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BELARUS

Government awards bogus journalism prizes

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Reporters Without Borders is shocked to learn that the information ministry has just awarded a series of journalism prizes in Belarus, a county where censorship prevails and the state of the independent media is alarming.

The prizes were awarded during a "special international exhibition" entitled "Mass media in Belarus" that the information and foreign ministries and the Minsk city hall organized from 5 to 7 May with the motto of "Word in the service of the world." Participants included print media, TV and radio stations, news agencies and Internet Service Providers.

Deputy information minister **Igor Lutsky** awarded the prizes to several national media. Journalists with the news agency *BELTA* (Belarusian Telegraphic Agency) won the "best reporter," "best photo-reporter" and "[best web column](#)" awards.

[In an article about the prizes](#), *BELTA* said it had been rewarded for "conscientious and beneficial work in the media domain and its major contribution to realizing the state's information policies."

Congratulating the winners, Lutsky said "the press and information have a special meaning in today's world."

Reporters Without Borders does not share his enthusiasm for the awards, given the disastrous state of independent media in Belarus and the level of [Internet censorship](#) since the adoption of draconian legislation.

No mention was made of the persecution of independent journalists, whose requests for accreditation are repeatedly refused and who are subjected to countless forms of [administrative harassment](#).

The latest victims include [Olga Chaychyts](#), who is about to be tried for working without accreditation for *Belsat*, a Polish TV station that specializes in broadcasting reliable news coverage to Belarus.

Reporters Without Borders is also concerned about the case of **Alyaksandr Alesin**, a [journalist accused of "collaborating with foreign intelligence services."](#) and calls on the authorities to drop all charges against him.

Belarus is ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
