

THE REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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*Affiliations appear only
for purposes of identification.*

December 2, 1999

Mayor Paul Schell
City of Seattle
By fax: 206-684-5360

Dear Mr. Mayor:

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press strongly protests your police department's decision to arrest a journalist during the WTO protests, and we encourage you to take action to ensure it does not happen again.

According to a report on the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* web site, Kery Murakami, a reporter for that newspaper, was arrested Tuesday and held overnight. We certainly understand that response to protests that turn violent requires quick action and immediate judgment, and we know that some actions taken in the heat of the moment are not intended. But we ask you to recognize, and to communicate to law enforcement officials, that credentialed journalists covering what is clearly a matter of great public interest should not be subject to arrest and detainment.

These journalists are providing a great public service, and even when they report news that may not place authorities in a flattering light, they are engaged in a constitutionally protected activity. The citizens of Seattle, and indeed the world, have a right to know what is happening on the streets around the trade conference, and a free, unrestrained news media is essential to that process.

We ask that you and officials of your Field Resource Center — which we understand is the official clearinghouse for information about the WTO-related protests and violence — develop a procedure to ensure that reporters covering this story while the protests and curfews continue are not kept from doing their jobs. If journalists are swept up in any more arrests, and if they do not have access to counsel, we ask that you encourage them to use the Reporters Committee's 24-hour, toll-free hotline (1-800-336-4243) so that we may help them find an attorney.

We also understand that a number of Seattle news organizations have made sure that media law and criminal defense lawyers are standing by for reporters in need, and would encourage you to publicize the availability of that assistance, if you have more details.

Sincerely,

Gregg P. Leslie
Acting Executive Director
The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

cc: Field Resource Center, Seattle
By fax: (206) 615-0486