

Testimony of Hatice Cengiz

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On October the 2nd 2018, Jamal and I went together to the Consulate General of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul to get the documents needed for our marriage. He never walked out. As I hoped for good news from him that our marriage papers were in order, as I eagerly awaited the happy surprise of seeing him again, no such things ever happened. On October 20, the confirmation that my fiancée, Jamal was murdered, was announced to the world.

It has been more than six months since this horrible event, but there has been no truth, justice or accountability for those responsible for this terrible incident, to this stain on human rights and press freedom. Maybe that's the reason I am here today.

Jamal's killing was a violation of the most basic, universal human right: the right to live.

The United States is a beacon of hope and freedom to the world. I feel that it is important to send a message to the world that the United States treasures the foundational principles of universal human rights and expects its allies to uphold freedom of expression and freedom from persecution for one's political views.

To this day the Saudi government has not returned Jamal's remains, though they have admitted to his violent death on their diplomatic soil. Without his body it has not been possible to give Jamal the dignified burial and funeral that he deserves.

I feel it is important for me to mention that most people know about this story purely from the news they've seen on television and read in newspapers. But I am the one whose beloved was taken away from me and taken through a gruesome act of murder.

Every day, I have nightmares thinking of Jamal's suffering.

Is it not natural for me then to demand that those responsible for his death are held accountable through the proper channels?

The world is outraged at Jamal's murder. It is a violation of human rights, of international law and of a common sense of decency. What happened to him is part of a global pattern of journalists and those who speak and write freely being killed. Escaping abroad in search of safe harbor is no longer a guarantee of protection.

If Jamal's murder passes with impunity, then me speaking here today puts me in danger, it places everyone who shares these universal values in danger. Only by holding those responsible to account can we ensure that this does not happen again. I hope that the United States and the international community will take a stand for Jamal and for all journalists, dissidents and human rights advocates who were killed simply for exercising their right to free speech.

I was the closest witness to this incident. I was last person who's seen Jamal alive. I have reason to believe his murder was premediated. Investigators could not access the crime scene for many days. As the closest witness, I feel a moral obligation to remind the world that the people who perpetrated this act, still to this day, have not been brought to justice.

Given this void, I feel the event needs to be explained to everyone one more time.

I met Jamal in May 2018 at a conference in Istanbul as a PhD student. I was 36. Shortly after we met, our acquaintance grew into a very special relationship. Jamal visited Istanbul and our daily communication continued with passion and intensity. Finally, Jamal said that he wanted to continue this our beautiful voyage in a formal manner, and he proposed me. I was amazed. I was thrilled to marry someone who I could share my world with intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. He is the love of my life.

Jamal was an accomplished journalist, author and political commentator who observed and analyzed Saudi Arabia's internal and domestic politics. I had followed in the media and admired for years. In his work, he had often met kings, princes and world leaders. And he fell in love with me, a modest and simple Turkish woman, and made a decision to spend his life with me. This showed me what a humble and natural a person he was, deepened my own love for him even more.

The fact that Jamal, as brilliant as he was, wanted me by his side, made me think that, I, a young woman seeking knowledge, love and happiness, might have something to offer to the world. My life finally made sense to me.

In the beginning, my feelings for Jamal were only of intellectual admiration, but I soon felt a deep love and longing for him. When I was with him, I felt warmth and the exuberant, passionate love of a young woman. Jamal started talking about his need to be with me, to create our life together. We started to dream. We wanted to settle down and get married. We wanted to live our lives together. Always there for each other. Always loving each other.

I believed with all my heart that my life would change with Jamal, not just materially but also spiritually. For the first time in my life, I was happy to be alive. Up until his untimely death.

With Jamal, I felt fulfilled. This was my destiny: to stand beside him in his life and his work, and for him to stand behind me in mine. We dreamt together. We spent many nights talking in the dark until the early hours of the morning, exchanging views about politics, culture and the world. Nights like this were joyful for Jamal, and they were joyful for me, too.

But shortly after meeting Jamal, I began to see his inner world. He was in deep pain. He lost his country, his job and his family all at the same time. His decision to settle in the US was well thought out, but it left him with a sense of deep loss and loneliness. Jamal was uncomfortable with the changing political atmosphere in his country that began in 2017. He was disturbed by the uncontrolled exercise of power in Saudi Arabia, its violations of human rights, arbitrary arrests and detentions of scholars and writers, and unprecedented violations of people's basic freedoms.

Jamal was banned from writing anything in his own country. In Saudi Arabia, he was forced into silence for a very long time. While he was torn by the decision, he felt he had no choice but to leave.

Jamal chose a life of exile at age 60 so that he could continue to write, and to defend those without a voice. He fled to the United States, where he already had a home, and began writing for the Washington Post. He was thrilled to write freely again in the US, and to reach an even broader, international audience. He said that the experience of exile only sharpened his calling to write. He told me how happy he was. He told me the things he enjoyed most were to write, to read and to share ideas. This is why I loved him.

Jamal always said that his life in the States was good, and that he loved this country for its freedom and its greatness.

Jamal was a thinker. He was deeply connected and committed to his country. When he left Saudi Arabia it never occurred to him that he might never return home. He constantly told me that there was no hatred in his heart or any grudge between him and his country. He said he wanted to his good intentions and his positivity toward Saudi Arabia to be known.

He chose to fight for the principles he believed in and he chose to leave his country, fearing death if he were to stay. To honor Jamal's legacy, I must stand up for these principles. Jamal spoke for those without power, without a voice. He spoke for people who expressed their views, whatever the price, against oppression and authoritarianism. Those people have been silenced, and don't have the opportunity to address the world the way that I do.

The people who Jamal defended cannot speak to Congress, they cannot speak to the media. They cannot speak, without facing imprisonment or death. Now, Jamal has been

taken from us for speaking out for them. But who will speak for Jamal? I can't stop asking that question to anyone who will listen. That is what brings me here today.

Now, I ask for your help. Humanity must make a decision between two things. We either decide that Jamal was killed, and this case is closed. Or, we decide that the values that Jamal paid for with his life still mean something, and that the people of the world can still hope for justice. I know that the United States will always remain vigilant in defending the most basic principles of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Accountability for Jamal's murder might help protect me from those who killed Jamal, but more importantly it protects those who he passionately defended, who are in danger, and who risk their lives and their freedom every day as they stand up to the oppression of authoritarian regimes. I am here today to continue on that path and to honor the legacy of my beloved Jamal.

I dedicate this testimony to Jamal, I will love him until the end of my days even though I've lost him.