

I am deeply moved, honored and delighted to receive this great award, which serves me a sense of closure of whatever I in this profession, over three decades, wished and attempted to accomplish, however little.

It has been a journey marked by a struggle for survival, for more defeats than achievements, for battling against all sorts of non-imaginary, real windmills.

Yet, I should put much deeper emphasis on another aspect the award invites, and that should leave us to be less cheerful about: The award comes at a time, which puts Turkey's embattled, weary and intensely oppressed media - with a very weak moral compass, to a significant degree submissive, in shackles, limping and frightened - under a spotlight.

After an extended, seemingly unending period of intolerance for dissent, chronic allergy for free and independent reporting, systemic intimidation and harrassment by two sorts of punitive measures, namely jailings and arbitrary sackings en masse, implemented by the government, judiciary and, powerful and greedy moguls, we at home fight for a media which these days try to stand on its trembling legs to do its job against authoritarianism, subordination to power and all sorts of methods to block the truth to reach the country's curious, freedom striving public.

The award goes way beyond me, to all those colleagues of mine, who year after year had to work under severe conditions that were set to restrict and showed brave professional resistance to serve their social role.

Those who stood for the independence and freedom, no matter what the odds were, have constantly been tested with prison, with unemployment, depraved of collective rights, humiliation, subservience.

Some of them, like our dear friend and colleague, Hrant Dink, an Armenian who published a paper in Istanbul, were heinously murdered. Others, like those who tried to cover the urban unrest

or graft probe, were physically harassed. The award goes to all of them.

It also goes to all the dissidents, most of them imprisoned due to anti-terror law, mainly Kurds, who wish to exercise their freedom of expression, and right to publish, to share opinion, however offensive they sometimes might be perceived.

Last but not the least, I am very, very happy, proud and honored to have a dear colleague of mine, here.

Ms Yasemin Çongar, who was until recently the managing editor with the tiny, but bolder than bold, independent Taraf daily, that pushed Turkey's democratisation agenda on daily basis, is with us.

We began journalism in the dark days under Turkish junta, in the eighties, and our paths crossed constantly. Both of us having had our share of being forced to quit, we now launched a new media platform, P24, Platform for Independent Journalism, to monitor Turkish media, train young media professionals and do whatever we can, in our limited abilities, to raise the standards at home and promote for a future in digital journalism.

Honorary chairman of P24, who is not with us today, is Hasan Cemal. Our mentor, and source of constant inspiration to this day since the late 1970's. He was the editor who with daily Cumhuriyet created a stronghold of journalism during the days the generals and all sorts of militarists were trying to turn it into a wreck, to dysfunctionality.

Last year his integrity, like ours, was challenged by Prime Minister Erdoğan himself, who tried to humiliate an article in defence of journalism by Cemal, countering that 'if this is journalism, down with it!'

It was a response to Cemal who in his column that very day had written that 'while you deal with politics, let us deal with what we do, journalism.' As a consequence, like many of us, Cemal was forced to leave his job, last May. More than anything else, even the

single episode about Cemal should be sufficient to explain the state of misery and despair in Turkish media.

But, ours is a developing story.

We will continue to defend this scarred profession, which is under constant attack over here in the UK, there and everywhere, and keep the public informed as deeply, as freely and as bravely as possible. Let us all, keep an eye on each other, and be on the watch, on vigilance.