that often interfere with the media operations. Like for instance, our Communications Act says that politicians should not own media companies, but we have still politicians that privately own private radio stations, which are potentially skewing content to favor specific political agendas.

Then the other one that I wanted also to look at is the aspect of harassment and threats. Journalism in Malawi continues to face arbitrary arrests, I mean journalists face arbitrary arrest, intimidation, and surveillance. I speak from experience because I founded the Platform for Investigative Journalism in 2019, but by April 2022, as an investigative journalist now, I found myself in challenge because we had exposed some corruption

within the office of the Attorney General, and I was detained and interrogated by the police over the article that we had written. That day, the law enforcement agency stormed our offices, which are based on the southern part of our country, called Blantyre. My smartphones, laptops, and desktop computers were confiscated as authorities searched for any digital trace that would reveal confidential sources. It was a stark reminder of how press freedom can be threatened, even under a democratic constitution.

Now, the other third issue that is a challenge is now the technological challenge. Because while digital platforms have democratized information, dissemination, they have also facilitated the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, and journalists now grapple with the dual challenge of combating false narratives while ensuring their own reporting remains accurate and credible, which now brings in government with the aspect of the legal constraints. Although Malawi's constitution enshrines freedom of expression, there are still certain laws to impede media freedom, like the 2016 Electronic Transaction and Cybersecurity Act. This Act has been criticized for its potential to suppress investigative journalism, journalism in general and investigative journalism in particular, under the guise of regulating online content. Like I said, I was arrested for investigating and publishing an alleged corruption, which authorities called a crime of spamming. And it's the same law that the corporate and the politicians are still using.

Which now brings me to another challenge, which is that of the economic vulnerabilities that come with how the media now is trying to spread its wings. Many Malawian media outlets operate on limited budgets, making them susceptible to political and commercial pressures, so this financial fragility can somehow lead to compromised editorial independence and reduction in investigative reporting because most of these media outlets resort to self-censorship. The biggest advertisers for profit-making media outlets in Malawi is government and the corporate. So most of the times you would think twice if you wanted to write any story that is going to concern the politicians or the media itself. So sometimes if you are not going to get enticed with a bag of money, you are going to be threatened with arrest using the law. So that by the end of the day, you're not able to do the kind of stories that you are expected to do. Just last year, I think in February, we exposed corruption within the military, and because the military was not happy, I'm the one who did that story, the military intelligence started hunting for me so that they find out the source that we had used to use some of the documentation that we had used to publish the story that we did. So I had to flee my country, and where I was hiding, the whole army commander who is the head of our military, the Navy or the Air Force used to send me text messages through WhatsApp. Like, the first place where I had a ran to was in Addis. And while I was there, he sent some messages telling me the hotel that I was hiding at in Addis Ababa. And then, having seen that I've been exposed, I had to move to another country, so within the period that I wasn't hiding, I at least tried to manage to go to at least three or four countries, just to make sure that I am not being followed by our military intelligence, and either to take the diplomatic community back home to start negotiating with the president as well as the military command, so that they let me come back home. Incidentally, the time that I was out in hiding was also the time that JSK was announcing names of those that had succeeded to come for the fellowship. Because of time, I think I'll stop there. Thank you so much.

Luz Mely Reyes Okay, hello everybody. I am a little nervous, because you know, I am smarter in Spanish than in English, but I'm going to try to say that. I would like to talk about what happened in Venezuela, but also, I would like to talk about an investigation and research that I had made about the exiling journalists from Venezuela. So let's go to beginning with this story, which is a really long story, but I'm going to do it short.

This began, it all started with a very charismatic leader. He won the election, many people loved him, other people didn't. He used to say, "You are either with me or against me." He used to refuse to answer questions from journalists. He attacked the press. He always says, "You are my enemies." He always attacked, also, the different branch of the government. Today, the story, as I said before, can be very long, but the dismantling of the democracy was slow and consistent. I have to say that I'm talking about Venezuela. I'm sorry. Sometimes I forget that I am talking about that. Today we have in power a president who did not show evidence that he won the election, so we have even more problems. I prepared this slide, I have prepared this during the last 20 years. Rosental has seen different versions of this. And you can choose the score where you are. I'm sure that a lot of people here, a lot of journalists, are living similar situations that we have lived. And right now we are in the 24 and 25 years, and these are the most dangerous times living in Venezuela. But I want to point the 2016, because it's a very important year, 2015 and 2016, is very important for us because in Venezuela, we live something that we call in a poetic way the "spring of digital media." And it was very important because some journalists we created different media outlets, and we decided to do the best that we can do, which was doing the best journalism in order to survive, in order to defend our freedom and the right of the people to have the right information.

So the problem that we have in Venezuela is that we had the second crisis of people who have left the country is behind the Syria country. And people go, Venezuelan people, go to Colombia, to Spain, and to the States, the majority. In that group, the journalists, we have found that they are coming to the States to look for asylum. So now, when we are talking in our chat, we have this kind of deja vu because we are living something here that perhaps some of them lived in Venezuela years before. So right now, I say that we are living in Venezuela, an emergency, like a humanitarian emergency, but in the case of the media. Because we are leaving this kind of situation, authoritarian censorship. We don't have a good economy. You know that. We have a lot of space without news that is a desert of information. We have a control of the government taking all the spaces and try to deliver the information that they want to deliver. And of course, we are living this crisis, try to find a new model, a new project, a business model that you know during the day here we know that we have a global problem. So we are finding the new way to have a business model, but I think that we find some solution about how we can deal with these kind of challenges that we are dealing with.

I spent the last two months writing and investigating about something that happened to many journalists in the world, but I focused on journalists from Venezuela. And this is an order, and I don't know how to say in English. I don't know how translate into English when somebody say you had to leave your country. And I always say that perhaps sometime, like my friend from Haiti, we believe that we can still continue doing journalism in our country, until somebody yell at us and to push us and say, "You have to go out from your country." And then I interviewed 10 journalists here in the States. They are journalists from Venezuela. They are between 30 and 70 years, and they had to leave the country between 2015 and 2023. There's something that we found, for example, this, I use this word, "deshilado." We are not going to find the word in English, the translator, the translation, because we don't have words for "saudade" for example. But it's the way that we can feel, and I know that people who had to leave their country can feel. When you can't have the blue of the sky, you can't have your mountain, you can't not have your rivers. So in Spanish, somebody find this word, "deshilado." And I see that a lot of our journalists in Venezuela feel deshilado.

So, but I don't want to finish this presentation with this position because, you know, we always say in Venezuela that joy is an act of resistance because the oppressor want that we are tired, we have to be sad. So what I want to say to you right now is many lessons that we have learned during this year. Some of the lessons are, for example, doing better and better journalism. We know that we need funds to do that, but if we are committing to do the best journalism that we can do, we try to look the way to do that. The other thing that we have realized is that we had to create connection. We had to create alliance. And we have to stop watching us like, you know, when you are in a competition. Because when you don't have freedom, you don't have the space to compete. The only space that you have to compete is when you live in freedom. And the other thing that I would like to share with you this afternoon is an example that we made in last July, since July to January, that we created so many alliances covering the election. And one of them, it was La Hora de Venezuela, that you are going to have the opportunity to see what happened with that initiative. And we have a lot of other examples that we can show to you that are thinking always in the possibility to create network, to create alliances, and to create a different way to approach. And in this case, other journalists that they are far from their countries, the way that we combine the competencies, the experiences from people who are abroad with the people who are on the ground. I have to say thank you to all the journalists in Venezuela that they are still continuing doing the job. As I say, I always say that we are coming from the future. Yes, we're coming from the future, and we know that as journalists that love journalism, we are going to find a way to fight with these very challenges that everybody has. Thank you very much.

Lina Chawaf Hello, so I'm happy, first of all, that I'm presenting my country, Syria, today that is still struggling to survive freedom, dignity, and democracy. I have been working in the journalism field since 20 years in something we can call and describe as "empire of silence." We call it like this because I remember my parents, my grandmother, my grandfather all my life, they have been telling us, "Walls have ears, so don't say anything. Don't talk." We have lived under the most brutal regime in the world since 54 years ago. This regime called Assad regime. The father for 30 years and the son after him for 24 years. Last year, 2024, before 8 of December, when the Assad fall, I was saying, "We have been living." But now I can say, "We have lived," because Assad fall and like HTS, al-Nusra, like part of Al-Qaeda, took over the country in 8 December last year.

Before 2005, it was not allowed to practice journalism in Syria out of state media. And of course, state media is the voice of the regime. When they launched the permission to create a private media, it was only for an entertainment license. I created a private radio called Arabesque owned by a bunch of businessmen. We are not allowed to produce any content or any news. But even though I was able to create and produce critical content, but I was walking, in a valley of landmines, always. I learned how to walk between the red line that they put for us in this country. This is Arabesque Radio. Through entertainment, I was discussing the most difficult and sensitive topic on air: Violence against women, raping, sexual harassment, honor crime, and all the taboos that are in the Syrian society. I got many pressure from the government and from the religion people in the society. I remember we broadcast a sketch, a comic sketch, about freedom of speech, but in an indirect way, and I remember the Ministry of Media called the director of the radio and said, "Tomorrow I will close the radio because you are criticizing us." And I remember too that religion people came to the radio and asked about who is this host who's doing this show, talking about women's rights and all these sensitive issues that I talk about, and they want to meet me and they ask me to stop doing this because I am destroying the society. And this, it was going on until 2011, when we started our revolution in the middle of Arab Spring. As an editor-in-chief in this radio, Arabesque, I was started to be asked by the

intelligence people of the regime to broadcast their propaganda on our air. The propaganda said that those Syrians who demonstrate in the street, they are terrorists and jihadists. And because I was one of those people who demonstrated on the street, and I know exactly what was happening, I refused. And I said, "But it's not true. Those people just want freedom and dignity." The owner of the radio started to put a pressure on me to spread the story of the regime because they are pro-regime, and they are afraid from the regime at the same time. I kept refusing to broadcast any propaganda or hate speech on our air. They started to threaten me for months until the moment when they sent a very clear message through one of my friends saying, "Leave the country now, and never think to come back. Or we will kill your children." In a couple of days, I was obliged to flee with my children, like all my colleagues, all of us, flee the country.

I continue my fighting from exile, where I create another radio called Rozana, broadcasting from France and the Turkish-Syrian border to Syria, inside Syria. The Rozana radio still survives until now. Citizen reporters, who have been working with us came to the border and took a lot of training from me and other trainer, how to do an independent and credible journalism and how to protect yourself while you are reporting from Syria, inside Syria, in the middle of all this bombing, violence, killing, and all these massacres that happened inside.

Since the beginning of the revolution, 2011, until now, and according to SJA, the Syrian Journalist Association report, there have been, as you see, 1,546 violations against media and journalists in Syria and abroad documented. The surprise is that this happened not only by the Assad regime, even though they are in the lead, but from other armed groups affiliated with the revolution, as you see in the slide. The violation was happened by Assad, by Free Syrian Army, HTS, the one that is a branch of Al-Qaeda, and ISIS, of course. And this is exactly what happened with our correspondent in Rozana. Those are our correspondents we lost. We lost two of them, like the two on the left. They were taken by the regime. And in one month, they bring their bodies killed under torture. And one of them, his parents had to sign a paper that he's dead in a heart attack. And if they say anything, his brother will end in the same way. And another two correspondents taken by ISIS, until now we don't know anything about them. And there is one of this Kurdish journalists killed by al-Nusra in a ballot while he's reporting from inside.

So freedom of press was surrounded by all the armed groups inside Syria. I remember one doctor in the opposition area told me one sentence I'll never forget. He said, "Don't believe that any weapon believe in democracy or freedom ever." And I never forgot this sentence. Meanwhile, I never expected that I started being threatened by the regime, and I ended up threatened by the opposition group for many content we publish in Rozana, like Muslim Brotherhood. Again, I remember it like the same scene repeated when I was in Syria inside in Arabesque, when they came, the religion people, asked me to remove this content. Same scenario, like religion people came to Rozana, asked me to remove women, like women content and everything sensitive on our Rozana. And of course, like in both scenes, I refused to remove anything from our content. They started a huge media campaign against the radio and against me. It continued for two years, I remember. It's in Arabic of course, but this is part of the campaign against the radio and against the content.

As I was professional to walk between the landmine, like I told you in the beginning of this talk, I took the challenge again and walked, but this time in a real valley full of landmines to be able to smuggle into Syria between 2014 and 2016 to report from the opposition area and help creating a local radio inside by giving a training to the local journalists there. So this is a part of the campaign and this is when I went into Syria to report from inside. Last

time I smuggled into Syria, I was about to be killed by a bullet from the Turkish gendarmerie. When I tried to smuggle back into Turkey, the bullet passed so close to my head. Maybe you will ask yourself why I entered Syria illegally because I was banned from entering Syria by the Turks because I'm a journalist, and because I was threatened by all the parties controlling Syria, it was dangerous for me to enter officially as a journalist. As we know, Assad failed at 8 December 2024, so Syria now is without Assad, but we are under the control of HTS. And as you see, like as I said before, even HTS, they, we don't know if they believe in freedom of press, or democracy, or dignity. And HTS, again, they are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and they are a branch of Al-Qaeda. So, we still don't know if we will get our freedom of expression now, or we can practice freedom of press in Syria after all these 14 years we have been fighting for it. So let's see if we keep saying "we have been fighting for freedom" or sooner we will be able to say "we have fought for freedom but now finally we got it" or "we lost it." Who knows?

Dawn Garcia We have just 10 minutes or nine for some questions. I have a couple, but if you have any questions, send them in now. I can see them on the iPad. Years ago, we would, in our fellowship program at Stanford, we would bring journalists who, to get them out of harm's way for a year, and that was enough to get them out of the hot seat, to get them out of a situation. And now, many of you here, one year is not enough, and many of you are in exile. I would like to just ask some of you, what are your strategies for living and working in exile? And then what would you like this audience to know about how they can help promote your work, and what kind of help do you need from the community of journalists? So, some strategies maybe about being in exile and doing your work. Why don't we start here.

Mikhail Rubin Okay, thank you very much for this question. I already mentioned it during my speech, but I am happy to say it again. Well, we are in a position today that we want to address not only our audience, but also Western audience. When we left the country, our strategy was, in any way, to go on working for Russians, to explain to them how terrible Vladimir Putin's regime is whatever would that cost, our strategy was to still try to reach Russian audience. That was extremely important for us. But unfortunately now we are in the position when we have to survive, and we will not survive working only for the Russian audience. That's why the strategy now is to try to reach also the Western audience. That's why again, I'm happy to find somebody to collaborate who are interested in Russian investigations.

Dawn Garcia We can give you his email. I wanted to ask, Dieu-Nalio. It was an amazing, scary, moving presentation. You're working on journalism now to document the diaspora, right? And I wanted you to hear a little bit about the Springfield, Missouri. Some of you may remember why Springfield Missouri is kind of an important city with the new administration. So what is that chapter going to be about?

Dieu-Nalio Chery Yeah, thank you for this question. This chapter is about this vibrant community in Springfield because during the presidential debate, so they mentioned Haitians in Springfield. I don't need to repeat what they say. And then, so I said, "This is a good moment to focus on this community." Because normally sometimes they misrepresented, and I didn't want to do the same way as the traditional media did, but I want to spend more time with the Haitians over there to see how they live, what people criticize them. Because normally as a journalist, sometimes you need more time to spend in the community to understand them better than just show up, and take some few pictures, and some interviews, and just leave the place. But I spent some time there seeing how they are struggling over there, you know. As you know, Haitian people, they

are very hard workers, so they are working very hard. And you know with my documenting, I try to go back in the community, show the residents in Springfield how the Haitians are working very hard, how they are working to help the economy in the Springfield grow.

Dawn Garcia Great, thank you so much. I'm just kind of lightening around here on questions. So Gregory, you'd mentioned you were, how long were you in hiding when we were trying to, he was answering us though, plan his interview and the fellowship program? How long did you have to leave?

Gregory Gondwe I think I was in hiding for close to eight months.

Dawn Garcia Eight months, okay. And then you were able to come back?

Gregory Gondwe Yes, I was able to come back because I think I'm also reflecting on the question that you asked Mikhail. Because I think sometimes the journalism job is like a lonely job, especially when you don't have support of others. But I think I should praise the good, especially from the diplomatic community, and the institutions like the international institutions that are for the media freedom. Because the more noise they make, it kind of helps you to break some chains that the systems are trying to shackle you down with. So I think when the USA embassy in Malawi, as well as the EU, as well as the British High Commission, started speaking to President Chakwera and the military command, there were some agreements that they set out, which allowed them to give me passage, which allowed, at least for me, to travel back. And because JSK Fellowship is one where you are allowed to travel with your family, I also had to facilitate getting some passports for my daughters so that I could travel with them here. So I think that period of about three months that I went back, I was able to do all that and fly to the U.S. with my family.

Dawn Garcia So shining a light on your situation is a good idea. Okay, quick, we have just a couple minutes. So Luz Mely, I was wondering, how long have you been in exile, and what is your piece of advice for journalists who are just beginning to be in exile?

Luz Mely Reyes I consider myself in exile since a year ago, when my passport was concealed twice, not once, twice, and then I can't go back to my country. So my only piece of advice is try to take the connection between the mission that you have doing journalism in your country. Because I understand that we have to live here in this day, and it's a very different situation, but I grow up as a journalist in my country. So I devote to work for my country for not only for audiences, for the community. So right now, the only piece of advice, I'm sorry, is try to bring together a lot of journalists that are in exile and try to create connection and networking between them. Because this is a trend that is growing also, and we have a lot of skill, a lot of competencies that we have to bring together to work for our country.

Dawn Garcia Thank you, so Lina, I'm going to ask you the last question and maybe we can end on a bit of an up note after a lot of really important but sobering reporting. And so you're at Harvard this year as a Nieman Fellow. So tell us one thing that you're doing there that is just really enjoyable or what you're working on.

Lina Chawaf Yeah, actually, I'm working about documenting my experience through Syria, the story that you saw already. But I really, I want to say something like, in the beginning you talk about USAID, it's very important to keep the independent media in the world because it's not connected to Syria or any country of those. Independent media means fighting the hate speech, and this is very important for the whole world. Hate speech is

bringing extremists for the whole world, and this is what I have been saying since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution. And Syrians, when they went into the street asking for freedom, dignity, and democracy, they were looking at a country like USA, so I think we have to keep fighting even here to keep freedom of expression, and democracy, and dignity.

Dawn Garcia I think that's a fantastic way to end. Let us give a great round of applause for this courageous and resilient group of journalists.