Josh Wolf becomes longest jailed journalist in U.S. history

by Sarah Olson

Josh Wolf, named northern California's 2006 journalist of the year by Society of Professional Journalists, broke the record for the longest amount of time a reporter has spent in jail protecting his sources. Journalist and professional organizations are denouncing his continued imprisonment.

"The 169th day of Josh Wolf's incarceration marks another alarming milestone in the struggle for press freedom in post-9/11 America," said Linda Foley, president of The Newspaper Guild/CWA. "What was once a cherished constitutional mandate that journalists operate free from government interference increasingly has come under attack."

"Josh is fighting a brave battle that an increasing number of journalists in the U.S. are facing today," said Jerry Zremski, president of the National Press Club. "Chillingly, many journalists must battle to keep their reporting from becoming a tool that prosecutors can use to further their cases."

"Keeping Wolf in jail is absurd and cruel," said Lucie Morillon, Washington director at Reporters Without Borders. "It is a bad signal sent to the rest of the world. We would have expected a democratic country such as the United States to put the bar higher regarding press freedom."

"Josh should be protected by the California shield law, and this should never have become a federal case. He has neither broken the law, nor been convicted of a crime," said Sarah Olson, an independent journalist recently subpoenaed by the U.S. Army. "The Department of Justice should release Wolf from prison immediately."

The 24-year-old independent journalist sold his footage of a 2005 San Francisco demonstration to the nightly news. The broadcast attracted the attention of local and federal law enforcement agents who later served Wolf a federal subpoena requiring his unpublished video footage and testimony. When he refused to comply he was charged with contempt of court and incarcerated.