

Questions Submitted by the Audience

Answers Provided by

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Were there any attempts to create an investigative group of international journalists to investigate such cases as Elmar Huseynov's assassination? The FBI participated in early investigations of this case. Did CPJ or any other groups ask for their findings?

Answer:

In the case of Elmar Huseynov, an FBI agent – Brian Parman – participated in the forensic investigation early in the murder probe. However, there wasn't a follow-up and the Azerbaijani government has not sought help from U.S. authorities since.

As for creating an international investigative journalist group: on May 28, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) announced in Moscow the launch of an international commission of inquiry into the killings of Russian journalists. (It was during the IFJ Congress, which was hosted by the Russian Union of Journalists in Moscow this year.) The commission's research is to mainly be the work of two leading Russian press freedom group – the Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (CJES) and the Glasnost Defence Foundation (GDF).

Seven journalists are currently detained in Azerbaijan. What are the recorded numbers of detained journalists in other countries in the region – Armenia, Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan?

Answer:

Azerbaijan is the leading jailer of journalists in the region. Uzbekistan is the runner-up in this dishonorable ranking – with five behind bars. Russia and Armenia come third and fourth – with two and one behind bars, respectively. CPJ publishes an updated list of journalists in prison in December every year. It can be accessed at: www.cpj.org.

Nina Ognianova said the U.S. cannot be indifferent and should do something about press freedom in Russia. What are some of the things can and should the U.S. do, particularly in North Caucasus?

Answer:

1. The U.S. government should take every opportunity to make press freedom a priority, which would include raising press freedom concerns consistently in any bilateral meetings or international summits involving states from the region.

2. Concerning press freedom in Russia:

- The U.S. government should publicly renew its offer to assist Russian authorities in the investigation of the 2004 murder of U.S. journalist **Paul Klebnikov**. The Moscow City Court jury trial of two suspects in the killing is currently in limbo because of Russian authorities' inability to locate and apprehend one of them—Kazbek Dukuzov—who went missing in March. CPJ encourages the U.S. government to press for the apprehension of Dukuzov, and to press Russian authorities to further identify and apprehend the alleged masterminds of Klebnikov's murder, who remain at large more than three years after the crime.
- The U.S. government should request regularly reports from Russian authorities updating the progress of the murder investigations of both Paul Klebnikov and **Anna Politkovskaya**. Both Klebnikov and Politkovskaya—who was slain in a contract-style hit in 2006—were U.S. citizens; due to that fact, the U.S. government is uniquely placed to positively influence the progress in each of their murder investigations. The solving of both these high-profile, journalist assassinations would set a positive precedent. Fourteen journalists have been murdered for their work with impunity in Russia since 2000; justice in Politkovskaya's and Klebnikov's cases would finally help overturn this record.
- The U.S. government should continue keeping close tabs on the progress of the investigations of the twelve other work-related murders of journalists committed in Russia since 2000. One case where the Russian authorities are making marked progress is that of the 2000 murder of *Novaya Gazeta* journalist **Igor Domnikov**. Five suspects currently stand before a court in Kazan, in the republic of Tatarstan, for killing Domnikov. But the alleged masterminds of the murder are not prosecuted. The U.S. government should call on Russian authorities to ensure that the criminal investigation includes prosecution of the intellectual authors of the crime. If the masterminds in this case were to be prosecuted, Domnikov's case would become the first journalist murder case in contemporary Russia, where both the immediate killers along with those who hired them would finally be brought to justice. This would set a watershed precedent.

3. Concerning press freedom in Azerbaijan:

- The U.S. government should encourage Azerbaijani authorities to resolve the contract-style slaying of opposition editor **Elmar Huseynov** in Baku in March 2005. To date Azerbaijani authorities have made no known progress in finding and prosecuting his killers. One former colleague of Huseynov's—independent editor **Eynulla Fatullayev**—was jailed on trumped-up charges of allegedly defaming Azerbaijanis shortly after publishing his own investigation into Huseynov's murder in his now-shuttered weekly *Realny Azerbaijan*. Huseynov's murder and Fatullayev's imprisonment have had a chilling effect on the practice of critical journalism across the country. Violence against Azerbaijani reporters is not only frequent but it also nearly always goes unpunished. The U.S. government

should press Azerbaijani authorities to resolve Huseynov's murder and the 2006 brutal attacks against opposition journalists **Fikret Huseinli** and **Bakhaddin Khaziyev**. After having received phone death threats that warned him to discontinue his reporting, Huseinli, who was investigating alleged government corruption at the time, was kidnapped on March 5, 2006, and his throat slashed by unidentified assailants in a Baku suburb. After having written articles critical of high-ranking security officials, Khaziyev was abducted by five men on the outskirts of Baku on May 19, 2006. The assailants beat him over several hours, and drove over his legs with a car. Both Khaziyev's and Huseinli's attackers are still at large.

- The U.S. government should press Azerbaijani authorities to release journalists held behind bars for their work. Azerbaijan currently imprisons seven journalists, making the nation the top jailer of journalists in Europe and Central Asia. Most disturbing in all these cases is the fact that most journalists are held on criminal charges filed by public officials. Defamation remains a criminal offense in Azerbaijan. The U.S. government should call on Azerbaijani authorities to release the seven jailed journalists, and to also take steps to decriminalize defamation as part of an effort to reverse the country's deplorable press freedom record.