

Tale ved utdeling av Fritt Ords pressepriser

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Sigrun Slapgard, styremedlem Fritt Ord

Ladies and gentlemen – on behalf of Free Word I wish you welcome to this awards ceremony – and a most special and warm welcome to the price winners.

Welcome also to State Secretary Morten Høglund from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For us in Free Word – and for me, being myself a journalist, this is a day of great importance. The brave work we are about to honour, goes to the core of our priorities and brings us directly to the most important challenges of our times.

To be a journalist, in my view, is to take responsibility for true and critical historytelling. We need a warm heart and a cold brain, a former colleague of mine once said. But both capacities come at a cost. In many countries at an increasing cost. It is a fact that journalists all over the world are under threat or they are being hampered in their work. Only this year we have so far seen 42 killings of journalists at work. Also in our own neighbourhood we have seen some serious setbacks as for the situation of journalists at work this last year.

In particular, it seems to be an increasing tendency that journalists are denied possibilities to live and work in their homecountries. Several journalists around the globe are forced to flee in order to survive and continue their work.

As I prepared for welcoming you last night – I also reported about increasing tensions between NATO and Russia. Here, today, we are specially concerned about the worsening situation for those trying to report from inside Russia and in Ukraine. It is deeply worrying that our powerful neighbor in East seems to be moving backwards when it comes to the basic fundament for democracy – namely a free press and freedom of expression. The seriousness of the matter is illustrated by journalists having to flee in order to continue their work.

We have two outstanding examples among our prize winners here today, who both have had to escape their own homeplace. Galina Timtsjenko – now working for a free Russian press from her new base in Latvia – and Valentyna Samar who had to get away from her Crimea after threats.

It is impressive – and an important message to us all – that you both continue your work.

This year we don't have any prize winner from Azerbaijan – this does not mean that we do not follow the situation there closely. One of our earlier prizewinners, Khadija Ismayilova, is still kept in prison – but there is an ongoing campaign world wide both to continue her work and to get her released.

Fritt Ord is also continuing to support other journalists working out of Azerbaijan – and our governing board will this coming autumn visit the country for a closer follow up on the issues of freedom of speech.

It seems to me that it might also be brave to come here and receive your prizes. For us, living under different conditions, it is very much needed and necessary to learn from your stories. Thank you all for coming – and thank all of you in particular who are willing to risk so much for taking responsibility for truthtelling and building the cornerstones of civil rights and democracy.

On behalf of Free Word I also would like to thank Die Zeit Stiftung for an ongoing and very good cooperation for more than ten years – I think we share the opinion that this is one of our most important tasks – and specially in the present climate between East and West.

Thank you all and welcome, once again.