



# Society of Environmental Journalists

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January 30, 2020

Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St.  
Washington, D.C., 20520 U.S.A.  
c/o DoS Press [PAPressDuty@state.gov](mailto:PAPressDuty@state.gov)

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

The Society of Environmental Journalists protests the State Department's punitive action against National Public Radio after you verbally abused and threatened its journalist, Mary Louise Kelly, in retaliation for her persistent questioning of you in an interview you did not like.

SEJ is the world's largest professional organization dedicated to supporting environmental journalism, with more than 1,500 members in 46 countries. While Ms. Kelly's interview with you dealt with topics our members don't normally cover, SEJ believes it necessary to speak out against conduct aimed at intimidating all journalists and undermining the bedrock American principle of a free, independent press.

In the past, the State Department has spoken out in defense and support of the press in other countries, where journalists aren't just criticized but jailed or worse for asking tough questions. We can't help but note the irony of your attacks on Ms. Kelly, a widely respected veteran journalist, for doing her job, and for your subsequent public criticism of American news media as "unhinged" and lacking in integrity. To follow that up by removing NPR reporter Michele Kelemen from your plane for an upcoming trip abroad only deepens the irony.

Sadly, this episode is of a piece with abusive treatment journalists on a variety of beats are receiving all too frequently from the Trump administration. It's one thing to take issue with the facts in a story you don't like, but quite another when public officials or agencies ascribe ulterior motives to journalists and encourage the public to turn against them.

The journalists with whom you and others in the administration work every day are professionals, doing the job of informing the American people about what



their government is doing. The First Amendment to the Constitution, which you swore to support and defend, recognizes how essential that is in a democracy. You do not have to like us. But we would appreciate civility from public servants, especially those at the highest levels, that can serve as an example not only within our nation but around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meera', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Meera Subramanian, President

Society of Environmental Journalists

cc: Stephanie Grisham, White House Press Secretary

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