



NYCLU

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July 5, 2012

VIA FIRST CLASS MAIL

Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal
Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information
Department of Public Information
U.N. Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Maher Nasser
Acting Head of the U.N. Department of Public Information
Department of Public Information
U.N. Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Re: Procedure for Review of U.N. Media Accreditation

Dear Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal and Mr. Nasser:

We have been informed that Steve Redisch, the Executive Editor of Voice of America, has written a letter of complaint regarding a journalist, Matthew Russell Lee, who currently enjoys press privileges conferred by the United Nations Department of Public Information. The letter requests that the News and Media Division of the Department of Public Information review Mr. Lee's accreditation status. We take no position on the merits of that complaint, or any other complaints that may be advanced with regard to Mr. Lee. We write in an effort to determine the procedure that is used to review the accreditation status of U.N. journalists and to urge that the procedure comport with basic principles of fairness.

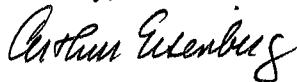
Our concern in this matter derives from the basic understanding that the press plays a vital role in informing the public about the important issues of the day and the functioning of our public institutions. As stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "[e]veryone has the right 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." Press access is an important vehicle to ensure an informed public. And the procedures governing the granting or withholding of press access are, therefore, important. A fair and clear procedure plays an essential role in ensuring that press access is not denied arbitrarily or conditioned on the content of a journalist's reporting.

Under these circumstances, when disputes arise that could result in the loss of a journalist's press privileges, fundamental fairness suggests that the journalist should be provided with notice of the factual reasons for the review of his or her status, an opportunity to rebut those factual reasons, and a written decision containing the reasons for the ultimate determination. See Sherrill v. Knight, 569 F.2d 124, 128, 130 (D.C. Cir. 1977). These steps represent the minimum procedural safeguards for securing freedom of expression by protecting the news-gathering function of the press.

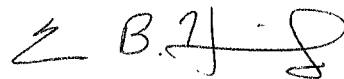
Because of the importance of the rights at issue, we ask that you inform us what procedure is used to review the accreditation of journalists reporting on the United Nations. If such procedures as those outlined above are not already in place, we urge the Department of Public Information to adopt similar safeguards in view of the United Nations' commitment to the freedom of opinion and expression.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Arthur Eisenberg
Legal Director



Erin Beth Harrist
Attorney

cc:

Matthew Russell Lee
Inner City Press
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U.N. Headquarters
New York, NY 10017