



Committee to Protect Journalists

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His Excellency Shinzo Abe  
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Excellency,

I write as the chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to the defense of press freedom and the rights of journalists around the world.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Japan in conjunction with symposia organized by two of your country's leading universities. On June 4, Waseda University hosted a conference with CPJ on investigative journalism in Japan. On June 2, CPJ and Sophia University hosted a separate event focused on press freedom and media safety.

The Sophia University symposium also featured a keynote address from UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression David Kaye, who spoke about the findings of his [recent report on Japan](#). In his remarks, Kaye emphasized several areas of concern, including the possible chilling effect of the vaguely worded 2014 Specially Designated Secrets Act, which could be used to prosecute journalists for publishing classified information. Kaye also highlighted that the broadcast regulatory agency is not independent, but is part of the government.

The Special Rapporteur's concerns echoes those we heard from journalists and media experts we met during our recent visit, who described a tense relationship with the government, pressure on media companies, and an uncertain legal environment that contributes to a deep unease.

Excellency, Japan's historic commitment to press freedom and freedom of expression; its strong and vital media; and its free and open Internet are an inspiration to journalists in Asia and around the world. Press freedom is the pillar of any democratic society. At a time when these values are being challenged around the world, we need leaders who stand up and embrace them, leaders who tolerate criticism of government as a normal part of democratic life.

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Advancing press freedom, even when that press is critical of the government, is a chance for Japan to set an example, and take a leading role in the region as a proponent of liberal democratic values.

That is why we were disappointed to see Japan's [official response](#) to the Special Rapporteur's report. Rather than welcoming constructive and thoughtful criticism as an opportunity for Japan to strengthen press freedom, your government dismissed Kaye's findings, wrongly dismissing them as unsubstantiated and as hearsay. We were also disappointed that Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to meet with CPJ's delegation, which included David Schlesinger, the former editor-in-chief of Reuters, Sandra Mims Rowe, the outgoing chair of CPJ, and me, saying that there was no one "appropriate" to receive us.

Japan's historic commitment to freedom of the press is a source of strength and national pride. But the concerns raised by the Special Rapporteur are well grounded, and confirmed by our own recent experience. We urge you to treat his recommendations with the utmost seriousness and consideration, and to work towards their implementation.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Carroll  
Chair

CC

Yoshihide Suga, chief Cabinet Secretary

Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sanae Takaichi, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communication

Katsutoshi Kaneda, Minister of Justice