

Tale ved utdeling av Fritt Ords pressepriser

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Av: [Statssekretær Morten Høglund](#)

Honoured laureates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honoured to have been invited to this prestigious event here at the Nobel Institute. This is a day of celebration, but given the troubling developments we are seeing in the world today, it is also a day of concern.

Every year Fritt Ord and Zeit-Stiftung award prizes to outstanding journalists and representatives of the media in Russia and Eastern Europe.

This year, the prizes are being awarded to six courageous journalists and media outlets from Russia, Ukraine and Georgia.

In my view, the jury has once again made an excellent decision.

The laureates - the weekly newspaper Pskovskaya Guberniya and editor Galina Timchenko from Russia, the news agency Slidstvo.Info and the journalists Serhiy Harmash and Valentyna Samar from Ukraine, along with the online medium Netgazeti from Georgia - know what freedom of expression really means.

You have promoted free speech and independent media in your own countries, in different ways, and often under severe pressure.

I am delighted to see you here in Oslo to receive your awards.

Promoting freedom of expression and strengthening the independent media are key priorities for the Norwegian government.

Why?

Because freedom of expression is the foundation on which all other democratic freedom rest. It is essential for the realisation of other fundamental rights, like freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and the right to information. It is a cornerstone of democracy.

Today, however, freedom of expression is under pressure in a number of countries, not the least in Russia and Eastern Europe. It is one of the most severely threatened human rights.

The appalling attacks in Paris and Copenhagen earlier this year are a clear reminder that freedom of expression must never be taken for granted, neither in Europe nor elsewhere in the world.

Freedom House recently presented its annual report on freedom of the press. The report found that global press freedom declined in 2014 to its lowest point in a decade, with only one in seven people living in a country with a fully free media.

Impunity, restrictions on access to information, defamation suits, restrictive media laws and censorship continue to undermine freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

The ability of journalists to gain access to and report freely from certain countries, and from protest sites and conflict areas, has also declined dramatically.

As the ancient Greek dramatist Aeschyles wrote: "In war, truth is the first casualty", and he has been quoted ever since. His words still ring true today, not least when we think of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Propaganda can be spread easily through the social media. As it can through state-controlled media. Today, we are faced with competing versions of events and different so-called "truths".

Journalists working in the field and trying to decipher the facts have a hugely important job, perhaps more so than ever before.

The Norwegian government recently presented the first Norwegian white paper on human rights in fifteen years. It puts human rights at the centre of our foreign and development policy, and identifies freedom of expression as one of Norway's main priorities.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently drawing up a strategy to strengthen our efforts in this field. We are already doing a lot.

We promote freedom of expression in the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. We support the work of freedom of expression organisations and media organisations, and we support efforts to provide safety training to journalists.

We were especially pleased to provide support for the safety handbook for journalists working in Russia and Ukraine, which was published last week by the International Federation of Journalists and the Norwegian Union of Journalists.

The handbook is the result of a joint initiative by Russian and Ukrainian journalists. It is hoped that the handbook will also be useful for many other journalists working in conflict areas or hostile environments.

We now intend to intensify our work to promote freedom of expression and the independent media through even more targeted action at all levels.

We all know only too well that journalists in many countries are harassed, threatened and even killed for simply doing their jobs and reporting events as they see them.

Some of the laureates recognised here today have taken serious personal risks in connection with their work. Some have even had to leave their home countries.

Honoured laureates,

You are brave. You are an inspiration to all of us that believe in the value of freedom of expression and independent media.

I urge you to continue your important work. Do not lose courage when you are confronted with new obstacles. Please keep exercising your right to freedom of expression.

I wish you very success in your future reporting.

Thank you.