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Sevgil Musaieva

We Know the Truth About the War in Ukraine Because of Journalists

Ми знаємо правду про війну в Україні завдяки журналістам

Головна редакторка «Української правди» С. Мусаєва, яка увійшла до сотні найвпливовіших людей світу за версією Time, виступила на саміті TIME100 у Нью-Йорку, де заявила, що журналісти на війні в Україні стикаються з неймовірними проблемами, найголовніша з яких просто вижити, розповідаючи світові правду. За три місяці в Україні загинуло 32 журналісти, 9 з них під час виконання службових обов'язків.

<https://time.com/6184962/sevgil-musaieva-time100-summit-2022/>

Editor's note: Sevgil Musaieva, the editor in chief of independent Ukrainian news outlet Ukrayinska Pravda, appeared at the TIME100 Summit in New York City on Tuesday, June 7. Here are her remarks, published in full.

It's the year 2000. I am 13 years old. I am growing up in Crimea, the southernmost region in Ukraine, and dreaming about becoming a journalist.

There was total censorship in Ukraine at that time. Thirty-one-year-old Ukrainian journalist Georhiy Gongadze is one of a few who dares to criticize the government, and he is blacklisted from employment on television.

And for this reason—in April of 2000, he and a colleague decided to create an online publication named Ukrayinska Pravda. Pravda means Truth. “Giving the new meaning to old concepts,” is how Gongadze explained the name.

The fact is that the Russian newspaper Pravda has been the main source of official propaganda for decades. That the paper calls itself Truth must be understood in the Orwellian sense of the word—truth is a lie, peace is war, slavery is freedom.

Gongadze's publication, Ukrayinska Pravda, was founded to return a non-propaganda meaning to this word. To make the Truth once again truthful.

Six months later, he was killed. The “Gongadze case” led to accusations against the authorities and protests, which ended with the Orange Revolution in 2004. Gongadze and the journalists working at Ukrayinska Pravda helped push forward Ukraine's democratic development, making freedom of speech an essential value.

Gongadze's story is etched in my heart. The written word is a weapon. And the truth is a weapon.

Fourteen years later, in 2014, fate will bring us together—me and Ukrayinska Pravda, the publication Gongadze founded, where I am now the chief editor

We will meet at a terrible time—a few months after the Revolution of Dignity, the occupation of Crimea by Russia, the beginning of the war in the East. At the same time, Ukraine is trying to make reforms and fight corruption. In 2014, democracy has won in Ukraine, but it is fragile. There are too many challenges.

It turns out that all these terrible events were just a preparation for the most important battle for the right of our country to exist, which began for us on the morning of February 24, 2022.

I am often asked what the war in Ukraine is about today. And I have three answers to that question.

It is a war for the future of the world, for its ability to unite for its future.

It is a war of decolonization, because Ukraine is fighting for the right to exist.

But for me, as a journalist, it is also a war of truth and lies. The war for the right to call a spade a spade.

Thanks to journalists, the world saw the truth about Bucha, Borodyanka, and Irpin. Hundreds of civilians shot dead by the Russian military. The Kremlin continues to blame the West and Ukraine, claiming that all these photos are fakes. But we know the truth.

Because in Bucha, the Russians killed the father of my colleague, a 70-year-old unarmed man. And in Irpen, my classmate from Harvard, documentarian Brent Renaud, who came there to make a TIME Studios film about the Ukrainian refugee crisis, was shot dead.

Journalists in the war in Ukraine face incredible challenges, the most basic one of which is simply to survive while telling the world the truth. In three months, 32 journalists died in Ukraine, 9 of them in the line of duty.

Another challenge is not to cause harm. Because when reporting on a war, the cost of error is measured by human life.

A couple of weeks ago, I arranged for an interview with a victim of sexual violence by the Russian military. We talked for a long time, but then she asked that I not publish the story. Instead, she asked me for help getting access to medical abortion drugs. As a human, I had to help her, and as a journalist, I could not publish an interview with her.

Sometimes the most powerful truth is to remain silent. And sometimes, it is necessary to speak out.

In the days of the fiercest fighting near Kyiv, Ukrayinska Pravda published the names of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine at a time when they were a few kilometers away from our parents and relatives. Was it dangerous? Yes. Was it important? Yes, it was.

When you cover a war as a journalist, you face grief and death every day. The truth is harder to communicate and to comprehend in war. It can get lost in the scale of the grief, and in the statistics.

It is under such conditions that you value the opportunity to tell the truth even more, to tell the story of a person who died, lost relatives or miraculously escaped. And it is through this work that ensures that the stories of the victims are told. That the story of Ukraine is told.

This knowledge gives us the strength we need to work—despite the sirens sounding every day and the horror of the war in which my country has been living for four months now.

In March, TIME published a cover emblazoned with the phrase “Life Will Overcome Death and Light —Darkness,” set against a background of the Ukrainian flag.

I would like to add one more sentence.

Life will overcome death and light will defeat darkness. And Ukrainian truth will surely defeat lies. No matter how difficult this struggle is.