



Alexander Tokovinin
Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Belgium

4 November 2020

Concern: Call to End Impunity for Killers of Journalists in Russia

Your Excellency,

We are writing as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the world's largest organisation of media professionals representing over 600.000 members in more than 140 countries, to urge your government to address the issue of impunity for violence against journalists in Russia.

The IFJ's principal mandate is to promote and defend the rights of journalists, including the right to life and physical safety. In this regard, we constantly monitor violations of our members' rights around the world and we publish an annual report on journalists and media staff who are killed for no other reason than the legitimate practice of their profession.

On the UN's International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the IFJ has launched its annual campaign to 'End Impunity for violence against journalists', focusing on Mexico, Russia, Yemen, Somalia and India. We are mobilising our 187 affiliates worldwide to highlight the impunity in these countries. You can view the campaign [here](#).

According to our records, 17 journalists have been killed in Russia since 2005 and five of the murders remain unsolved.

One of the most prominent cases of impunity for crimes against journalists is that of Anna Politkovskaya from Novaya Gazeta who was shot dead in October 2006. She was well-known for her reporting on human rights abuses by the Russian military in Chechnya. The investigations into her murder and the following series of trials were characterized by various setbacks and inconsistencies. In June 2014, five perpetrators were sentenced to prison terms but to date, the mastermind behind the crime has not been found.

It is unacceptable that investigations are stopped when those who executed the crime are found while the masterminds behind the crimes remain unpunished. This is also the case in the murder of Nikolai Potapov in 2013. While three men without personal motives were sentenced to prison terms, those who ordered the killing were never found. Several other murders of journalists remain completely unpunished. In the cases of Timur Kuashev in 2014 and



Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev in 2013, none of the killers was brought to justice. The fact that the perpetrators and masterminds behind crimes against journalists remain unpunished sends a troubling message that paves the way for continued violence against journalists.

In 2020, the Council of Europe's [Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists](#) registered 13 violations of press freedom, among them death threats, arrests, beatings and assaults in Russia. These numbers are unacceptable.

The shocking suicide of Irina Slavina in October this year demonstrates the dramatic consequences harassment of journalists can have. Slavina set herself on fire in front of the police quarters in Nizhniy Novgorod where she died from the burnings. Slavina had been repeatedly harassed by Russian authorities for reporting on the pro-opposition movement. The day before her suicide, police raided her home. The circumstances of her death and the harassment leading up to her death must be thoroughly investigated and the people responsible for the harassment must be brought to justice.

Together with our affiliate in Russia, the Russian Union of Journalists (RUJ), we demand your government, judiciary and law enforcement agencies undertake complete and effective investigations of all violations of journalists' rights and bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against journalists.

We urge your government to dispel the impression of indifference in the face of deadly assaults against journalists. There is so much more that can be done with a genuine commitment to fighting impunity. It needs to start with justice for the victims of violence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Anthony BELLANGER'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Anthony Bellanger
IFJ General Secretary