Hej

My name is Tom Meagher, and I'm the associate managing editor for investigations at The Marshall Project. It is a great honor for me to be here today to accept this prize on behalf of all of my colleagues back in the United States and to bring you their thanks.

I'm sorry that I can't say this in Swedish and please forgive my pronunciation in my small attempts, but if you'll bear with me, I'd like to tell you a little bit about our work and why this press freedom prize is so meaningful for us. The Marshall Project began in 2014 as a small nonprofit newsroom focused on covering the criminal justice system in the United States, named after the Supreme Court Justice and legendary civil rights lawyer Thurgood Marshall. Many of us had reported on crime and policing for decades. But before The Marshall Project very few of us had been able to work full time telling stories about the very complex nature of the justice system. As many of you may know, calling it "a system" in the United States is a bit of a misnomer. In fact, it is composed of thousands of local police departments, thousands more county jails and courts and hundreds of prisons across the 50 states and the federal government. When we began there was a rare moment of bipartisan agreement between the two parties that the system was broken, at least when it came to prison. People were spending too long in prisons that were neglectful and too often abusive. While we are not advocates and do not lobby for specific positions, we believed that by shining a light on some of the many abuses and injustices in our criminal justice system, we could inspire activists and lawmakers. To paraphrase our founding editor Bill Keller, our work could create the oxygen that fuels change. And so our mission has been to create and sustain a sense of urgency among the general public and policy makers about the criminal justice system. Much has changed in the 12 years since then, and our organization has grown considerably but that mission has remained steadfast.

There was much attention then, as there is now, on true crime and on wrongful convictions that led to people being sent away to prison for decades. That does indeed happen but it is not our primary focus. We sometimes darkly joke that at the Marshall Project we're not the innocence project; we're something closer to the guilty project. We want to tell stories that are more complicated than the simple black-and-white of innocence or guilt. Our work grapples with questions of harm, justice and forgiveness. If we as Americans want to be just, if we want people who have committed crimes and done harm to one day come back and rejoin our society, what do we owe them? Where is the system failing them and how is it failing the people they harmed? As the lawyer Bryan Stephenson has said, "The Opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice." Injustices often begin with overly simple narratives that don't portray the full humanity of the people involved.

These days it can feel like we are drowning in information. In the age of social media and AI, we are awash in news and takes and opinions yet often it doesn't feel like we have any better understanding of what's going on in the world. One of our hopes at The Marshall

Project is that by telling complex stories and talking to and hearing from people who are usually overlooked in the churn of daily news, we can help offset that. We want to tell stories for people who are in the system, not just about them. To that end, a number of our colleagues are formerly incarcerated and bring a wealth of experience to bear on our work. And together we launched our print magazine News Inside that circulates our reporting in prisons and jails across the country and our video series Inside Story that streams for incarcerated people and on YouTube. And we ask the families and loved ones of people who are in the system what they want and need to know.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to visit and talk with folks here in a couple of suburbs of Stockholm that I'm told are often the subject of difficult and sometimes simplistic narratives. I got to meet the people working in the neighborhood at Folkets Husby. I learned how they conducted surveys to understand what the residents there needed and wanted, how they empowered people to make films about their experiences and are collecting their stories in a community archive, among many other important programs there. And I was able to talk with journalists at Nyhetsbyrån Järva in Rinkeby. It was inspiring to meet other journalists working to tell stories that their audiences need to hear, in all of their complexity, and that by doing that consistently and persistently it has led to change for people who need it.

As a nonprofit, we don't receive any government funding for our work. We pay for our reporting by convincing philanthropic foundations and regular individuals to donate. To do that we have to demonstrate that our journalism is having an impact and that by bringing new information to the public it can inspire change.

It is incredibly difficult to show that a piece of journalism leads to a reform. But it does happen, eventually. Our "Unbelievable Story of Rape" inspired police in Washington State to change how they investigate sexual assaults and how they treat victims. And an investigation into dangerously high heat in Texas prisons led a court to order the state, many years later, to air condition all of its prisons.

So at The Marshall Project we want to tell stories about people who make mistakes and find themselves on the wrong side of the law. This has never been easy, in part because readers don't often have sympathy for sinners, but in the last few years we found that it has become even harder. That bipartisan agreement on how prisons were failing has not spread to discussions about the courts or the police. And while the president has made efforts to allow some people in the federal prisons opportunities to reduce their sentences, in many states we've seen the pendulum swing in the opposite direction, toward more punitive policies.

That bipartisan agreement has also not spread to immigration. At the Marshall Project we increasingly have focused on our immigration system, as we see it merging with the criminal system. Most of the people who find themselves ensnared by immigration enforcement in the United States are not guilty of any crimes and yet they are subjected to many of the worst conditions of the criminal justice system. Local police and jails and

prisons are being increasingly brought in to capture and hold immigrants who are seeking to live and work in the United States.

Getting information from government agencies has never been easy and it's only getting harder under the current administration. Our sources and the people who we write for and about are afraid. For many of them the stakes have never been higher. It makes our jobs more difficult but all the more important to get those stories right and to portray them fairly, in all of their complexity. And as with all of our coverage we want our stories to reach people most affected by the system, which is in part why we're beginning an exciting new partnership with El Pais, the global Spanish-language news outlet to co-publish much of our reporting.

We don't do this kind of journalism for awards and prizes, which are nice, but because our mission compels us to tell difficult stories in ways that we hope can reach people and move them to care.

Reporting about horrific crimes and unimaginable abuse, It can be easy to lose oneself and to feel very alone while doing it. This recognition today reminds us at The Marshall Project that we are not shouting into the void, that we have colleagues around the globe who care about this vital reporting and who support our work. For that reminder I want to offer you again our most heartfelt thanks.

Tack så mycket.