



The Honorable Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Main
Washington DC 20530

Delivered via Email

30 April 2026

Dear Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon,

This Sunday, May 3rd marks World Press Freedom Day, and we, the undersigned civil society organizations, strongly urge that you drop the charges against Georgia Fort and other members of the press in the case of United States v. Levy Armstrong (0:26-cr-00025). The arrest of Georgia Fort and others for their reporting on a protest along with their subsequent prosecution underscores a disturbing escalation of a systemic disregard for human rights.

World Press Freedom Day is dedicated to the importance of journalism and freedom of expression and to remind governments to uphold the right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

States have an obligation to protect journalists and not to persecute them in an effort to control the free flow of information. A free media is not only beneficial but necessary in a free society. By exposing human rights abuses and uplifting the voices of marginalized communities, the media can, at its best, encourage the proper application of justice and stimulate debates leading to better understanding that can defuse situations that might otherwise lead to conflict.

Since January 2025, the Trump administration has consistently targeted journalists for reporting on its actions with scrutiny. Examples of these attacks include the deportation of USA-based journalist and asylum-seeker Mario Guevara who reported on ICE raids; the FBI seizure of personal and professional devices from a Washington, DC reporter's home; the White House's launch of a

website focused on attacking journalists and media outlets not in line with the administration; and the weaponization of the Federal Communications Commission's authority to approve licensing and corporate media mergers based on corporate rejection of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.¹

The active targeting and discrediting of reporters and the media by those in power is a common authoritarian practice. Narrative control and silencing dissent or non-aligned reporting are key strategies for those in power to seek to act without accountability. The right to freedom of expression and press is a way for the public to hold leaders accountable; without this, leaders are further emboldened to act with impunity.²

In December 2025, the Trump administration launched a federal immigration crackdown known as "Operation Metro Surge" in the St. Paul/Minneapolis, Minnesota region ("Twin Cities"). The Department of Homeland Security deployed more than 3,000 federal immigration agents, who used military tactics against residents, causing fear and panic throughout the Twin Cities. Residents began to mobilize in a number of ways, including organizing protests against "Operation Metro Surge". Some residents of the Twin Cities described the experience as being "under siege" given the violent and hostile presence of federal immigration agents. Multiple journalists were documented to have been physically harmed as well while covering this protest.³

On 7 January 2026, ICE agents killed Renee Good, a community observer on federal immigration actions in Minneapolis.⁴ Following her death, on 18 January, a group of demonstrators protested inside a church in the city of St. Paul because one of the church's pastors was an acting field office director for ICE there at the time. Journalist Georgia Fort and others representing the press arrived at the scene to document the protest.

¹ Associated Press, "Spanish-language journalist arrested while covering protest near Atlanta deported to El Salvador", 3 October 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/journalist-detained-immigration-ice-mario-guevara-atlanta-dace73271b02d6e41890ba0554859b12>; Washington Post, "FBI Agents Search Washington Post Reporter's Home", 14 January 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/01/14/washington-post-reporter-search/>; Reporters Without Borders, "USA: New White House 'Hall of Shame' Webpage Expands Trump's War on the Press, Disparaging the Media", 3 December 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/usa-new-white-house-hall-shame-webpage-expands-trump-s-war-press-disparaging-media>; and FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, X Post: "I am concerned by Verizon's continued focus on promoting DEI. I expect all regulated businesses to end invidious forms of discrimination.", 27 February 2025, <https://x.com/BrendanCarrFCC/status/1895211283089367318>.

² Amnesty International, *Ring the Alarm Bells: Rising Authoritarian Practices and Erosion of Human Rights in the United States* (Index: AMR 51/0616/2026), 20 January 2026, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Ringing-the-Alarm-Bells-Rising-Authoritarian-Practices-and-Erosion-of-Human-Rights-in-the-United-States.pdf>

³ See Associated Press, "Federal officers push AP reporters back to their car as they document operation", 28 January 2026 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHzl6MbDNUw>; Status Coup News, X post: "You're all under arrest" An ominous announcement can be heard on border patrol's radio just moments after their agents threw Status Coup's reporter Tina-Desiree Berg, and deployed tear and flash bang grenades at the press indiscriminately", 26 January 2026, <https://bsky.app/profile/statuscoupnews.bsky.social/post/3md626o7bj22t>; U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, "Border Patrol agent shoves journalist into protesters in Minnesota", 24 January 2026, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/border-patrol-agent-shoves-journalist-into-protesters-in-minnesota/>; Sean Beckner Carmitchell, X post: "Minneapolis, MN - I got absolutely covered in spray. Really grateful to some protesters who have helped remove the dousing all over one of my jackets, face and camera. Regardless of how you feel about the protests, these people are incredibly kind", 24 January 2026, <https://bsky.app/profile/acatwithnews.bsky.social/post/3md6vxd6ud22g>; Jordyn Gualdani, Instagram post: "Managed to catch the moment I was hit with a flashbang on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026", 29 January 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DUGe1Njjspe/?img_index=1; U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, "Photojournalist pushed to the ground, pepper sprayed at Minneapolis protest", 13 January 2026, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/photojournalist-pushed-to-the-ground-pepper-sprayed-at-minneapolis-protest/> and U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, "Photojournalist shot at with pepper balls amid immigration", 12 January 2026, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/photojournalist-shot-at-with-pepper-balls-amid-immigration-operation/>

⁴ Associated Press, "Family and neighbors mourn woman who was shot by ICE agent and made Minneapolis home", 8 January 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/ice-shooting-minneapolis-minnesota-9aa822670b705c89906f2c699f1d16c5>

Within a few days, the protesters were arrested. The federal government sought to arrest the journalists and other members of the press at the same time, but its request was denied on three separate occasions by a magistrate judge, district court judge, and appellate court judge, respectively.⁵ The Department of Justice then called for a grand jury hearing resulting in an indictment on three felony charges, including a hate crime statute against Georgia Fort and two other members of the press who reported on the demonstrations.⁶ In the early morning on 30 January, Georgia Fort and other journalists were arrested (an additional journalist was indicted in late February).⁷

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the United States has ratified, enshrines the right to freedom of expression, which protects a free press and the right of journalists to seek and share information. However, for the Department of Justice to prosecute Georgia Fort and journalists with criminal charges, including a hate crime, for reporting on a protest inside Cities Church in St. Paul, Minnesota is to target them for simply doing their job as journalists and violates their human rights.

Reporting is not a crime. Rather, ensuring the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and of press freedom is integral to holding government officials accountable for their actions. These charges deliver a chilling and intimidating effect on journalists who are covering issues that are most pressing to communities.

This World Press Freedom Day, we the undersigned civil society organizations strongly urge that you drop the charges against Georgia Fort and the other journalists in the case of *United States v. Levy Armstrong* (0:26-cr-00025) in the District Court of Minnesota:

Amnesty International USA

Center for Media and Democracy

Committee to Protect Journalists

Common Cause

Free Press

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Human Rights First

International Women's Media Foundation

Journalism & Women Symposium

Los Angeles Press Club

National Press Club

National Press Photographer's Association

PEN America

Radio Television Digital News Association

Reporters without Borders

Society of Professional Journalists

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

⁵ New York Times, "Don Lemon Hires Federal Prosecutor Who Quit Over Immigration Crackdown", 10 February 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/10/us/joseph-thompson-don-lemon-minneapolis-protest.html>

⁶ Jurist News, "Journalist Don Lemon pleads not guilty in Minnesota First Amendment case", 14 February 2026, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2026/02/journalist-don-lemon-pleads-not-guilty-in-minnesota-first-amendment-case/>

⁷ District Court of Minnesota, *United States v. Levy Armstrong*, No. 0:26-cr-25-LMP-DLM, Superseding Indictment, 26 February 2026.