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SAN FRANCISCO - Journalism groups on Saturday decried the jailing of a video journalist and other recent court rulings pressuring media workers to divulge information to the government.

The news media becomes an information-gathering arm of law enforcement when journalists are ordered to give up confidential sources or unpublished material, said Tony Overman, president of the National Press Photographers Association.

"When news sources believe that statements or actions observed or reported by journalists find their way into the hands of police or prosecutors, those sources will be less willing — or flat-out afraid — to cooperate with the media," Overman said at a news conference.

The photographers association and the Society of Professional Journalists announced they would help pay for the legal defense of freelance video journalist Joshua Wolf.

A federal judge in San Francisco ordered Wolf jailed this week for refusing to hand over unaired video shot during a July 2005 protest in which a police car was vandalized and an officer injured.

Judith Miller, the former New York Times reporter who was jailed for 85 days last year, attempted to interview Wolf on Saturday at the federal detention facility in Dublin but was turned away by guards.

Officials prohibited press interviews with Wolf, said Miller, who was visiting family in northern California.

"I was just there to express my personal moral support for him," Miller told The Associated Press. "When I went to jail I had The New York Times behind me and a lot of publicity, and Josh Wolf did not have any of that. Anybody who looks at this trend has got to be worried about the obstacles being thrown in the way of a free and open press."

Wolf's defense lawyer, Jose Luis Fuentes, said jail officials blocked him from seeing his client until Saturday, five days after his incarceration. Wolf remains steadfast in refusing to surrender the footage, Fuentes said.

"It smells and appears to be punishment, which is not what the civil contempt order is about — it's about coercion," he said. "If he can't make phone calls to his mother or have visits from his mother, and he is denied visits from his attorney, it would seem that's all punishment."

A call to a spokesman for the correctional facility was not returned late Saturday.

The journalists said Saturday that recent court actions have violated First Amendment rights and eroded the news media's ability to serve as a public-interest watchdog.

San Francisco Chronicle reporters Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada are fighting a federal subpoena that would force them to reveal the source of leaked grand jury testimony in the steroid investigation involving Giants slugger Barry Bonds.