

## Stop attacking journalists for asking for information on COVID-19

We, undersigned members of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), condemn the public attacks and smear campaign by the Slovene government and media supporting the ruling SDS party against our fellow member Blaž Zgaga. We request such attacks against journalists stop immediately.

After Zgaga filed a FOIA request to obtain information about government handling of COVID-19, the official Twitter account of the Crisis Headquarters of Republic of Slovenia retweeted an anonymous tweet on 15 March 2020 which claimed: "Psychiatrists are searching for 4 patients who escaped quarantine. They have a virus covid-marks/lenin". Zgaga and three other Slovenes were mentioned, including philosopher Slavoj Žižek. This tweet, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, endorsed by an official communication channel of the Slovene government has put all four people in real immediate danger.

The following day Nova24 TV and weekly Demokracija, both owned and managed by the ruling SDS party, published articles designating Zgaga as a "deep state" journalist, who is undermining the efforts of the new government related to the COVID19 epidemic, because of his Freedom of Information request to the government.

As a result of the actions mentioned above, Zgaga received numerous anonymous threats and hate messages.

Zgaga has been a member of ICIJ since 2011. He is a professional and experienced journalist, who has won numerous awards for his public service journalism. He has reported on abuses of power with ICIJ projects.

We demand the Government of Slovenia and the SDS party stop attacking our colleague and other journalists in Slovenia who try to obtain official information and keep a critical focus on those in power.

We ask the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the European Parliament to take this situation seriously and request explanations by the Government of Slovenia and communicate publicly their findings.

Ștefan Cîndea, Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism, Romania.

Rakesh Kalshian, Independent Journalist, New delhi

Emmanuel K. Dogbevi, Ghana Business News

Sandrine Sawadogo, Burkina Faso, L'Economiste du Faso

Ola Westerberg, TT News Agency, Sweden

Johannes Kr. Kristjansson, Reykjavik Media, Iceland

Mohammed Komani, ARIJ, Yemen

Pedro Enrique Armendares, Mexico

Alia Ibrahim, Daraj, Beirut

Marcelo Soares, Lagom Data, Brazil

Alvin Ntibinyane, INK Centre, Botswana

Sandra Bartlett, Independent, Canada

Nelfi Fernandez Reyes, EL DEBER, Bolivia

Michael Bilton, investigative writer, United Kingdom.

Luc Caregari, Woxx, Luxembourg.

Leo Sisti, L'Espresso, Italy.

Joop Bouma, Trouw, the Netherlands

Jeroen Trommelen, Investico, The Netherlands

Shyamlal Yadav, The Indian Express, India

Oliver Zihlmann, Tamedia, Switzerland

Søren Kristensen, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Denmark

John Hansen, Politiken, Denmark

Serena Tinari, Re-Check.ch, Switzerland

Stefan Melichar, profil, Austria

Linton Besser, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Marcos García Rey, El Confidencial, Spain

Yossi Melman, Haaretz, Israel

Frederik Obermaier, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany

Bastian Obermayer, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany

Paul Radu, The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project

Stelios Orphanides, OCCRP

Stanimir Vaglenov, Bulgaria

Nina Selbo Torset, Aftenposten

Pelin Ünker, İstanbul, Turkey

Fernando Rodrigues, Poder360, Brazil

Atanas Chobanov, Bivol, Bulgaria

Micael Pereira, Expresso, Portugal

Sarunas Cerniauskas, OCCRP/Siena.It, Lithuania

Kristof Clerix, Knack, Belgium

Marcel Metze, The Investigative Desk, Netherlands

Juliette Garside, The Guardian, United Kingdom

Edik Baghdasaryan, Hetq, Armenia

José Roberto de Toledo, revista piauí, Brazil

Harry Karanikas, Mega Channel, To Vima newspaper, Greece

Susanne Reber, Scripps DC, USA

Musikilu Mojeed, Premium Times, Nigeria

Edouard Perrin, Premières Lignes, France

Rob Rose, Financial Mail, South Africa

Djordje Padejski, Stanford University, USA

Brigitte Alfter, Arena for Journalism in Europe, Denmark

Daniel Santoro, Clarin / FOPEA, Argentina

Giannina Segnini, Columbia University, US

Charles Lewis, Investigative Reporting Workshop, US

Mariel Fitz Patrick, Infobae and Foro de Periodismo Argentino (FOPEA), Argentina

Monica Almeida, Diario El Universo, Ecuador

Tamás Bodoky, atlatszo.hu, Hungary

Frédéric Zalac, Radio-Canada, Canada

Mónica Gonzalez, Ciper (Chile)

Carlos Eduardo Huertas, CONNECTAS, Latin America

Boyoung Lim, South Korea

Neil Chenoweth, Australian Financial Review, Australia

Karlijn Kuijpers, Platform Investico, The Netherlands

Margo Smit, public broadcaster NPO, The Netherlands

Colm Keena, The Irish Times, Ireland

Mary Triny Zea, diario La Prensa, Panamá

Dean Starkman, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, Washington.

Nicky Hager, New Zealand

Umar Cheema, Pakistan

Sven Bergman, SVT, Sweden