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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 23, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to urge you to secure the release of the U.S. affiliated journalists who continue to languish in Iranian, Vietnamese, Russian, Belarusian, Azerbaijani, and Burmese jails.

Since the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) terminated grants for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), Voice of America (VOA), and Open Technology Fund OTF), we have been concerned that jailed journalists affiliated with these networks risk being left behind.

We were grateful for your leadership in securing the release of RFE/RL journalist Andrei Kuznechyk in February – making clear that President Trump prioritizes the release of those who have worked for outlets committed to the provision of accurate information in repressive environments. USAGM networks have historically led efforts to advocate for the political prisoners held in authoritarian countries. While we are grateful that USAGM has reversed course on grant terminations for RFE/RL and OCB, for as long as these networks' status remains in question, it will be increasingly incumbent upon the State Department to stand up for their journalists. These journalists have worked tirelessly to advance U.S. interests and values by providing truth in countries with no press freedom, or countries which are in transition.

We want to call your attention to examples of a few journalists who serve as representative cases of U.S. supported jailed journalists around the world.

- Ihar Losik is a journalist for RFE/RL's Belarus Service who worked to inform Belarusians about the lead up to the presidential race in Belarus in 2020. Losik was unjustly sentenced to fifteen years in prison and has previously gone on hunger strike.
- Reza Valizadeh, a U.S.-Iranian dual citizen and former journalist for RFE/RL's Persian-language Service (2012-2022), was sentenced to ten years in prison on charges of

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“collaborating with a hostile government” after being lured back to Iran by Iranian intelligence agents.

- Vladyslav Yesypenko is a journalist who worked for RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service. He was jailed in Russian-occupied Crimea by Russian security services on bogus charges, leaving his wife and daughter to wonder if they will ever see him again.
- Truong Duy Nhat contributed to RFA’s Vietnamese Service, who was wrongfully abducted by Thai police in 2019, later sentenced in Vietnam to years in jail.
- Pham Chi Dung wrote for Voice of America and was unjustly arrested by Vietnamese police and sentenced to fifteen years in jail.

At least five USAGM supported employees remain jailed in Vietnam, two in Russia, one in Belarus, one in Azerbaijan, and two in Myanmar. We request that you with regularity use the voice of the United States to raise concern about their cases, and direct relevant regional bureaus, the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, (DRL), Consular Affairs (CA) and the Office of the Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs (SPEHA) to engage on their behalf where appropriate. We also request that you provide a plan to secure these journalists’ release following grant terminations for USAGM networks and its entities.

Sincerely,



Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator