

Press Release

FCCJ Freedom of the Press Committee

Japan Investigative Journalism Awards and Special Freedom Of Press Prizes

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Today is a dark day for journalism in Japan with the enactment of the State Secrets Law, which the United Nations has condemned.

Reporters Without Borders has called it, “an unprecedented threat to freedom of information.” The organization’s World Press Freedom Index for 2014 has just dropped Japan to number 59 on its list, below countries like Serbia and Chile. This marks a precipitous fall; Japan was ranked as high as 22 in 2012. Clearly, even international observers are becoming increasingly concerned about the direction of media freedom here.

The law provides for prison terms of up to ten years, not only for government insiders who leak information regarded as “secret,” but also for those, including journalists, who encourage them to do so. In other words, according to experts, even asking persistently about a “secret” could be a crime punishable with up to five years in jail.

The secrecy law, unprecedented in Japan’s postwar history, was forced through the Diet over the objections of critics who pointed out its many deficiencies. While the law was still under consideration, the FCCJ released a statement expressing our concerns.

The FCCJ has always been committed to promoting excellence in the media field. The Club highlights events that receive insufficient attention in the Japanese press, by speaking out for the safety and for the rights of journalists, and by hosting speakers who throw new light upon the subjects of the day.

In order to keep the flames of good journalism burning in the blackness ahead, The Foreign Correspondent's Club of Japan from next year will hold its first annual Japan Investigative Journalism Awards and Special Freedom Of Press Prizes. A panel of Japan's best journalists is currently being vetted. Nominations will be taken from the public and the results announced on May 3rd, the UN World Press Freedom Day.

The FCCJ Freedom of the Press Committee has decided to launch these awards and prizes to confer due recognition upon those heroes and heroines whose work represents the finest in defense of free speech, open society, and democratic accountability, with a particular eye to issues connected with, or touching upon, the Japanese experience.

The FCCJ hopes these awards will encourage good news reporting and keep the world focused on the tremendous importance of the third estate as a watchdog on the powers that be, and a guardian of democracy.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost."

For more information on the awards please write, Freedom of Press Committee Member, Jake Adelstein (The Daily Beast, Vice News, Japan Times, 財界展望)
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