



Hello to Free Press Unlimited, its team and the jury that has selected me as the winner! I'm greatly honored to receive this award, and to be honest, very overwhelmed. This is not something you expect while being detained, so I don't even know if there's any suitable form of words to describe what I'm feeling. A lot of non-government media experience pressure from people in power here in Kyrgyzstan: from being closed all together or having individual journalists detained. Just a few weeks ago, a new law was proposed where people can get a fine of 1200-2400\$ for "fake" comments related to current political figures. The law is already in use. So I'm very happy to receive this award at exactly THIS moment because not only will it bring attention to the whole ridiculous state of freedom of speech in Kyrgyzstan but also give a little bit of hope for other journalists here.

It's also very unfortunate to not be physically present at the event. I'm confident that similar stories can be found in other nations. And I wanted to meet them to learn more. I'm just beginning my journey and it would be great to get different advice from people that have been doing this job for years. I got detained on my only 5th month of being an investigative journalist. I seriously haven't even done anything to actually piss off big people in government. It's almost like I'm doing everything backwards. First I'm imprisoned, then I win an award and only after that I make some big investigations. That's okay though, I'm used to doing everything backwards. I also birthed my own mom.

Jokes aside, if you're suffering political persecution in your home country, you're not alone. I've seen it and it's impossible to take us down. As scary as it may sound and look, prison is just a temporary way to physically stop us. But words are not physical. They can outlive any censorship or metallic bars with ease. You write, you speak and it's over. Your words are already spread, and they do not stop. I've spent currently 258 days imprisoned, and not a single day I thought of stopping. I write everyday, investigate, and prepare my future works with any given moment I have. If not me, someone else will continue my works because with me winning this award, a new fresh mind is born, motivated to also receive the world's recognition and to open new horizons.

Thanks to Free Press Unlimited! To all other journalists around the world! And to other nominees that I would've actually loved to share this award with! We all do an important, sometimes ungrateful job. But that for sure will never stop us. Not even a grave can hold our body down, we will crawl back to post that goddamn article and get our shares!

Thanks to everyone, I apologize if something was not clear and wish everyone a good day and less pressure from the government :)

Wish you the best: Aike