

Journalists Reporting in Syria

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Senators' Statements

November 23, 2016

The Honorable Senator Ratna Omidvar:

Honourable senators, journalists have been talked about in the last little time in the Senate with some frequency, and I rise today to pay tribute to Canadian journalists reporting out of Syria.

Just this week, a team of journalists with the CBC are reporting from in and around Damascus. Their profession takes them directly to the front lines so that we Canadians and in fact the world can get a clearer picture of this most urgent global story.

It can be easy, I think, to take for granted the information that reaches us from war zones, and it is easy to overlook the lives of people who bring us these stories, but here is who journalists are. They travel in the direction of the battle when I think natural

instinct is to flee from it. They leave behind spouses and children and lives. They face directly and personally, with significant consequences on their health, mental and otherwise, the carnage and trauma of war, and yet they continue their work.

We should acknowledge that theirs is a dangerous world. Reporters Without Borders called Syria the world's deadliest country for journalists. To date in 2016, 10 journalists who have been reporting in Syria have been killed. Yet, journalists — Canadians and others — choose relentlessly to return. We are indebted to them for their pursuit of the truth, especially at this moment in time.

Many voices clamour to tell their own truths about what's happening in Syria and, depending on the source, casualties are either terrorists, freedom fighters or civilians. Again, depending on the source, targets are military objectives, hospitals or schools. The competing versions of truth cloud our understanding and judgment, so who is one to believe? And in this post-truth world, propaganda and often pure fiction — I think we know this — have a real impact on global politics and decision making.

I think now more than ever we need the eyewitness accounts of Canadian reporters whose courage and creed leads them to war zones like Syria. We need their objectivity, their accuracy and their balance.

And let me make one more submission to you, honourable senators. I think now more than ever we need to recognize our role as legislators in ensuring that Canadian journalists have every protection and freedom to continue shining light into darkness here at home and abroad. If we choose to honour their work in this way it would be very powerful.

Biography

Senator

Ratna Omidvar