



# Covering Dissent

*The Attack on Journalists by Law Enforcement*

## The Crackdown on Journalists

Through pre-emptive raids and mass coordinated actions, local and federal law enforcement interfered with the media's ability to report on public protest, civic engagement and on law enforcement's activities around the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC) in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. Law enforcement authorities arrested, questioned, detained and even brutalized journalists who were simply doing their job—covering the RNC and the protests around the Convention.

## Unlawful and Warrantless Actions

Under the Constitution, journalists have the right to be free from unlawful search and seizure, from unlawful arrests and from excessive, unnecessary and unreasonable force. Nevertheless, federal and local law enforcement made warrantless arrests and unlawfully detained journalists who were covering the protests at the RNC, without adequate justification or cause as is required by law. Law enforcement agents also engaged in unlawful seizures of property, used excessive force and deliberately interfered with the media's coverage of the public protests and civic engagement, as well as the conduct of law enforcement at and around the RNC.

## The Arrests of Journalists

Scores of journalists and other members of the media were arrested, detained, assaulted and searched. Their belongings were also seized and searched, including their cameras, video and other media equipment. The journalists prominently displayed their press credentials throughout the incidents and repeatedly identified themselves as members of the media to the acting law enforcement.

Three of the journalists who were arrested and assaulted during the RNC were Amy Goodman, Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Nicole Salazar. Goodman, Kouddous and Salazar were in Minneapolis-St. Paul documenting the thousands of demonstrators protesting the RNC in and around the Convention venue.

The three journalists—all well known advocates of independent journalism—were covering the RNC for Democracy Now!, an award winning, nationally syndicated independent television and radio news program.



*Amy Goodman, an award-winning journalist, was arrested and assaulted during the 2008 Republican National Convention. Ms. Goodman is one of CCR's plaintiffs in Goodman v. St. Paul.*



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“The protests on the streets outside the convention center are just as important to the democratic process as the official party proceedings inside....Journalists should not have to risk being arrested, brutalized or intimidated by the police in order to do perform their duties, exercise their First Amendment rights and facilitate the rights of others to freedom of speech and assembly.”

-Journalist and CCR plaintiff  
Sharif Abdel Kouddous

## The Rights of Journalists

Journalists have the right to gather information and cover matters of public interest, including dissent and law enforcement activity in public places. In violation of their constitutional rights, federal and local law enforcement at the RNC deliberately hindered the ability of the press to serve as the eyes and ears of the American public and to report on vital matters of public concern.

## The Right to Protest and Dissent

The policies, practices and actions of federal and local law enforcement at the RNC are part of a larger civil liberties crisis that has been intensifying at an alarming rate over the past decade. Peaceful police-protestor

interactions across the country have been met with brutal force by law enforcement, all while domestic surveillance activities by the government have increased dramatically. Individuals and activists are also given overblown and draconian sentences for constitutionally protected, lawful and peaceful conduct.

## *Goodman v. St. Paul*

In May 2010, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) filed a federal lawsuit challenging the policies, practices and actions of Minnesota and St. Paul law enforcement personnel. *Goodman v. St. Paul* alleges that the policies and conduct of law enforcement during the RNC culminated in the unlawful arrests and unreasonable use of force against three Democracy Now! journalists, Amy Goodman, Sharif Abdel Kouddous and Nicole Salazar.

CCR filed the case in the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota and the defendants include the municipalities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, their respective police departments, the Ramsey County Sheriff, and unidentified secret services agents and law enforcement officers.

*Goodman v. St. Paul* seeks to:

- **Protect the freedom of the press and media independence.** The government cannot condition journalists' right to cover matters of public concern by requiring that they present a particular perspective. "Embedding" with state authorities should not be a precondition to reporting on what is happening in the streets.

- **Protect the right to dissent and the free flow of information.** The government cannot, in the name of security, criminalize peaceful protest and dissent. Nor can the government shut down journalists who, serving as the eyes and ears of the public, seek to report on such speech and the public acts of law enforcement.

Learn more about *Goodman v. St. Paul* at: <http://www.ccrjustice.org/goodman>

