

10 June 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr  
Attorney General of the United States  
United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001  
United States of America

*Dear Attorney General,*

I am writing on behalf of the Association for International Broadcasting and its Members – who collectively reach audiences in excess of one billion people each week – to raise our concerns about the way in which journalists and news crews have been arbitrarily detained or have encountered attacks by law enforcement agencies in a number of US states in recent days.

The number of the attacks and detentions of journalists and news crews going about their lawful business in cities across the US is high; the severity of the attacks is also high. They are unprecedented in a major democracy in modern times. The attacks and detentions are particularly egregious as they go against American principles and ideals expressed in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as well as US policies.

The arrests of and violence against journalists and their crews covering news events as they unfolded across the US appears to contravene the First Amendment. They further violate international norms on the protection of journalists that the US have long supported and promoted. The concerted attacks on news media in the past few weeks perpetrated by US law enforcement agencies contravene Resolution 74/157 of the United Nations, adopted in December 2019.

Crews working for this Association's Members have suffered from direct unprovoked attacks by US law enforcement agencies, resulting in injury. Journalists and crews working for other media companies from across the world have similarly been attacked, apparently indiscriminately and with impunity.

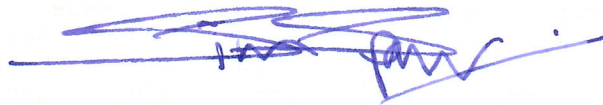
In addition to the illegality of these attacks and detentions, there is significant danger that other nations that do not share the democratic ideals of the United States, or that have not yet achieved democracy, will look to these occurrences to support their own restrictive regimes. This has the potential to endanger journalists and news crews who are US citizens reporting from territories across the world. It is likely that their protection will be reduced as a direct consequence of the recent actions by US law enforcement agencies. This is a point made by the then UK Foreign Secretary's Special Envoy on Media Freedom, Amal Clooney. Speaking at the Global Conference on Media Freedom organized jointly by the UK and Canadian governments,

and attended by the Acting Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip T. Reeker, in London in July 2019, she said: “We have to be vigilant and we also have to know that what happens in a country like Australia or the UK or the US will be looked at by every other leader in the world and potentially used as an excuse to clamp down even further on journalists.”

The United States has an important, central role in ensuring that media freedom is protected at home as well as abroad. It has a leadership role that is amplified through its membership of the Media Freedom Coalition Executive Group, and as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council.

The Association for International Broadcasting and its Members call on the US Department of Justice to uphold the rights of journalists, news crews and media companies to report freely and without fear from across the US. We also ask that you reinforce the need for US law enforcement agencies to act in accordance with accepted international standards for the protection of journalists working in the field. We further request that the appropriate inquiries are undertaken into the widespread attacks on and detention of journalists with action taken against those members of law enforcement agencies who have willfully disregarded the law in executing their duties.

*Yours sincerely,*



Simon Spanswick  
Chief Executive

CC: US Secretary of State  
AIB Executive Committee