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**TITLE:** The Magnitsky Human Rights Awards 2018 - Alexei Navalny

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**SPEAKER**

THOR HALVORSSEN: T

VLADIMIR ASHURKOV: V

T: You know I have to begin by saying I don't see why when celebrating something people have to look like they are going to a funeral because really honestly we are celebrating this evening and there are so many different kinds of awards and different kinds of events where people get recognised for things. What a thrill and an honour to be at an event and to be in a position to present an award for human rights. So I begin by just saying how grateful I am to Bill for allowing me to do this. Sergei Magnitsky was one of the bravest people on earth. We know him by his actions. He was a person who committed his life to fighting corruption. His legacy is one of justice, freedom and accountability and these three concepts they perfectly capture the introduction of what can be said about Alexei Navalny. A blogger, human rights defender, activist and a restless organiser and likely like Bill Browder and some of the folks here one of the most feared adversaries to the Kremlin regime and a single individual that has inspired millions and millions of Russians in the belief that perhaps their country is not doomed to live in autocracy and corruption forever.

I could stand here and talk about the cases that Navalny has exposed when involving corruption. Perhaps I should mention the gerrymandering that Putin's regime has carried out in order to prevent a growing popular Alexei Navalny from running in elections. Perhaps I should mention the number of times when this amazingly brave young man has been arrested, detained and prosecuted several dozen times, if I'm not wrong. What makes Navalny effective is what he speaks about, the way he speaks and to whom he speaks. What does he address? Corruption, it is said that in every State of the world there is a secret police and there is a mafia, but in the case of Russia the mafia and the secret police have a State. Funny from a distance not so funny if you're fighting that State and this State is one that engages in constant 24-hour propaganda, brainwashing the Russians into believing that they must live under a Tsarist regime, this is a natural thing for Russians, they need a strong man, this is perfectly normal in Russia, but you see they haven't been able to do the propaganda to also convince the Russian population that corruption is perfectly acceptable and you should be perfectly comfortable that the oligarchs and the people in government get rich while you suffer.

So that is the chord that Navalny has been able to strike so effectively and a chord that echoes all over Russian society. Who is listening to Navalny? Millennials, young, clever, educated people who seem immune to that propaganda, who were not born during the Soviet period, people who do not see the West as a boogiemer. The generation that is coming, the best human capital that Russia has today that is who Navalny speaks to and how does he say it? He says it in a light hearted and easy way; he doesn't take himself too seriously. It's never about him. It's not about Alexei Navalny; it's about his growing movement. This is a man who tweets encouraging messages to his supporters while he is in a police car being driven away. He is witty. He is funny and every time he comes out of jail, which happens to be quite regularly, he uses humour and he challenges the omnipotent dictatorship with a smile on his face. Dictators know how to deal with anger from the population, they crush it. They know how to deal with fear, they feed it. They know that they like to swim in a river of apathy where nobody really is going to do anything about things.

The one thing they cannot counter, the one thing they cannot fight against is humour in a positive human spirit, courage and leading by example with a smile on your face. Alexei is not here, his long-time friend, Vladimir Ashurkov who lives here in London, in exile, is going to be collecting the award for him. In order to support Alexei Navalny on behalf of the prize committee of the Sergei Magnitsky Awards, please help me celebrate Alexei Navalny.

- V: Thank you, Thor for this wonderful introduction. It's a great pleasure for me to accept this award today on behalf of Alexei Navalny. Throughout his life in civil activism and politics he is always fighting for the rule of law in Russia against oppression and violation of human rights, for him and the team that has assembled around him the values of human dignity and perseverance, which are exemplified by Sergei Magnitsky, are dear to our hearts. Sergei Magnitsky advocated a transparent and accountable government and paid for this with his life. Unfortunately in today's Russia this is the price that is too often paid for what should come as a given in a failed society. Alexei Navalny and his teammates are also subject to immense pressure and unlawful persecution as a result of their activities. It is symbolic that today the European Court of Human Rights announced a long awaited ruling on Navalny's case. The grand chamber of the court ruled that his arrest in 2012 and 2014 including a year spent under house arrest were politically motivated. The last time such motivation was determined by the European Court of Human Rights in a Russian case was in 2004.

This is an important precedent for many political activists in Russia for regularly detained during mass protests, for now we can expect justice in such cases only in international courts. However I am confident that sooner rather than later this situation will change and the rule of law will gradually prevail in Russian legal system. Alexei Navalny is making enormous contribution to this struggle while risking his liberty and life itself and this award is an important recognition of this fact. As Alexei could not be here today he asked me to read his address that he had prepared.

'Dear ladies and gentlemen, when I first heard about Sergei Magnitsky a lawyer who was illegally arrested and was subject to torturous conditions in prison I thought that he was going to be released fairly soon, that they would scare him and then he would be released, but he was not released and in 11 months Sergei died in prison. In fact he was murdered, from that moment on every time I hear Sergei Magnitsky's name it comes as a reminder that any indulgence in relation to human rights or any suggestion that a situation may get better by itself or by Magnitsky's name it comes as a reminder that any indulgence in relation to human rights or any suggestion that a situation may get better by itself or by a [unclear] goodwill will be wishful thinking and will cost the life of an innocent person. It is a great pride and honour for me to receive the Sergei Magnitsky Award as Sergei proved with his life [unclear], which I try to deliver daily to the people that corruption is not a harmless white collar crime, corruption is always ultimately linked to much more severe and cruel crimes behind any sophisticated bureaucrat who steals money using his pen there will be a corrupt police officer handcuffing everyone who comes as an annoying obstacle to the said bureaucrat with a pen. The fight against corruption in Russia sometimes looks like a Utopia because

corruption is a core for Putin to stay in power. My colleagues and I are inspired by support of hundreds of thousands of people who despite the intimidation, propaganda and cultivated indifference believe in a better future and I have no doubt that Russia will be able to become a proper European State and corruption will soon be turned from [unclear] into an object of criminal prosecution. I want to thank you for extending me the award and I would like to dedicate this award to all the wonderful people who support our movement all over Russia. Alexei Navalny'.

Thank you.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**