

THE FORBIDDEN TIMES

Denne avisen er ulovlig i store deler av verden.
Les den for å vise din støtte til pressefriheten.



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FORORD

Lørdag 3. mai markeres pressefrihetens dag. En dag for å hylle alle forkjempere av det frie ord, men også for å minnes journalistene som har ofret livet i et av verdens farligste yrker.

Norge er verdensmestere i pressefrihet, og har de siste 8 årene toppet den internasjonale pressefrihetsindeksen. Samtidig viser indeksen at pressefriheten trues i stadig flere land, og vi som har de beste kår i verden har et spesielt ansvar.

I samarbeid med Nobels Fredssenter markerer Narvesen pressefrihetens dag med en avis som utelukkende består av artikler som på grunn av sensur, politisk kontroll eller undertrykkelse er forbudt å publisere i opprinnelseslandet.


Med god hjelp fra internasjonale redaksjoner og Helsingforskomiteen, har vi samlet et utvalg artikler som vanligvis ikke får den spalteplassen de fortjener. Artiklene er skrevet av modige journalister som har risikert - eller soner - straff for sin ytring i land hvor en artikkel kan føre til fengsel, en overskrift til overvåkning og et intervju til dødsstraff.

Ytringsfrihet har vært en hjertesak for Narvesen helt siden Bertrand Narvesen etablerte kjeden i 1894. I over 130 år har kioskkjeden bidratt til et rikt mediemangfold i Norge gjennom å tilby lesestoff fra hele verden.

Som en del av Reitan Retail, er Narvesen stolt hovedsamarbeidspartner med Nobels Fredssenter. Ytringsfrihet er en forutsetning for demokrati, frihet og fred. Gjennom tidene har flere journalister mottatt Nobels fredspris.

Vi ønsker å takke alle bidragsytere som har hjulpet oss med å sørge for at flere undertrykte, men desto viktigere, perspektiver får se dagens lys i denne avisen.

Vi håper du leser, reflekterer og deler videre.



Ole Robert Reitan
CEO Reitan Retail



Kjersti Fløgstad
Direktør Nobels
Fredssenter

For months, the BBC has been communicating in secret with three North Koreans living in the country. They expose, for the first time, the disaster unfolding there since the government sealed the borders more than three years ago. Starvation, brutal crackdowns, and no chance to escape. We have changed their names to protect them.

Inside North Korea

WE ARE STUCK. WAITING TO DIE.

BBC News (2023) | By Jean Mackenzie



- Forbudt i Nord-Korea
- Straff Fengsling i politiske leirer eller henrettelse.
- Journalisten risikerer diplomatisk press samt arrestasjon, fengsel og tvangsarbeid dersom hun er tilgjengelig for Nord-Koreanske myndigheter.

Myong Suk is hunched over her phone, desperately trying to make another sale. A shrewd businesswoman, she is secretly selling minuscule amounts of smuggled medicine to those who desperately need it - just enough so she can survive the day. She has already been caught once and could barely afford the bribe to stay out of prison. She cannot afford to be caught again. But at any moment there could be a knock on the door. It is not just the police she fears, it's her neighbours. There is now almost no-one she can trust.

This is not how it used to be.

Myong Suk's medicine business used to be thriving.

But on 27 January 2020 North Korea slammed shut its border in response to the pandemic, stopping not just people, but food and goods, from en-

tering the country. Its citizens, who were already banned from leaving, have been confined to their towns. Aid workers and diplomats have packed up and left. Guards are under order to shoot anyone even approaching the border. The world's most isolated country has become an information black hole.

Under the tyrannical rule of Kim Jong Un, North Koreans are forbidden from making contact with the outside world. With the help of the organisation Daily NK, which operates a network of sources inside the country, the BBC has been able to communicate with three ordinary people. They are eager to tell the world about the catastrophic toll the border closure has taken on their lives. They understand if the government discovers they are talking to us, they would likely be killed. To protect them, we can only reveal some of what

they have told us, yet their experiences offer an exclusive snapshot of the situation unfolding inside North Korea.

“Our food situation has never been this bad,” Myong Suk tells us.

Like most women in North Korea, she is the main earner in the family. The meagre wages men earn in their compulsory state jobs are all but worthless, forcing their wives to find creative ways to make a living.

Before the border closure, Myong Suk would arrange for much-needed drugs, including antibiotics, to be smuggled across from China, which she would sell at her local market. She needed to bribe the border guards, which ate up more than half of her profits, but she accepted this as part of the game. It allowed her to live a comfortable life in her town in the north of the country, along the vast border with China.

The responsibility to provide for her family has always caused her some stress, but now it consumes her. It has become nearly impossible to get hold of products to sell.

Once, in desperation, she tried to smuggle the medicine herself, but was caught, and now she is monitored constantly. She has tried selling North Korean medicine instead, but even that is hard to find these days, meaning her earnings have halved.

Now when her husband and children wake, she prepares them a breakfast of corn. Gone are the days they could eat plain rice. Her hungry neighbours have started knocking at the door asking for food, but she has to turn them away.

“We are living on the front line of life,” she says.

At first Chan Ho was afraid he might die from Covid, but as time went on, he began to worry about starving to death, especially as he watched those around him die.

The first family in his village to succumb to starvation was a mother and her children. She had become too sick to work. Her children kept her alive for as long as they could by begging for food, but in the end all three died. Next came a mother who was sentenced to hard labour for violating quarantine rules. She and her son starved to death.

More recently, one of his acquaintance’s sons was released from the

military because he was malnourished. Chan Ho remembers his face suddenly bloating. Within a week he had died.

“I can’t sleep when I think about my children, having to live forever in this hopeless hell,” he says.

Hundreds of miles away, in the relative affluence of the capital Pyongyang, where tower blocks line the city’s river, Ji Yeon rides the subway to work. She is exhausted, after a similarly sleepless night.

She has two children and her husband to support with the pennies she makes working in a food shop.

She used to sneak fruit and vegetables out of the shop to sell at the market, alongside cigarettes her husband received in bribes from his co-workers. She would buy rice with the money. Now her bags are thoroughly searched when she leaves, and her husband’s bribes have stopped coming. No-one can afford to give anything away.

“They’ve made it impossible to have a side-hustle,” she frets.

Ji Yeon now goes about her day pretending she has eaten three meals, when in truth she has eaten one. Hunger she can endure. It is better than having people know she is poor.

She is haunted by the week she was forced to eat puljuk – a mash of vegetables, plants and grass, ground into a porridge-like paste. The meal is synonymous with the very bleakest time in North Korea’s history – the devastating famine that ravaged the country in the 1990s, killing as many as three million people.

“We survive by thinking 10 days ahead, then another 10, thinking that if my husband and I starve, at least we will feed our kids,” Ji Yeon says. Recently she went two days without food.

“I thought I was going to die in my sleep and not wake up in the morning,” she says.

Despite her own hardship, Ji Yeon looks out for those worse off. There are more beggars now, and she stops to check on the ones lying down, but usually finds they are dead. One day she knocked on her neighbour’s door to give them water, but there was no answer. When the authorities went inside three days later, they discovered the whole family had starved to death.

“It’s a disaster,” she says. “With no supplies coming from the border, people do not know how to make a living.” Recently she has heard of people killing themselves at home, while others disappear into the mountains to die. She deplores the ruthless mentality that has blanketed the city.

“Even if people die next door, you only think about yourself. It’s heartless.”

For months, rumours have been swirling that people are starving to death, prompting fears North Korea could be on the brink of another famine. The economist Peter Ward, who studies North Korea, describes these accounts as “very concerning”.

“It’s all well and good to say you’ve heard about people starving to death, but when you actually know people in your immediate vicinity who are starving, this implies the food situation is very serious - more serious than we realised and worse than it has been since the famine in the late 1990s,” he says.

The North Korean famine marked a turning point in the country’s relatively short history, sparking a breakdown in its rigid social order. The state, unable to feed people, gave them fragments of freedom to do what they needed to survive. Thousands fled the country, and found refuge in South Korea, Europe, or the United States.

Meanwhile, private markets blossomed, as women began selling everything from soybeans, to used clothes and Chinese electronics. An informal economy was born, and with it a whole generation of North Koreans who have learnt to live with little help from the state – capitalists thriving in a repressive communist country.

As the market empties out for the day, and Myong Suk counts her reduced earnings, she worries the state is coming after her and this capitalist generation. The pandemic, she believes, has merely provided the authorities with the excuse to re-exert its diminished control over people’s lives. “Really they want to crack down on the smuggling and stop people escaping,” she says. “Now, if you even just approach the river to China, you’ll be given a harsh punishment.”

Chan Ho, the construction worker, is also nearing breaking point. This is the hardest period he has ever lived through. The famine

was difficult, he says, but there were not these harsh crackdowns and punishments. “If people wanted to escape, the state couldn’t do much,” he says.

“Now, one wrong step and you’re facing execution.”

His friend’s son recently witnessed several executions carried out by the state. In each instance three to four people were killed. Their crime was trying to escape.

“If I live by the rules, I’ll probably starve to death, but just by trying to survive, I fear I could be arrested, branded a traitor, and killed,” Chan Ho tells us.

“We are stuck here, waiting to die.”

Before the border closure, more than 1,000 escapees used to arrive in South Korea every year, but since then only a handful are known to have fled and made it to safety in the South.

Satellite imagery, analysed by the NGO Human Rights Watch, shows that authorities have spent the past three years building multiple walls, fences and guard posts to fortify the border - making it almost impossible to flee.

Merely trying to contact people outside the country is increasingly dangerous. In the past, residents near the border have been able to make secret phone calls abroad by connecting to Chinese mobile networks, using Chinese phones smuggled into the country. Now, at every community meeting, Chan Ho says anyone with a Chinese phone is told to turn themselves in. Recently Myong Suk’s acquaintance was caught talking to someone in China and was sent to a re-education prison for several years.

By cracking down on smuggling and people’s connection to the outside world, the state is stripping its citizens of their ability to fend for themselves, says Hanna Song from the North Korean Database Centre for Human Rights (NKDB).

“At a time when food is already scarce, it is fully aware of the damage this will cause,” she says.

→ Continue



“People were clamouring, saying they were going to starve, and for a few days the government released some emergency rice from its stockpiles.

Yet these extreme controls could not keep the coronavirus out. On 12 May 2022, almost two and a half years into the pandemic, North Korea confirmed its first official case.

With no means to test people, those with a fever were, in effect, locked in their homes for 10 days. They and their entire household were forbidden from taking a single step outside. As the outbreak spread, whole towns and streets were locked down, on some occasions for more than two weeks.

In Pyongyang, Ji Yeon watched from her window as some of her neighbours, who did not have enough food to last the lockdown, had vegetables put outside their door every other day. But up along the border there was no such help.

Myong Suk panicked. She was already living day to day, meaning her cupboards were empty. This is how she ended up frantically selling medicine in secret, convinced it would be better to earn money and risk catching the virus than risk starvation.

Chan Ho says five families were “half-dead” by the time they were released from a lockdown. They only survived by sneaking out to find food after dark. “Those strait-laced people who stayed at home could not survive,” he says.

“People were clamouring, saying they were going to starve, and for a few days the government released some emergency rice from its stockpiles.” There are reports that in some areas lockdowns were called off early when it became clear people would not otherwise survive.

Those who caught the virus could not rely on the country’s decrepit hospitals to treat them. Even basic medicine ran out. The official government advice was to use folk remedies to relieve symptoms. When Ji Yeon herself got sick, she desperately called her friends for tips. They recommended she drank boiling water infused with green onion roots.

According to Ji Yeon, many old people and children have died from Covid-19. In a coun-

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try where an estimated 40% of the population is malnourished, health experts say it makes sense that, unlike in other countries, children fell sick. One of the city's doctors told Ji Yeon that during the outbreak about one in 550 people in each neighbourhood in Pyongyang died. If extrapolated to the rest of the country, that would equate to more than 45,000 deaths - hundreds of times the official death toll of 74. But everyone was given an alternative cause of death, she was told, be it tuberculosis or liver cirrhosis.

In August 2022, three months after the outbreak, the government declared victory over the virus, claiming it had been eradicated from the country. Yet many of the quarantine measures and rules are still in place.

When Kim Jong Un sealed the border in such an extreme manner, he surprised the international community. North Korea is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world, due to its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It is banned from selling its resources abroad, and unable to import the fuel it needs to function. Why, many asked, would a country already in economic ruin willingly inflict so much pain upon itself?

"I think the leaders decided that Covid-19 could kill a lot of people, or at least the wrong kinds of people, the people they feared dying," says Peter Ward, referring to the military and elite who keep the Kim family in power. With one of the worst healthcare systems in the world, and a malnourished and unvaccinated population, it was reasonable to assume many would die.

But according to Hanna Song from NKDB, Covid has also presented Kim Jong Un with the perfect opportunity to re-exert control over people's lives.

"This is what he has secretly wanted to do for a really long time," she says. "His priority has always been to isolate and control his people as much as possible."

After preparing and eating her meagre dinner, Ji Yeon washes the dishes and cleans her home once over with a damp towel. She climbs into bed early, hoping for a better night's rest. She will probably manage more hours' sleep than Chan Ho. Work is so busy now, he often has to sleep at his construction site.

But in the relative quiet of her border town, Myong Suk steals a moment to unwind, sitting with her family to watch TV, using a battery they have charged up during the day.

She particularly enjoys South Korean TV dramas, even though they are forbidden. The shows are smuggled across the border on micro-SD cards and sold in secret. The most recent release Myong Suk saw was about a K-pop star who shows up at his family's house claiming to be their long-lost son. Since the border closure, hardly any new shows have made it into the country, she says. Plus, the crackdown has been so strong that people are being more careful.

She is referring to the Reactionary Ideology and Culture Rejection Act, passed in December 2020. Under this law, those who smuggle foreign videos into the country and distribute them can be executed. Chan Ho calls this "the scariest new law of all". Merely watching the videos can lead to 10 years in prison. The purpose of the law, according to a copy of the text obtained by the news organisation Daily NK, is to prevent the spread of "a rotten ideology that depraves our society".

The one thing Kim Jong Un is thought to fear above all else is his people learning about the prosperous and free world that exists outside their borders, and waking up to the lies they are being sold.

Chan Ho says since the law was passed, foreign videos have almost disappeared. Only the younger generation dares to watch them, causing their parents immense worry.

Ji Yeon recounts a recent public trial in Pyongyang. The local leaders were gathered to judge a 22-year-old man who had been sharing South Korean songs and films. He was sentenced to 10 years and three months in a hard-labour camp. Before 2020, Ji Yeon says this would have been a quiet trial, with perhaps one year in prison.

"People were shocked how much harsher the punishment was," she says. "It's so scary, the way they are targeting young people."

Ryu Hyun Woo, a former North Korean diplomat who defected from the government in 2019, says the law was introduced to ensure young people's loyalty, because they have grown up with such a different attitude from that

of their parents. "We grew up receiving gifts from the state, but under Kim Jong Un the country has given people nothing," he says. Young people now question what the country has ever done for them.

To enforce the law, the government has created groups that go around "ruthlessly" cracking down on anything deemed anti-socialist, says Ji Yeon. "People don't trust each other now. The fear is great."

Ji Yeon herself was taken in for questioning under the new law. Since her interrogation, she never reveals to others what she really thinks. She is more afraid of people now.

This erosion of trust concerns Prof Andrei Lankov, who has been studying North Korea for 40 years. "If people don't trust each other, there is no starting point for resistance," he says. "What that means is North Korea can stabilise and last for years and decades to come."

In January 2023 the government passed yet another law, banning people from using words associated with the South Korean dialect. Breaking this law can, in the most extreme cases, also result in execution. Ji Yeon says there are now too many laws to remember, and that people are being taken away without even knowing which one they have supposedly violated. When they ask, the prosecutors simply respond by saying: "You don't need to know which law you have broken."

"What these three North Korean people have shared supports the incredible idea that North Korea is even more repressive and totalitarian than it has ever been before," says Sokeel Park, from the organisation Liberty in North Korea, that helps North Korean escapees.

"This is devastating tragedy that is unfolding," he says.

Recently there have been signs the authorities could be preparing to open the border. Myong Suk and Chan Ho, who live along the border, say most of those in their towns have now been vaccinated against Covid - with the Chinese vaccine they presume - while in Pyongyang. Ji Yeon says a good number of people have received two shots. Furthermore, customs data shows the country is once again allowing some grain and flour over the border from China, possibly in an attempt to ease

shortages and stave off a much-feared famine.

But when North Korea finally decides to reopen, it is unlikely people's old freedoms will be returned, says Chad O'Carroll, who runs the North Korea monitoring platform NK Pro.

"These systems of control that have emerged during the pandemic are likely to cement. This will make it harder for us to understand the country, and sadly much harder for North Koreans to understand what is happening outside of what they are told."

There are small signs however that the regime will not emerge unscathed from the hardship it has inflicted on its people over the past three years.

Chan Ho says during the week, people do not think much about changing the system. They are so focused on finding one meal a day, simply happy to have food in front of them. But come the weekend, he, Myong Suk, and Ji Yeon have time to reflect.

They must attend their weekly Life Review Session, compulsory for every citizen. Here they admit to their mistakes and failures, whilst reporting the shortcomings of their neighbours. The sessions are designed to encourage good behaviour and root out dissidents. They could never admit to it in the classroom, but Chan Ho says people have stopped believing the propaganda on TV.

"The state tells us we are nestling in our mother's bosom. But what kind of mother would execute their child in broad daylight for running to China because they were starving?" he asks.

"Before Covid, people viewed Kim Jong Un positively," says Myong Suk, "but now almost everyone is full of discontent."





Tidligere ukrainske spesialsoldater fra “Berkut” i tjeneste for diktatur i Belarus

Novy Chas (2020) | Tekst Dzianis Ivashyn

→ Fakta

Belarus er fortsatt et av Europas farligste land for journalister, med massiv undertrykkelse av frie medier etter presidentvalget i august 2020. Rundt 400 journalister har flyktet i eksil (kilde: BAI), og de som blir igjen jobber i skjul, ofte utsatt for overvåking, vold og fengsling. Uavhengig journalistikk regnes nå som ekstremisme, og er straffbart med inntil 7 års fengsel.

→ Forbudt i Belarus

→ Straff
Forfatteren Dzianis Ivashyn ble dømt til 13 år i fengsel for å ha skrevet og publisert denne artikkelen.

Dzianis Ivashyn er en undersøkende journalist fra Hrodna i Belarus. Han har skrevet om russisk innflytelse i Belarus og Syria, og hans siste artikkel avslørte at tidligere ukrainske «Berkut»-offiserer har fått jobb i det belarusiske opprørspolitiet.

I mars 2021 ble Ivashyn arrestert av KGB. Han ble siktet for å ha «påvirket en politimann» ved å avsløre hemmelig informasjon, og senere også for «landsforræderi». I september 2022 ble han dømt til 13 år og 1 måneds fengsel i en straffekoloni. Retten påla ham også bøter og erstatning til ni politifolk. Rettsaken ble holdt bak lukkede dører.

Dette er et fragment av en tredelt etterforskning utført av Dzianis Ivashyn for Novy Chas, et uavhengig belarusisk utsalgssted. Etterforskningen var grunnen for dommen.

Tidligere ukrainske spesial-soldater fra «Berkut» i tjeneste for diktatur i Belarus
Under revolusjonen i Ukraina

i 2014, kjent som Maidan eller Revolusjonen for verdighet, sto spesialstyrken «Berkut» på regimets side. De brukte brutal makt for å forsvare president Viktor Janukovitsj. Etter at regimet falt, flyktet mange av disse soldatene – ikke bare til Russland og de okkuperte områdene i Ukraina, men også til Belarus.

Flere tidligere «Berkut»-soldater har senere blitt identifisert som medlemmer av den belarusiske opprørspolitiet (OMON), et viktig verktøy for å slå ned på protester i landet. En ny etterforskning avslører at minst fem av disse har fått både statsborgerskap og jobb i sikkerhetsstyrkene i Belarus.

En av de mest fremtredende er Sergej Panasenکو. Etter å ha blitt avslørt i en tidligere rapport i 2017, forsøkte han å skjule sin identitet på sosiale medier. Men med hjelp av nettarkiver og åpen kilde-granskning (OSINT), ble det likevel bekreftet at han jobber i OMON i Minsk.

Han har vært involvert i flere aksjoner mot aktivister i Belarus.

Blant annet vitnet han i retten mot opposisjonspolitiker Zmitser Dashkevich, og deltok i arrestasjonen av to brødre som prøvde å klage på valgprosessen i 2020.

Gjennom videre granskning ble det også oppdaget at flere tidligere «Berkut»-soldater har sluttet seg til sikkerhetsstyrkene i Russland og Krim. Dette viser hvordan autoritære regimer samarbeider for å opprettholde kontroll, ofte med hjelp fra tidligere medlemmer av brutale spesialstyrker. Aleksandr Lukasjenko har ikke bare tatt imot disse personene – han har gjort dem til en viktig del av sitt maktapparat. Dette understreker hvordan regimet i Minsk lener seg tungt på politi og militærmakt, og får støtte fra Russland for å holde seg ved makten.

Etter presidentvalget i august 2020 har Lukasjenko forsøkt å gjenopplive en sovjetisk stil med sterk leder og undertrykking. Han har personlig delt ut medaljer til politistyrkene og gitt dem en sentral plass i regimets maktdemonstrasjoner – som da han selv stilte bevæpnet midt i Minsk i 2020.

NOT MUCH TO CELEBRATE PRESS FREEDOM IN THE AUTHORITARIAN COUNTRY

Not previously published. Written for The Forbidden Times (2025) | By A group of anonymous journalists from Toplum TV

Engaging in critical and independent journalism in Azerbaijan, where all mainstream media remain under tight government control, is a life-threatening profession. As the World Press Freedom Day is celebrated across the globe on May 3, the untenable price journalists pay for government criticism in Azerbaijan should not be forgotten. The case of Toplum TV, whose office was forcibly closed, many journalists imprisoned, or under interrogation and travel ban or fled to exile, is emblematic.



↑ The imprisoned journalists of Toplum TV. @Toplum TV

Without accurate, independent reporting and scrutiny over the government Azerbaijani people wouldn't know how the ruling authoritarian regime abuses power and steals its wealth. Without accountability for the human rights abuses, not only Azerbaijan but many authoritarian regimes would operate freely, and that hurts us all.

The government of Azerbaijan has long records of pursuing dubious, punitive criminal charges against the critical journalists. But its vicious crackdown on critics and dissenting voices intensified over the last two years as the government started to tighten screws even more. Around 25 journalists, among them at least 8 Toplum TV journalists, are behind bars as the government aggressively targeted media professionals and online independent news outlets, whose offices and journalists' houses have been searched and sealed, equipment confiscated, and their social media accounts hacked, and some websites blocked.

On March 6, 2024, large numbers of policemen raided the Toplum TV office in capital Baku and arrested everyone present, including interns. While some were later released, most remain in jail under pre-trial detention. At least 8 journalists were charged with smuggling, but later authorities added more charges - including but not limited to tax evasion and illegal entrepreneurship. The government of President Ilham Aliyev, in power for more than two decades thanks to the flawed votes, routinely calls them "enemies of the state" and label them as "collaborators of the anti-Azerbaijani powers." The government's intent is clear: muting its critics and sending chilling signals to other brave journalists to behave and discouraging others from entering the journalistic profession and further increasing the self-censorship among media professionals.

Toplum TV co-founder Alasgar Mammadli, journalists Mushfig Jabbar and Farid Ismayilov, head of the Institute of Democratic Initiatives and speaker of the newly established political movement, Third Republic Platform, Akif Gurbanov, founding member of the Platform of the Third Republic,

Ruslan Izzetli, and employees of the Institute of Democratic Initiatives, Ali Zeynal, Ramil Babayev, and Ilkin Amrahov, are currently in prison. Two others, journalist Elmir Abbasov was put under police supervision, while women journalist Shahnaz Beylergizi was recently placed under house arrest. They all reject the charges and put forward that, as independent journalists, they are being prosecuted because of their legitimate work as a journalist.

In March, the investigation on the Toplum TV case was concluded, and the first trial was held on April 2. Lawyers of several appealed at least for house arrest, but to no avail. Some of the imprisoned journalists have major health issues, and need urgent medical care, and while in pretrial detention their lives are at risk due to unsafe prison conditions and difficulty in accessing to adequate healthcare.

For instance, in the case of the prominent journalist Alasgar Mammadli, the Appeal Court recently rejected his appeal to serve out his pre-trial detention at home even though he was suffering from an oncological tumour on his throat. "This is about my right to live. The case is almost over, and they have put in front of us a pile of nonsense. What can prevent me from going to trial while I am still free?", - Mammadli told the judge, referring to the indictment act, during his latest trial.

Mammadli, who is also a media lawyer, said that his and others' release is not only a matter of law but also of humanity. "I read 370 books during my detention, and I pose no threat to society," he said.

Toplum TV was founded in 2016 by the Institute for Democratic Initiatives as a project. Later, it became an independent media organisation in Azerbaijan. Guided by the principles of journalism, its main goal is to inform citizens about events taking place in the country and the world. During this period, it has published thousands of materials, becoming an impartial and unbiased source of information about the developments in Azerbaijan for readers. It was only independent media or-

ganisations which had live broadcasting. In its full-day live broadcasting, experts, politicians from different camps, and lawyers were invited as guests.

Independence and non-partisanship of Toplum, giving opportunity to all voices, caused the anger and attack of the government which strive to cut all independent voices in the country.

While most of the team is behind bars, Toplum TV continues its work from abroad. Toplum TV once again announces that the accusations are baseless and the motive for the pressure is that Toplum TV as an independent media outlet covers the problems of citizens and invites individuals from various groups to its live broadcasts - The outlet said in a statement in February.

"Unfortunately, the pressures on the media in the country make it impossible for Toplum TV to operate in the country. Therefore, Toplum TV will continue to carry out its activities through journalists living abroad", - it went on to say. "Despite operating outside the country, Toplum TV, as always, accepts and will continue to accept impartial, unbiased and independent journalism as its highest value." - the statement ended.

Thanks to the devoted journalists living abroad, Toplum TV publish video, text materials, and delivers accurate and correct information to the citizens about politics, human rights, problems of the citizens, economy and so on. As a small team, we do our best to achieve this holy aim. The imprisonment of the staff of Toplum TV is another step by the Azerbaijani authorities to retaliate against the critical journalism and defiance, but also to deter others from exposing corruption, human rights abuses and seeking justice, which are persistent and well-documented problems in Azerbaijan. We will not remain silenced despite the crackdown and persecutions. On a day when the world commemorates the fundamental importance of press freedom, the constant pressure should be put on the Azerbaijani authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the wrongly imprisoned journalists. This would mark a vital step towards ensuring media freedoms and guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

→ Forbudt i Aserbajdsjan

→ Straff Overvåkning, trakassering, arrestasjon og fengsling.

KYSS TIL ALLE! JEG HÅPER! JEG KJEMPER!



Novaya Gazeta (2025) | Tekst Vera Tsjelicheva

- Forbudt i Russland
- Straff Bøter, husarrest, tvangsarbeid, arrestasjon og fengsel.



↑ Aleksandr Demidenko

Novaja Gazeta har samlet de siste livstegnene fra de som døde i russiske fengsler de siste 2,5 årene. Disse menneskene, hvis navn nå er kjent, ble dømt eller var under etterforskning for sine overbevisninger, først og fremst for sine antikrigsstandpunkter. De ble anklaget for alt fra «spredning av falsk informasjon» til «forræderi». Alderen deres var fra 38 til 62 år. Ingen av dem ønsket sitt land vondt (vert imot) og var ikke farlige for samfunnet.

Vitnesbyrd om liv og død i fangenskap fra de som valgte å ikke forråde seg selv

De siste brevene fra fengsler – «FSIN-brev», «Zonatelecom»-meldinger eller vanlige postkort. De siste telefonsamtalene – tillatt via kortnummer gjennom statlige telefoner eller betalte samtaler fra mobiltelefoner delt blant innsatte. De siste ordene sagt under besøk gjennom glass eller i retten, mens man blir ført gjennom korridoren til rettssalen. De siste meldingene i meldingsapper før arrestasjon og død. De siste innleggene på sosiale medier.

Vi forteller deres historier.

Anatolij Berezikov døde (antatt etter tortur) under en bølge av arrestasjoner 14. juni 2023 i et spesialfengsel i Rostov. Han hadde allerede sonet tre påfølgende administrative dommer etter en pasifistisk aksjon. Myndighetene trengte flere arrestasjoner for å få tid til å forberede en tiltale for forræderi.

Han støttet ikke hendelsene som startet 24. februar 2022 og la regelmessig ut antikrigsinnlegg og ulike (ifølge myndighetene, støtende) tanker om president Putin på sosiale medier frem til sin død. Tidlig om morgenen 11. mai 2023 kom politiet til Berezikovs hjem, konfiskerte datamaskiner og hans sykkel. De slo ham og tok ham med til politistasjonen.

Årsaken til arrestasjonen var at han hadde delt ut brosjyrer med en QR-kode som førte til et nettsted fra det ukrainske forsvarsdepartementet, rettet mot russiske soldater. Overvåkingskameraer fanget ham på fersk gjerning. Men det var ikke nok bevis for å starte en tiltale for forræderi.

Etter den første administrative dommen fulgte en andre, deretter en tredje. «Motstand mot politiet», «liten hærverk», 10, 15 dager, igjen 15... Konvektoren startet og fikk god fart. Familie og venner hadde lenge problemer med å finne ut hvor han var og hva som skjedde med ham – Rostov-politiet hadde innført full informasjonsblokkade. Ved slutten av den andre arrestasjonen fikk Berezikov kontakt med sine pårørende gjennom andre arresterte personer. Han fikk besøk av advokat Irina Gak. Han fortalte at han ble truet med en tiltale som kunne gi livsvarig fengsel. «Jeg er redd for at jeg helt vil forsvinne. Jeg er redd for at de vil drepe meg og at jeg ikke vil overleve til jeg blir løslatt fra spesialfengselet», var hans siste ord til advokaten.

Aleksandr Demidenko, forretningsmann og frivillig fra Belgorod, var 61 år gammel da han døde. Dødssted: varetektsfengselet i Belgorod.

Som idealist og en svært empatisk person, begynte Demidenko å jobbe som frivillig etter starten på den «spesielle militæroperasjonen» (SVO) – for å hjelpe ukrainske flyktninger. Han lot noen bo gratis i sitt eget hjem, og dem som ønsket å returnere til Ukraina, fulgte han personlig til grenseovergangen ved «KPP Kolotilovka» – det

eneste fungerende grensepunktet mellom de to landene. Mange eldre med helseplager trengte hjelp for å komme seg gjennom. Demidenko ble arrestert høsten 2023. Akkurat da hjalp han en eldre ukrainsk kvinne med å krysse grensen. Ifølge Demidenko selv ble han først pågrepet av soldater fra den tsjetsjenske «Ahmat»-avdelingen. De førte ham til et øde sted, der han etter eget utsagn ble torturert med elektroshokk, skutt ved føttene og truet til å tilstå spionasje. Deretter ble han overlevert til FSB i Belgorod.

Etter en kort periode med det som etter hvert er blitt en typisk «karusell» av administrative arrestasjoner i Russland, ble det åpnet en straffesak mot ham for «ulovlig våpenbesittelse», og han ble plassert i varetektsfengsel (SIZO).

Der tilbrakte han sine siste seks måneder i live. I dødsattesten står det at han døde av et kutt i arteria radialis (håndleddspulsåren). Sønnen hans fortalte at advokaten hadde møtt faren noen dager før dødsfallet og sett ham i en svært nedstemt tilstand. Demidenko hadde snakket om å skrive testament. Dagen før han døde, fikk han vite at det var åpnet en ny straffesak mot ham – for «landsforræderi».

I løpet av alle de seks månedene i varetekt bekymret han seg konstant for flyktningene han ikke lenger kunne hjelpe, og var svært redd for familiens sikkerhet. Samtidig er det merkelig at en mann som visstnok hadde bestemt seg for å ta sitt eget liv, like før ba kjente om å sende ham sokker og undertøy. Etter Aleksandr Demidenko er det diktene hans som står igjen. Han var en romantiker av natur og hadde de siste årene begynt å skrive poesi. De siste seks månedene i fengsel var intet unntak – derfra sendte han dikt til familie, venner og frivillige som støttet ham.

→ Fortsetter



*Elskling, vi har det
akkurat som i sangen:
mellom oss er det byer,
flyplassenes lys, blå
snøstormer og tusenvis
av kilometer. Men jeg
elsker deg bare sterkere
og sterkere.*



↑ Aleksey Navalnyj

- Forbudt i Russland
- Straff Bøter, husarrest, tvangsarbeid, arrestasjon og fengsel.

Aleksey Navalnyj, politiker. 47 år gammel da han døde. Dødssted: en straffekoloni i Arktis.

Det gir lite mening å fortelle om Aleksey Navalnyjs livsvei, hans kamp og de torturlignende forholdene i fengselet – det vet alle allerede.

Vi legger bare til at hans siste brev fra kolonien i Harp var noen linjer sendt til kona Julija, den 14. februar 2024:

Til slutt tegnet Navalnyj et hjerte. To dager senere, den 16. februar 2024, døde politikeren i straffekolonien – under omstendigheter som fortsatt ikke er juridisk klarlagt.

Pavel Kushnir, 39 år gammel da han døde. Dødssted: varetektsfengselet i Birobidzjan.

Hva blir igjen etter ham? Hans unike tolkninger av Rakhmaninov, Sjostakovitsj og Chopin – og boken «Russisk klipp og lim», som ble utgitt først etter hans død. Venner av Pavel Kushnir fortalte Novaja Gazeta at han aldri skrev noen brev fra varetektsfengselet (SIZO). Mange av vennene hans hadde allerede forlatt landet da. Han hadde ikke et nært forhold til sin bror eller mor. Den eneste nære slektningen han hadde, var faren – den kjente musikeren Mikhail Kushnir – som døde fire år før sønnens bortgang. Likevel finnes det ett brev – fra tiden etter starten på den såkalte spesialoperasjonen (SVO), men før arrestasjonen. Til sin barndomsvenn, pianisten Olga Shkrygunova, skrev Kushnir:

For det meste driver jeg nå med visuell agitasjon. Om natten, eller i det minste i mørket, henger jeg opp A4-plakater med store svarte bokstaver (...) omtrent som på den kjente plakaten, men i stedet for Bill Greenshields (...) bare et vanlig pasifistsymbol.

På dagtid legger jeg ut små flygeblader på offentlige steder, halvparten av A4-størrelse, brettet i to. På utsiden er det også et peace-symbol (pasifist-symbolet – red.anm.) eller emblemet til EAAS (Det Jødiske Autonome Antikrigsmotstanden). Inne er det en tekst med bibelsitater, ganske lang – hvis du er interessert, kan jeg sende den til deg.

Det vanskeligste jeg har laget i det siste, var ett stort plakatak laget av kartong, nærmest som en antikrigs veggavis. Du tar et stort ark og skriver med røde bokstaver over hele flaten (...), og over det igjen en lang antifascistisk tekst med svart tusj – ganske romantisk (hvis du er interessert, kan jeg sende den også).

Deretter kutter du plakaten i biter og taper den sammen igjen, slik at den enkelt kan brettes og foldes ut. Den blir i A4-format og passer lett i en veske. Midt på natten, i hjertet av byen, klistret jeg opp hele arket...»



↑ Pavel Kushnir



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT RUSSIAN LOSSES AFTER THREE YEARS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE. 165,000 MILITARY DEATHS AND A FULL LIST OF ALL KNOWN NAMES

Mediazona (2025) / Mediazona Data Department | Tekst Medizona Data Department

Today marks the third anniversary of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine—and three years of our ongoing quest to reveal the true cost of this war. We are counting Russian casualties using two methods: by meticulously collecting and verifying data on each individual Russian KIA serviceman in our database, which now exceeds 95,000 names, and by estimating a broader figure that we believe reflects the true number of dead—over 165,000 in total.

In collaboration with the BBC Russian Service and a team of volunteers, we have assembled a named list of losses. Volunteers have been scouring obituaries, media reports and social media to build a comprehensive database of KIA servicemen. This painstaking work, including the verification process, ensures that each loss is carefully recorded, even though many casualties do not appear in official reports.

Despite the challenges inherent in tracking casualties in an active conflict, this joint effort has produced the most detailed record available. To date, our verified count of Russian military losses stands at 95,323. And today we are making the full list available to the public for the first time.

The list allows you to search for KIA soldiers by name, as well as filter them by region, service branch, and rank. Since our database is maintained in Russian, all entries and browsing options are also available in Russian only (at least, for now). It will be updated bi-weekly, as always.

Alongside our individual data collection, we are also conducting an investigation with Meduza to estimate the overall number of losses. By the end of 2024, we assess that Russian casualties have exceeded 165,000.

This method was first introduced in June 2023, in our joint study. Through a combined analysis of our losses list and probate data, we succeeded in estimating the true mortality rate among Russian men.

Russia maintains a public Probate Registry, where notaries record inheritance cases for state-registered assets such as apartments, cars, land, etc. However, not every deceased person is included in the registry, as not everyone leaves inheritable assets.

In 2022, 2023, and 2024 there was a sharp increase in new inheritance cases for men, particularly younger ones. By comparing this surge against long-term trends and the ratio of male to female inheritance cases (female mortality was unaffected by the

war), we can determine the number of “excess” inheritance cases.

The next, most challenging step is converting these excess inheritance cases into excess mortality. This is done using a detailed list of casualties. By checking this list against the registry, we can determine how often inheritance cases are opened for deceased individuals from specific social and age groups. For example, if we find that 60% of contract soldiers aged 20 to 24 from the casualty list are in the registry, we infer that the remaining 40% left no inheritance. To account for them, we multiply the number of excess inheritance cases in the period of interest by 1.6.

Our analysis shows that 2024 became the bloodiest year of the war. The number of Russians who died at the front nearly doubles every year: about 20,000 in 2022, about 50,000 in 2023, and close to 100,000 in 2024.

- Forbudt i Russland
- Straff Bøter, husarrest, tvangsarbeid, arrestasjon og fengsel.



Dreaming of a New Iran

Diaries from three young women

New York Times Magazine (2023) | By Farnaz Fassihi | Illustrations by Tropiwhat

Forbudt i Iran

Straff Journalisten risikerer utvisning fra hjemlandet, fengsel, tortur og dødsstraff, men også forfølgelse og trakassering av familie som bor i landet.

For de tre anonyme kvinnene ville strafferammen kunne inkludere fengsel, tortur, familiefølgelser og dødsstraff.

The uprising began in September, after a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, died in the custody of Iran’s morality police. She had been arrested on accusations of violating mandatory-hijab rules, and a gruesome photo and video of her unconscious in a hospital bed went viral, sparking outrage and grief. The protest movement — known as Woman, Life, Freedom — quickly morphed into broader demands for an end to the Islamic Republic’s rule.

Marches, led by women, spread across the country from September to January, and the government has cracked down violently. Authorities have also dismantled the morality police and are try-

ing new methods to enforce the dress code.

To this day, acts of civil disobedience continue. Women and girls appear in public without the hijab. At night, Iranians chant antigovernment slogans from their rooftops.

To better understand how daily life in Iran has transformed, we asked three young women to keep a diary for five weeks. Their entries have been edited for length and clarity, and their last names are being withheld for their safety. Like many Iranians, they are trying to figure out what their lives should look like as they continue to fight for, and dream of, change.

March 4

GHAZAL, a 20-year-old college student living in Tehran: It was my friend's birthday today. When I got into the car service, the driver asked me if I had anything to cover my hair with. I replied, sternly, "No, I don't." He then explained that drivers can be fined for passengers without proper hijab. I later thought about what he said — if I wore a hijab in his car, I would be surrendering. If I didn't, the poor driver could be penalized. I was really confused. But I realized that looking out for one another is the most important thing, so I've decided to cover my hair in taxis.

March 11

PARNIAN, a 23-year-old recent college graduate who lives in Tehran and works multiple jobs: There were at least 40 of us in the train's women-only carriage. I could feel the bag of the passenger behind me pressing against my waist. It was hot, and there was no oxygen. Once the train door closed, people started talking. I couldn't see her, but a woman was selling well-priced cosmetics inside the carriage. One passenger passed her credit card, from hand to hand, to the woman, who then took the card and shouted, "What's your PIN code?"

The passenger's reply came from another side, "2-5-4-2." Several people repeated the code until it finally reached the seller's ear. She then sent the card and a new mascara back to the other end of the carriage. A tube of mascara was sold with the help of several people, and the train hadn't even moved yet.

March 12

KIMIA, a 23-year-old graduate student who lives in Kurdistan Province: I thought I would have fun after my master's entrance exam, but now there is nothing to do. I used to enjoy going to cafes once a week, but it has become so expensive. Now I can afford to go only once or twice a month. I can't even download a movie or check social media properly with our stupid slow internet. Pretty much every application you want to use in Iran is blocked, and to get around the restrictions, we use virtual private networks. It takes hours. I have to use multiple VPNs, and they disconnect several times. You have to keep trying and trying.

GHAZAL: Something very strange and interesting happened at the hair salon today. A woman came in with head scarves and

shawls for sale. One of the salon's stylists jokingly told her that people don't buy scarves anymore, that it is no longer profitable and that she should change her job. In response, the woman said that was not true and that certain people are trying to promote secularism and prostitution in society. We were all stunned, but nobody said anything to her.

PARNIAN: I feel good for no reason. Ever since the start of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution, there has been so much pain that feeling good seems bizarre. Yet I feel great today. I wonder why. The lightness is weird.

One of the most disturbing manifestations of the government's crackdown has been the executions of protesters. For months, the Revolutionary Court has staged trials and charged some protesters with "moharebe," or waging war against God. At least a dozen have been sentenced to death by hanging. Protests have become sporadic and limited to occasions when the public has an excuse to congregate, such as at funerals or outside prisons to demand a halt to the imminent executions.

March 13

PARNIAN: As I stepped outside today onto one of Tehran's busiest streets, I was taken aback. In 10 years of living in this neighborhood, I have never seen it as dim and quiet. All the shops around the metro station were closed. There were police officers and special forces everywhere, waving their batons in the air, ushering people to move along.

One of the police officers had a hilarious expression. He tried to look serious but seemed incredibly idiotic. Seeing that face, the stern gaze and the amount of stupidity nestled in that uniform made me want to laugh. As I kept walking, my chest suddenly started burning, and I felt short of breath. I must have walked into tear gas.

One officer told a teenage girl to move and stand somewhere else. The young girl looked at him coldly and said, "Are we bothering you?" Another guy came and said to the policeman, "Reza, let it go," and took him away. I looked at the young girl and blew her a kiss. She blew a kiss back.

March 13

KIMIA: The execution of Mohammad Mehdi Karami still breaks my heart. He was a protester and national karate champion. We were around the same age, and

I also have a black belt in karate. I feel very close to him, more than any of the other protesters who have been killed. I look at his picture often and try to imagine his life as a young athlete. What motivated him to go out and protest? Did he just want a better life?

There was a call to protest today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. There were riots in several cities tonight, but the big day is tomorrow. Let's see how it goes.

At night I heard people chanting "death to the dictator" and the constant sound of explosions. It went on until 1 a.m. I couldn't tell if it was gunfire or firecrackers. Boom, boom, boom.

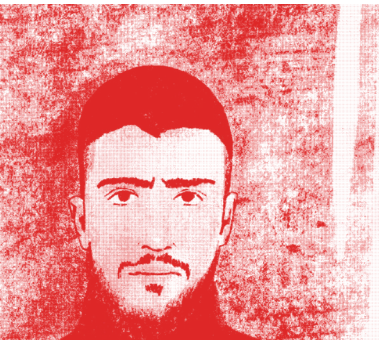
GHAZAL: My friend and I have found an exciting cafe on Enghelab Street that screens foreign films and shows. I watch this show, "The Last of Us", which I love. This week it was part of the cafe's program, so my friend and I made a reservation. You know, we don't get to watch foreign films and TV shows together with friends, grab a bite and enjoy ourselves. And that cafe made it possible for us.

Most of the customers were our age, and we shared the same vibe. It felt great to watch the show and react to different scenes collectively. Nobody told us to keep it down. To be honest, it felt like freedom.

March 14

KIMIA: My friend's brother was arrested during the protests in a city in Kurdistan and has been imprisoned for several months. This morning, I learned that he tried to kill himself. My friend told me that he had been fed up with living in limbo — he had not been put on trial or formally charged.

I'm much less hopeful than I was at the beginning of this movement. The Islamic Republic will be gone one day, but I'm not sure it'll happen this time around. We have seen this cycle before: We get our hopes up and think that this time will be different, that change



is coming, that we will win, and then nothing happens. I was really convinced that the regime would be toppled this time, but when I saw the brutal crackdowns and all the killings, I realized this wasn't it, either.

PARNIAN: On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I work from home. Today one of my colleagues called, sounding nervous. "Are you OK?" she asked. That morning, the metro on the Tajrish line, my main daily commute, had stopped at a station for a while because of a technical issue, and then one of the carriages caught fire. Official reports did not mention injuries. I thanked my colleague for letting me know and hung up. I thought about the people on the train. How scared were they? Did they scream a lot?

For years we have grown accustomed to the fact that anyone, anywhere can be unsafe. We have gotten used to shrinking our comfort zones. Back when the morality police were active, almost every time we met with friends, one of the boys went ahead, scoped out the situation and told us which way to go in order to avoid the forces. Now, in the absence of the morality police, there is more freedom, but also more anxiety. People meet near their workplaces, homes or schools. Nobody talks about it, but we're afraid to explore new areas.



→ Continue

Iran's economy has steadily declined over the past few years as a result of U.S. economic sanctions and the government's systematic corruption and mismanagement. Inflation is skyrocketing, and the Iranian currency has devalued against the American dollar by 20 to 30 percent since the beginning of this year. Middle-class and working-class families are buying less, eliminating essentials like meat, chicken and dairy from their grocery lists. Many people work two or three jobs to get by. It has become common for employees – even those working for the government, like teachers and factory workers – to go several months without a paycheck.



March 15

KIMIA: We went to the market to do some shopping for Nowruz, the Persian New Year. Pastry shops were packed. Boy, how expensive everything is! My mom wanted to buy pistachios and roasted nuts, but it cost over 1.2 million tomans, more than three times the price they were last year. We ended up buying a small box of sugar candies from a cheaper place.

PARNIAN: The company I work for has been in financial trouble for over eight months and cannot pay the employees' salaries. Several employees at my work resigned and left. The ones who stayed, including me, are mostly young and single. Some of my colleagues are spending their savings; others are borrowing money. I have no intention of dipping into my savings, and I'm too proud to borrow, so I have taken translation jobs on the side, working late after my regular hours.

Today I was having my third cup of coffee, struggling with a headache and insomnia, when the door opened. In came my colleague, looking upset. "Look, Parnian, my girlfriend is a modern person and doesn't think providing money is a man's duty, but I'm just tired," he told me. "She has been paying for everything for several months, and her support makes me feel worse. The harder I try, the poorer I become." After staring at the kitchen

floor for a few seconds, he said, "I feel useless."

I hugged him and whispered in his ear: "You will get through this. Don't forget that our only weapon is our thick skin. Be a rhino!"

GHAZAL: A few friends and I somehow ended up talking about the protests and how the Mahsa movement has died down. But I don't believe the movement has ended.

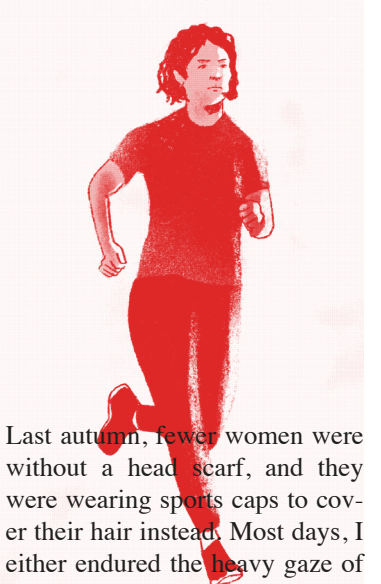
This movement is not just about people coming to the streets, chanting, fighting and getting killed. I am witnessing so many other changes. Now we can eat in restaurants without wearing the hijab, and not a single person says, "Madam, put your hijab back on." The university security no longer pesters students about their attire. People don't defend this regime in classes anymore. It doesn't matter that we don't protest in the streets. People are kinder and look out for one another every day. If a guard or a security person bothers a student, everyone will come to the rescue. I think it's beautiful.

March 16

KIMIA: We haven't turned on state television in years. The news is all lies, and it has no entertainment. So my mom and I stay up every Thursday and Friday to watch "The Voice Persia," a singing-competition show broadcast from MBC

Persia, one of the satellite channels. We guess which songs will be performed and which contestants will get ahead. Our favorite is a guy from Mashhad, a city in northeast Iran, who now lives in Turkey and sings alternative rock. I hope he wins.

PARNIAN: I felt like running today. I went to the park near my house for some fresh spring air. Almost two years ago, they opened a women-only park in front of the old mixed one. I do not like gender segregation, but I like the new park more than the mixed one.



Last autumn, fewer women were without a head scarf, and they were wearing sports caps to cover their hair instead. Most days, I either endured the heavy gaze of a hijabi woman or I was directly scolded, told to have shame and cover my hair. But today, many women didn't have a hijab, and those who did exercised alongside them in peace.

Forbudt i Iran

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For de tre anonyme kvinnene ville strafferammen kunne inkludere fengsel, tortur, familiefølgelser og dødsstraff.

There was one beautiful girl with short blond hair. At the start of the uprising, women were cutting off their hair as an act of protest and a sign of mourning. Seeing her got me emotional. For years we had fantasized about the day we would take off our scarves and let the wind blow through our hair. But now that we can be unveiled, we no longer have our long hair. We cut it for that very basic freedom. Our dreams are always one step ahead of us.

March 18

KIMIA: I went to the market with a friend. It was very crowded, with many street vendors selling items for Nowruz. A musician was playing an instrument, and shops were playing loud music, too. As I was waiting to cross the street, I started dancing subtly to the rhythm of the music. A police officer nodded at me and laughed. There were several girls and women, including myself, without head scarves. I finally got into the Nowruz mood.

PARNIAN: I was checking the news on Twitter when I came across a picture of a man dressed in brown. The tweet said that the families of prisoners on death row have gathered outside the Urmia Central Prison. Mohayeddin Ebrahimi, a political prisoner, would be executed tomorrow with the morning call to prayer. “Let’s be the voice of our countrymen,” the tweet read.

Executions have become an all-consuming issue; people follow the cases closely, and when they hear that a protester will be executed at dawn, they rush to the prison and stand outside the walls all night.

I was about to retweet it so that others, too, could become the voice of Mohayeddin, when I saw the date of the tweet. It was exactly one day old. That meant they had probably hanged Mohayeddin.

I closed the Twitter app, disconnected my VPN, locked the phone screen and stared at the darkness in my room.

March 19

KIMIA: Today we went to the bank with my father. I was waiting for my turn when I heard someone behind me say, “Madam, put your scarf on.” Turning around, I saw only the shadow of a veiled woman pass by. She came back a few minutes later and repeated the same thing. Again, I ignored her. A while later, the bank’s deputy manager came and asked me apologetically to wear my hijab. He said that they were told to tell clients to comply and apologized once more. So I said OK and wore it.

Then, at another stand at the bank, my shawl slipped down. In came the manager again, asking me to fix my hijab. At that moment, I saw the veiled woman sneak out of the bank. I was so pissed off.

The branch manager of the bank told my dad that the veiled women were with the government. It turns out that they go to banks, warning them not to serve hijabless women or assume the consequences. I saw the woman again out on the street, telling another girl to fix her hijab.

March 21

PARNIAN: Until recently, I wasn’t big on praying. I considered prayer an insult to my intelligence. But things have changed. We have been in an extraordinary situation, bearable only with divine help and a lot of patience. Tonight I closed my eyes and prayed from the bottom of my heart: “Dear God, spare families from the pain of losing a child.” Then I broke into tears: “Let us be a little happy. ... Give us a little bit of happiness. ... Just a little bit. ...”

KIMIA: Today I was talking to my family about how much people check you out in Iran and how much time you spend thinking about what to wear. It feels like you’re under constant surveillance. But I’ve noticed a change in attitude among men. Before this movement, if I went out with my red hair showing or wearing a cool outfit, some men would follow or harass me. Cars would slow down and honk their horns. Now we go out without hijab, we wear what we want and men don’t

say anything. They nod in approval. They smile.

March 23

GHAZAL: I saw a beautiful graffiti message on my way to a stationery store today that said, “Move on but don’t forget,” with a Mahsa Amini hashtag underneath. In order to succeed, we have to keep our spirits up as much as possible. We must not stop living or lose hope. We shouldn’t feel guilty for being happy. The government’s sole aim is to take our joy away, and we can’t allow that.

March 25

PARNIAN: We came up with a new rule at home: No daily news during Nowruz. You could call it something like compassion-fatigue syndrome. The volume of bad news is numbing.



March 28

GHAZAL: On a group chat today, my friends and I discussed our summer attire; the head scarf is, of course, out, but the long manteau or coat we must wear is also hijab. We brainstormed about its replacement. One said we could wear long T-shirts. Another said, No, that’s not my style; I prefer long dress shirts. It felt great to know that months after this movement started, people are not backing down.

March 29

KIMIA: I’m in Turkey on holiday to see friends and relatives, and I’m enjoying myself. I wear whatever I want, not worried about getting arrested. People can get together here without being bothered by anyone. And there are so many fun places to go.

The streets are in good shape. The traffic lights work properly. Shops have a wide variety of items, and

you can easily find what you are looking for. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram open easily here. God knows what we go through to open them in Iran. The trains are fast, comfortable, clean and on time. All this is happening only a few kilometers from Iran.

It’s a difficult decision, and I don’t like it, but I may have to leave Iran.

March 31

PARNIAN: We were in a taxi on the way to the airport after spending some time in Kurdistan. The driver was a warm and chatty man, so we took advantage and asked him about Kurdish dances. “A friend of mine got married a few months ago, but they didn’t celebrate with music and dance out of respect for the victims of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement,” I told him.

He asked if we knew how to do Kurdish dances. We all shook our heads, so he pulled over, played a Kurdish song and told us to get out of the car. “Don’t be shy,” he said. “The road is empty. No one will see you.”

We stood in a line, and he showed us how to move our hands and feet to the rhythm of the music. We did our best. After we got back in the car, he said: “Men and women are the same for us. We are all one.” His tone was serious. “We stand in a line, one man and one woman, and hold each other’s hands. We are not men or women. We are brothers and sisters.”

April 1

PARNIAN: There’s a funny old story I read in elementary school. I don’t remember the details; I only remember that it was about a dry, barren desert, once a beautiful and glamorous city, whose people got so involved in their daily lives that they gradually stopped noticing their surroundings. Ultimately, beauty disappears when no one is left looking for it. But the truth was, it did exist. Invisibility does not mean absence.

The government has struggled with how to respond to the most visible and enduring result of the uprising: women refusing to wear a hijab. After abolishing the morality police in December, officials said they would find alternative methods for enforcing the hijab law. Some of the new policies would include using surveillance cameras and facial recognition to identify women, which could result in fines or the denial of civic services. Many women, for their part, continue to disobey the law.

→ Continue

April 4

PARNIAN: We were stopped at one of the busiest metro stations, and a lady dressed in a work uniform was leaning against the train’s wall, frowning at every passenger who got on. The carriage was packed. She was quietly checking her phone when a beautiful young girl with curly blond hair got on, covering half of the woman’s face with her hair.

The lady politely asked the young girl, “My dear, can you put your scarf on?”

The young girl blurted loudly: “It’s because of people like you that we live this way. When are you going to learn to mind your own business? Do we have no other problems? Do I tell you what to wear?”

The woman listened to her calmly, turned back to her phone and said: “As you like. You are very close to me. Your hair is in my nose.”

People started laughing.

April 7

KIMIA: On my way to the airport to go back to Iran, I wore a shawl around my neck so I wouldn’t have to look for it in my backpack when I arrived. Once I put the damn thing around my neck, my anxiety returned. I was still in Turkey, yet the stress crept back into my body.

April 8

PARNIAN: A Twitter friend posted something interesting. Until four or five years ago, he wrote, he never missed a single prayer, but now every time he hears the call to prayer, he starts cursing. Many people around me are turning away from Islam. Some religious families have stopped practicing and even asked the women in their families to take off their hijabs. What will happen to those who no longer pray and are irritated by the call to prayer? Or those who even make fun of religion? How are they going to feel once their anger has subsided? What will happen when people are no longer humiliated and threatened in the name of Islam? When religion is merely a matter of the heart?



April 11

PARNIAN: My colleague sent me a photo of mothers sitting outside a school, guarding the children against possible poisonings. After the student demonstrations and school gassings, many urged people not to send their kids to school. They argued that nothing would happen if the children didn’t attend school for one year.

The truth is, I didn’t learn anything worthwhile in 12 years of school and four years of university. If we ever objected to what we were learning, we were immediately sent to the principal’s office. They taught us about Aristotle and the elements of logic, but using them was considered a crime.

Reading classical novels for 12 years is more useful than going to school. What better teacher than Shakespeare or Mark Twain? They aren’t taught in Iranian schools, either.

Instead, I remember reading poems by some idiot pro-regime poet.

April 11

GHAZAL: I went to my grandmother’s house for Iftar, when Muslims break their fasts at sundown during Ramadan. She invited the whole family for a big dinner of chicken and saffron rice with barberries. My mom’s family is very religious. My grandmother and all my aunts wear a full hijab chador. My mom does not typically wear the hijab, but in front of them she covers her hair. At family gatherings, I’m the only woman without a hijab. I don’t pretend anymore. At first, my aunts would try to politely persuade me to cover my hair, but for the past few months, they don’t dare ask.

At the dinner, one of my mom’s distant relatives started talking about the hijab, saying that people must be free to choose their attire and that it is no one’s business what they wear. He was basically in favor of our movement. But later on, when I was talking to his wife, she said she really liked short, over-the-knee coats but couldn’t wear them because her husband wouldn’t allow it.

The same guy lecturing about women’s rights and freedom didn’t let his own wife dress the way she wanted. This type of person really annoys me, and unfortunately there are many of them — people who babble on about freedom without knowing its real meaning.

April 13

PARNIAN: I woke up to the sound of two girls, a 6-year-old and a 3-year-old, gleefully riding their bikes in the backyard. The older one asked her mother for something, first begging then growing irritated. The mother patiently refused. While the older kid was grumbling, the 3-year-old was biking around happily.

They rented the apartment downstairs over a year ago. I have never met them in person. The mother is roughly my age, and her husband died from Covid. He was a victim of a decision made by the highest political authority: to ban the import of British and American vaccines for coronavirus, saying they would harm Iranians. The widowed young mother, patiently pampering her older daughter, whispered something in her ear. The 6-year-old girl laughed from the bottom of her heart and joined her younger sister in biking around.

KIMIA: Stepping foot back in Iran always means being confronted with bad news: They plan on enforcing the hijab law by fining women who don’t cover their hair. They won’t be giving social services to unveiled

Forbudt i Iran

Straff Journalisten risikerer utvisning fra hjemlandet, fengsel, tortur og dødsstraff, men også forfølgelse og trakassering av familie som bor i landet.

For de tre anonyme kvinnene ville strafferammen kunne inkludere fengsel, tortur, familiefølgelser og dødsstraff.

Since November, hundreds of schools across Iran have reported mysterious incidents of poisoning with toxic gas. The attacks have mainly targeted girls, some of whom have been hospitalized with respiratory and neurological symptoms. After not responding to the crisis for months, the government said in March that it had arrested more than 100 people. It still remains unclear who was behind the attacks and what motivated them. Education for girls has never been contested by the Islamic Republic, and women constitute more than 50 percent of university students and about 18 percent of the work force. Health officials have said that some of the attacks involved toxins, but they have also blamed stress, claiming that a majority of the cases were a result of psychogenic illness.

women, and they will be barred from entering universities. There is also a call for protest soon.

April 14

PARNIAN: Never in my life have I been so eager for a day to come. The government has announced that as of tomorrow, women cannot appear in public without a hijab, and those who do will be dealt with brutally. The problem is that they cannot force us anymore. I can't wait for tomorrow.

April 15

PARNIAN: Today was just a normal day, like any other. Not only were there just as many women without the hijab, but many had deliberately let their long hair fall over their shoulders.

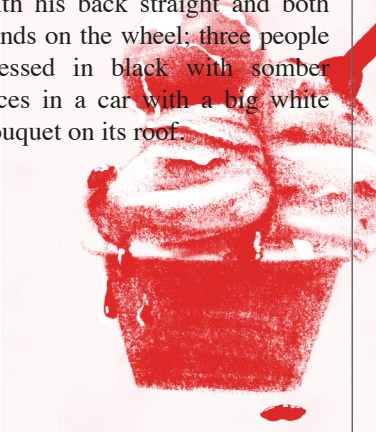
The government's threat was a bluff, and a funny one. The number of hijabless women is increasing by the day. Boys are coming out with shorts now, too. People boycott stores that don't offer services to unveiled women. The shawls that women used to have around their necks in case they were spotted by security forces are now in the back of wardrobes. Short shirts are replacing long coats. Skirts are replacing pants. Short pants are replacing long ones. There is more and more unity. People have the upper hand. The other side is nothing but bluffs.

April 15

GHAZAL: I saw several women on motorbikes today. Usually, men ride bikes, and women sit behind them. But this time it was the other way around.

April 16

PARNIAN: I like taking buses. Watching people's lives on the street from afar truly fascinates me: a pissed-looking teenage girl and her mother; a young boy about 17 years old selling balloons, wandering between cars, clearly exhausted; a woman taking off her head scarf and giving the middle finger to the car next to her; a female driver wiping her tears while eating behind the wheel; a male driver sitting with his back straight and both hands on the wheel; three people dressed in black with somber faces in a car with a big white bouquet on its roof.



April 17

KIMIA: I went out with my friends this evening and had ice cream. I had a shawl in my bag, just in case. Inside the shopping mall, we were thanked for observing the mandatory hijab on loudspeakers every few minutes. We just laughed at them.

April 19

GHAZAL: There is a very popular show in Iran called "The Lion Skin", a crime drama about a father and a daughter. The father thinks his daughter has been murdered and hunts down the criminal, but then he discovers she is alive. When they see each other, they hug. We were stunned when we saw this scene, replaying it a few times. Men and women who are not related are not supposed to touch each other physically. And here was a male actor and a young female actress hugging each other.

Today was the first screening for the public, and one of the actresses attended the premiere without a hijab. Afterward, the manager of the movie theater was fired for not telling her to cover herself. They didn't post her hijabless picture on the series' Instagram page, but I posted it.

April 21

PARNIAN: While eating her salad, my friend asked, "What will Iran look like after liberation?"

"Imagine having only one job and being able to save money!" she said. "That way, we can also buy whatever we want. We should go on a nice trip."

"In a free Iran, women will not be discriminated from management jobs," I said. "Your mother will finally be able to become the bank director."

"So many things will happen!" she said excitedly. "Imagine, things would actually work!"

"We are used to working multiple jobs and always being busy," I said. "What will we do if we don't have money issues?"

"We will find the most suitable job."

"What do we do for the rest of the day?" I said. "We'll get bored."

"You're right," she said. "We'll get bored. ... Wow, free Iran will be something! I can't wait to turn the page."

In the weeks since the three young women chronicled their experiences, the government has engaged in diplomatic outreach to project stability. In April, the government restored ties with Saudi Arabia, mediated by China. In May, the country conducted prisoner swaps with European countries. Within Iran, crackdowns continue. Businesses have been shuttered for catering to unveiled women, including a government administrative office in northern Tehran. Women say they are heartened by the solidarity they receive from men, including shopkeepers who defy orders and give unveiled women discounts. Three more protesters have been executed, bringing the total to seven. Prices of everyday goods are still climbing, with the government's statistics office announcing 47 percent inflation in a recent report.

For many in the country, including Ghazal, Kimia and Parnian, a desire for a better life in a new, free Iran remains.

May 24

GHAZAL: The executions are heartbreaking. There is nothing I can do. Everyone feels the same way. We post stories on Instagram. So what? How does that help? They get executed anyway.

I detest the call to the morning prayer — that's when they execute those young kids who did nothing but fight for their rights. I have begun to question Islam. I believe that our generation doesn't truly believe in it, a religion that for so many years, in school, in the university, was imposed on us. If we are fighting them, then why should we believe in the same things they do?



May 27

KIMIA: I cannot fathom the executions. There is a story in the Shahnameh, a revered epic poem, about a king named Zahhak who ascends to the throne with the help of Iblis, the devil. The devil kisses him on each shoulder, out of which grow two snakes. The only way to keep Zahhak alive is to feed the snakes the brains of two young boys every day. It's a perfect allegory to Iran's current situation.

I have started to play sports again after a few years. And it feels great to go to the gym; at least I'm doing something worthwhile. I am also studying English to prepare for the TOEFL exam.

The other day, I went to a governmental office wearing a scarf, a man's shirt and jeans. The guard at the entrance said, "I have no problem with what you are wearing, but the woman inside will bug you." I entered, and indeed the woman told me that my coat was too short and that I should wear a chador. So I went outside and borrowed a long one from someone.

It feels terrible — being deprived of things because of where you were born.

PARNIAN: A few days ago, I saw a new banner with something like a mirror in the center surrounded by pictures of five martyrs of the war in Syria. What was the message? See yourself in the mirror amid these men and feel shame for not having sacrificed your life for Islam? I didn't know any of the "martyrs." They were among the poor youths sent to fight in Syria in the name of helping the Islamic Republic gain more power and expand its territory.

A few teenage girls with long hair hanging over their shoulders were standing in front of the banner, taking selfies in the mirror, without the hijab. It made me laugh. I rejoiced at their beauty and courage, in their simple and harmless way of exclaiming, "I exist!" The government is not afraid of women's hair or the length of their skirts. They are afraid of our existence.

This is a simple revolution: Do not mock or restrain people for their gender, orientation, nationality, religion. Don't kill. Don't rape. Don't attack. Don't threaten. We don't want things to be perfect overnight. We simply don't want to be invisible. We want to be ordinary people, not subjects. We want to make decisions, even mistakes. We want to exist.

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Hostages of Their Own Policy:

Why the Tajik Govt Does Not Ease Pressure on Freedoms

Radio Ozodi (2023) | By Khursand Khurramov



→ Forbudt i Tadsjikistan

→ Straff Trakassering, husarrest, arrestasjon og fengsling,

Government Pressure

International criticism of Tajikistan’s human rights record continues to mount, yet the situation within the country remains unchanged.

In early May, as in previous months, the Tajik authorities faced intensified scrutiny over human rights violations. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom’s annual report, released on May 1, listed Tajikistan among 17 countries of particular concern about religious freedoms. The report recommended targeted sanctions against the governments of these nations.

This publication followed a mid-April visit to Tajikistan by Nazila Ghanea, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Ghanea expressed alarm over the state of religious freedom in the country, noting that Tajikistan’s practices fall significantly short of international human

rights standards. She emphasized the need for the nation to move beyond its civil war legacy and safeguard freedom of religion and belief.

Apathy or Dialogue?

Over the past year, international human rights organizations have intensified their criticism of Dushanbe. However, political analyst Khayrullo Mirsaidov observes that Tajik authorities often choose to ignore such critiques. He attributes this to Russia’s distancing from the West and democratic values, which has emboldened Dushanbe to further disregard human rights, as evidenced by the increasing number of journalists and others imprisoned on extremism charges. Mirsaidov suggests that this trend will persist, given the Tajik government’s reliance on support from Moscow and Beijing.

Tajik officials frequently cite “quiet diplomacy” when addressing sensitive issues. Afshin Mukim, press secretary of the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Tajik government, stated that the committee has responses to each point raised in the UN Special Rapporteur’s report. He mentioned that these issues were discussed during the committee head’s recent meeting with the rapporteur and that they are now awaiting the UN’s conclusions.

The Tajik government denies suppressing civil rights and freedoms, framing its actions as part of efforts to combat crime, extremism, and terrorism. At a UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination session, Deputy Interior Minister Abdurahmon Alamshozoda justified special operations in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) and the detention of activists from the area by alleging their close ties to extremist and terrorist organizations

operating in Afghanistan, such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Ansarullah. Human rights advocates and experts view this narrative with scepticism.

Dushanbe Underestimates Criticism

An international human rights expert with several years of experience in Tajikistan believes that Tajik officials fail to grasp the consequences of ignoring international recommendations. The expert notes that international human rights organizations lay the groundwork for sanctions by informing governments worldwide, potentially leading to serious repercussions for Tajikistan in the future.

A report by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), also published in early May, indicates the organization’s intent to hold Tajikistan’s leadership accountable for crimes against humanity. The NHC, in collaboration with Freedom for Eurasia, has been documenting severe and systemic human rights violations throughout 2022, which they believe constitute crimes against humanity. This documentation aims to serve as the basis for filing complaints against Tajikistan in courts exercising universal jurisdiction.

Hostages of Their Own Policy

Sociologist Kodir Khudoyer asserts that the current government cannot afford political reforms and thus disregards human rights recommendations. He explains that internal policy reform is not a priority for the authorities, who are focused on ensuring a stable transfer of power. Even if liberal reforms were theoretically initiated, they could quickly spiral out of control, reminiscent of the Gorbachev-era perestroika. Therefore, the authorities are, to some extent, hostages of their own internal policies.

“ANYTHING BUT FAIR



FOUR RUSSIAN JOURNALISTS JAILED FOR 5.5 YEARS OVER ALLEGED TIES TO NAVALNY’S BANNED ANTI-CORRUPTION FOUNDATION

Mediazona (2025) | By Mediazona

Forbudt i Russland

Straff Bøter, husarrest,
 tvangsarbeid, arrestasjon
 og fengsel.



↑ Sergey Karelin, Konstantin Gabov, Antonina Favorskaya, Artyom Krieger before the verdict. Photo: Alexandra Astakhova / Mediazona

A Moscow court has sentenced four journalists to five and a half years in prison each for allegedly participating in the activities of Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF, ФБК in Russian), which the Kremlin has outlawed as an “extremist” organisation. The verdict was handed down after all hearings were held behind closed doors, with press and public barred from attending.

Antonina Favorskaya, Sergey Karelin, Konstantin Gabov, and Artyom Krieger were accused of producing media content for ACF, though their exact actions remain undisclosed. Favorskaya, a reporter with SotaVision, said she was targeted for reporting on Navalny’s treatment in prison prior to his death and then “helping to organise [his] funeral.”

Four journalists were sentenced on Monday to five and a half years in prison each by Moscow’s Nagatinsky District Court for allegedly taking part in the activities of the banned Anti-Corruption Foundation, founded by late opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The trial was held entirely behind closed doors, and little is publicly known about the substance of the charges. The press office for Moscow’s courts said the journalists were accused of gathering materials, editing videos and publishing content for ACF, which Russian authorities have designated as an “extremist organisation” in 2021.

SotaVision reporter Antonina Favorskaya was detained in March 2024 after visiting Alexei Navalny’s grave in Moscow. Initially held for ten days on a minor administrative charge of disobeying police, a common pretext, she was rearrested immediately upon release and charged under criminal articles related to ACF.

During her pre-trial hearings, also closed to the media, she managed to shout that she was being prosecuted “for an article about how the Federal Penitentiary Service tortured Alexei Navalny.” In a

letter from pre-trial detention, Favorskaya later wrote that she was also accused of “helping organise Navalny’s funeral.”

On April 27, 2024, two more journalists were arrested—Sergey Karelin and Konstantin Gabov, who had worked with the Associated Press and Reuters respectively. In July, the case expanded to include Artyom Krieger, another journalist from SotaVision. By August, lawyers told Mediazona the investigation had been completed.

From the very first hearing, Judge Natalia Borisenkova closed the proceedings to the public, citing a letter from Russia’s anti-extremism police unit warning of “planned provocations”. In October, the Moscow City Court denied press accreditation altogether.

During the December hearings, witnesses for the prosecution were questioned in secret. Mediazona was able to identify at least one of them as a participant in a street interview previously aired on the “Navalny LIVE” YouTube channel.

On April 10, 2025, prosecutor Tikhonova requested a sentence of five years and eleven months in a penal colony for each of the defendants—just one month short of the maximum possible sentence for these charges. All

defendants demanded full acquittal. The verdict, delivered on April 15, matched the prosecution’s request closely: five and a half years in prison.

Only two family members per defendant were allowed into the courtroom. Several diplomats, including representatives from the U.S., U.K., Switzerland, and New Zealand, were also granted access. Journalists were warned not to raise their cameras in hallways, under threat of arrest. As the journalists were led into court, dozens of supporters chanted their names and applauded.

“Everything will be all right, don’t lose hope—sooner or later this will end,” Krieger told the crowd after the verdict. “Those who sentenced me will be in prison one day,” he added. Artyom’s father, Pavel Krieger, shook his head:

“This trial was anything but fair.”

I 2021 ble Maria Ressa fra Filippinene og Dmitrij Muratov fra Russland tildelt Nobels fredspris for sin modige kamp for ytringsfrihet. I sitt Nobel-foredrag beskrev Dmitrij Muratov journalister som «motgiften mot tyranniet».

Andre journalister som har mottatt Nobels fredspris er: Tawakkol Karman, Elie Wiesel og Carl von Ossietzky.



Den norske
Helsingforskomite

NOBEL
PEACE
CENTER



NARVESEN