

The Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press



Congressman Adam B. Schiff, Co-Chair
Congressman Mike Pence, Co-Chair

Senator Chris Dodd, Co-Chair
Senator Richard Lugar, Co-Chair

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

June 27, 2006

Dear Madame Secretary:

We are writing to urge you to ask Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov to reaffirm the Kremlin's commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law when you meet with him next week in Moscow.

As the co-founders of the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press, we are especially concerned about the persecution of journalists in Russia, which has been occurring with increasing frequency, severity, and impunity. An independent media is essential to maintaining the principle and practice of democracy, and the right of freedom of expression is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and other international agreements to which Russia is a part.

The case of Paul Klebnikov, the Russian-American editor of *Forbes Russia* who was murdered in Moscow in July 2004, is a tragic example of the kind of murder of journalists that have gone unresolved under President Putin's Administration. Klebnikov was a courageous reporter who revealed corruption but also celebrated democratic progress in Russia, and his murder reveals both the importance of objective reporting in Russia as well as the dangers faced by journalists in that country.

Last month, on World Press Freedom Day, Paul Klebnikov's widow, Musa, celebrated the launch of the Congressional Caucus for Press Freedom and spoke passionately of her late husband's belief that without freedom of the press there is no civil society and can be no true democracy. Unfortunately, a Russian court acquitted two Chechen gunman who were thought to be the triggermen in this murder.

Klebnikov family attorneys have filed court papers detailing numerous procedural violations committed during the trial by the presiding judge and defense attorneys, but trial protocols are being withheld and this appeal is not being considered by the Moscow City Court. We fear the Russian government simply wants this case to fade away. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Mr. Klebnikov's murder exposed the problem of violence against journalists in Russia and increased the awareness of widespread threats to press freedom there, but it is not an isolated case. Klebnikov was the twelfth reporter to be killed in mafia-style assassinations in direct reprisals for their journalism in Russia since President Putin came to power in 2000, and not one of the murderers has been brought to justice. Russian laws concerning the press also fall beneath European standards. Criminal libel legislation is still used to intimidate and persecute journalists who criticize the government or its allies.

The Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press was created to highlight and condemn media censorship and the persecution of journalists around the world. We urge you to call upon the Government of Russia to continue its investigation into Paul Klebnikov's murder and to prosecute all those responsible. Furthermore, we ask that you take the opportunity of your upcoming meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov to ask for appropriate action to protect the independence and freedom of journalists in Russia.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter and your ongoing efforts to promote democracy and human rights around the world.

Respectfully,


REP. ADAM B. SCHIFF


REP. MIKE PENCE


SEN. CHRISTOPHER DODD


SEN. RICHARD LUGAR