

# Human Rights & Press Freedom



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# James Foley, Photojournalist



“He was not a warrior soul, not a ‘live by the sword, die by the sword’ person. He believed that stories are worth risking your life for, in places where people have been silenced”

Tzivia Gover, former supervisor of Jim Foley;  
Quoted in the University of Massachusetts Alumni Magazine, Fall 2014

# NO FREE PRESS/MEDIA: NO DEMOCRACY!



- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:**
  - Articles 19 (free expression) & 24 (democracy)
- **US Constitution: Bill of Rights 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment**

# NO FREE PRESS/MEDIA: NO DEMOCRACY



- **Inform/educate;** provides differing viewpoints
- **Accountability:** Government/Corporate leaders
- **Expose** hidden corruption/conflicts of interest
  
- Watergate, Pentagon Papers, NSA Spying
- Dangerous oil trains in city; public/charter school funding/test cheating scandals
- Life threatening faults in building inspections
- Comcast conflicts of interest in net neutrality

# Journalists at Risk: Stark Facts



- **Journalists killed:** 1,123 since 1992; 61: 2014; 21 in 2015 as of 5/01/15
  - 746 murdered; 651 with complete impunity
  - 229 in cross fire/combat
  - 145 on dangerous assignment
- **Beats:** Politics: 46%; War: 38%; Human Rights: 20%; Corruption: 20%; Crime:15%
- **Iraq:** 166; **Syria:** 80; **Philippines:** 77;; **Algeria:**60; **Pakistan:** 56; **Russia:** 56; **Somalia:** 56

# Stark Facts



- **Journalists forced into exile: 404 since 2009**
- **Due to imprisonment or threat of imprisonment; violence or threat of violence; harassment**
- **Top Countries: Iran 77, Syria 44, Somalia 42**
- **Africa: 40%; Middle East/N. Africa: 36%; Asia: 11%; Americas: 11%; Europe/Central Asia: 2%**

# Stark Facts



- **Journalists jailed: 221 in 2014**
  - China: 44; Iran: 30; Eritrea: 23; Ethiopia: 17; Vietnam: 16; Egypt: 12; Syria: 12
- **Medium:** Internet: 120; Print: 83; Radio: 15; TV: 14
- **Charges:** Anti-state (treason, subversion, acting against national interests): 60%; none disclosed: 20%; defamation, ethnic/religious insult, false news: 7%;

“ Today, even places that shouldn’t be dangerous for journalists are dangerous. Whole stretches of Muslim countries are becoming off limits. This is a minor facet of a much larger calamity, but it has consequences: the problems of Afghanistan & Pakistan & Syria & Iraq are not going away; **our ability to see these problems, however, is becoming progressively more circumscribed**”

“Before the Beheadings: Remembering a Time When Islamist extremists wanted to persuade reporters, not kill them”, Jeffrey Goldberg, *The Atlantic*, December 2014





# Terrorism's Dual Dangers To Free Press



- **Two Ways Terrorists Can Win:**
  1. If Acts of Terror Shut Down Media Due to Actual Attacks/Fear of Attacks, e.g., *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris
  2. If Governments Use Terrorist Threats as an Excuse to Clamp Down on Dissent, Criticism or Questioning
- **Questionable US Allies in countering terrorism:**
  - Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates: **None have a Free Press**
  - China: used *Charlie Hebdo* killings as an example of dangers of a free press & as a reason why there should be limits on free speech

# Human Rights and Counter Terrorism



- **DANGER:** Human Rights, particularly freedom of expression, will be compromised amid response
- **KEY QUESTIONS:**
  - How will the “countering violent extremism” initiative differentiate between legitimate criticism of, or resistance to, foreign policy?
  - How will the US respond to autocratic governments that use the initiative to counter domestic dissent?

# Human Rights and Counter Terrorism



“We’re sitting in that room with representatives of governments that are part of the problem.”

“If the president believes what he’s saying, then the actions that these governments are taking are undermining our supposedly shared agenda.”

“That has to stop, or we can have summits every month, but we’re not going to win.”

- Elisa Massimino, President & CEO, Human Rights First; after attending White House conference on combatting violent extremism, “On Terror: Gentle Hand or Iron Fist”, Peter Baker, Judith Hirschfeld Davis, *New York Times*, 2/19/15

# Freedom House Media Rankings\*



- **Results 2015 Report out of 199 countries:**
  - 32% free; 36% partly free; 32% not free
  - *Declined to lowest point in more than a decade*
  - Includes all forms of media
- **World Population & Free Media:**
  - 14% Free; 42% Partly Free; 44% Not Free
  - China not free; India partly free: 1/3 of humanity

\*Freedom House information from *Freedom of the Press 2015* except positive trends which is from *Freedom of the Press 2014*

# Freedom House Media Rankings:2015



- **Worst**: N. Korea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Eritrea, Crimea (territory), Belarus, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Syria
- **Best**: Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Andorra, Liechtenstein
- **US**: 22<sup>nd</sup> ; **Russia**: 180<sup>th</sup>; **China**: 186<sup>th</sup>
- **Most Improvement**: Tunisia, Myanmar, Libya, Togo, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Niger

# Freedom House



- **Key Reasons for decline in free media in 2014**
  - Increased use of restrictive laws
  - Increased physical violence vs. media
  - More areas inaccessible
  - Increased use of propaganda by states & non-state actors
  - More controlling content via state ownership/pressure, private sector cronies

# Freedom House on the United States



- **Strong rating (22nd) but lost ground in 2014:**
  - Continued unwillingness of **high government officials** to provide access and information to press of information coming out of White House
  - Harassment & detentions of journalists by police in Ferguson, Missouri
  - Obama Administration use of Espionage Act of 1917 eight times to prosecute alleged leaks of classified information
  - **NSA mass surveillance** of metadata, phone records, digital info a continued concern
  - Lack of “**protection of source**” **legislation** at the federal level



# Freedom House



- **Positive Global Trends:**
  - More private outlets licensed
  - More diverse news sources via access to online media, social media, transnational outlets
  - Improved legal environments, e.g., Better performance by governments/judiciaries upholding constitutional free expression plus new constitutions with more protections

"The **best of journalism happens** when we take a stand: when we question those who are in power, when we confront the politicians who abuse their authority, when we denounce an injustice,"

"The **best of journalism happens** when we side with the victims, with the most vulnerable, with those who have no rights.

Jorge Ramos, News Anchor, Univision, CPJ International Press Freedom Awards Dinner, 11/25/14

