

## **Peterborough man's documentary explores threats to journalists in some regimes**

by Matthew P. Barker 15.06.2021 THE PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER

A retired journalism professor in Peterborough is producing a documentary highlighting the struggles of three refugee journalists who came to Canada seeking asylum.

The documentary called “The Cost of Freedom — Refugee Journalists in Canada” focuses on three refugee journalists who came to Canada after escaping their countries of origin due to pushback from authoritarian regimes.

James Cullingham, owner of Tamarack Productions and a former journalism professor at Seneca College and adjunct professor at Trent University, said he wanted to take on the project after meeting a refugee journalist during a panel he put together for the Canadian Association of Journalists in 2017.

“In the fall of 2016 one of them was Arzu Yildiz from Turkey,” Cullingham said.

“I met her and invited her to join me on a panel for the (Canadian Association of Journalists). I had already been in touch with the Luis Najera, a journalist from Mexico and he agreed.”

That’s when the idea of producing and directing a documentary started to come together, he said.

“We talked about doing a documentary when I met Abdulrahman Matar from Syria,” Cullingham said.

“As a potential producer/director I had a pretty good cohort of journalists from three very important countries suffering threats to journalism.”

Cullingham's subjects come from Mexico, Syria and Turkey, countries that have seen significant governmental silencing of journalists in recent years.

The threat to journalistic freedoms is not the only issue covered by the documentary, he said.

“The backdrop is the global threat to free speech, democracy and journalism that the experience of these three journalists exemplifies,” Cullingham said.

“They have faced political oppression, corruption of governments or police, because the situations are very different in the three countries, but what is common is a threat to freedom of speech and the free activity of journalists.”

Principal photography took place in three locations over a couple of years while working with the refugee journalists.

There has been a fair amount of filming over the months in the Toronto area,” Cullingham said.

In February 2020, in conjunction with Trent University's Peter Gzowski College. Cullingham held a panel with the journalists filming it, he said.

It also included the New Canadians Centre Peterborough, the Kawartha World Issues Council and Trent International.

“People will see footage of that event in the film, so that was very helpful and of course, we are more or less concluding filming this Thursday,” he said.

Editing will begin on the film shortly and it will be released this fall and appear in several film festivals and academic settings.

The documentary is supported by the Canadian Association of Journalists, the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, Peter Gzowski College and the Symons Trust for Canadian Studies.