

# Press Freedom Act: Government in Belarus imprisoned journalists



Belarus was mentioned in the text of the Daniel Pearl Press Freedom Act signed into law by President Barack Obama last Monday, May 17. According to the Voice of America [\\*](#), the U.S. State Department will be required to evaluate press freedom in countries around the world and highlight governments that condone and facilitate repression of the press. Pressure on journalists has recently increased in Belarus. Two criminal cases have been initiated against independent news website [charter97.org](#). According to [charter97.org](#)[\\*](#), their office was searched and computers were seized and journalist Natalya Radzina was beaten during the search. The editor of the opposition newspaper "Tovarishch" Syarhei Vvaznyak has recently been arrested after a search in his apartment.

*Obama Signs Press Freedom Act Voice of America Editorial*  
The United States continues to be a staunch defender of press freedom. In support of this fundamental liberty, President Barack Obama recently signed the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act. The law is named in honor of the American journalist who was kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan by terrorists on February 1st, 2002. The Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act, said President Obama, "sends a strong message from the United States government and from the State Department that we are paying attention to how other governments are operating when it comes to the press." Under the new law, the State Department will be required to evaluate press freedom in countries around the

world and highlight governments that condone and facilitate repression of the press. "Oftentimes, without this kind of attention," said President Obama, "countries and governments feel they can operate against the press with impunity, and we want to send a message that they can't." The attention is warranted. In a recent statement on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, President Obama noted that last year was a particularly bad one for freedom of the press worldwide. While people gained greater access than ever before to information through the Internet and cell phones, governments like North Korea, Ethiopia, Iran, and Venezuela curtailed freedom of expression by limiting full access to and use of these technologies. More media workers were killed for their work last year than any year in recent history. The high toll was driven in large part by the election-related killings of more than 30 journalists in the Philippine province of Maguindanao. In addition, journalists were killed with impunity in Somalia and Honduras. Even more journalists have been imprisoned. "Iran, following its crackdown on dissent after the last elections," said President Obama, "now has more journalists behind bars than any other nation. Governments in Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba, Eritrea, North Korea, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela imprisoned journalists who wrote articles critical of government leaders and their policies." The United States honors those who carry out the vital task of reporting the truth to their fellow citizens, despite the many challenges and threats they face. All nations should. Article 19 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration on Human Rights protects freedom of expression including the right to a free press. There can be no doubt that a free and independent press is central to a vibrant and well-functioning democracy.