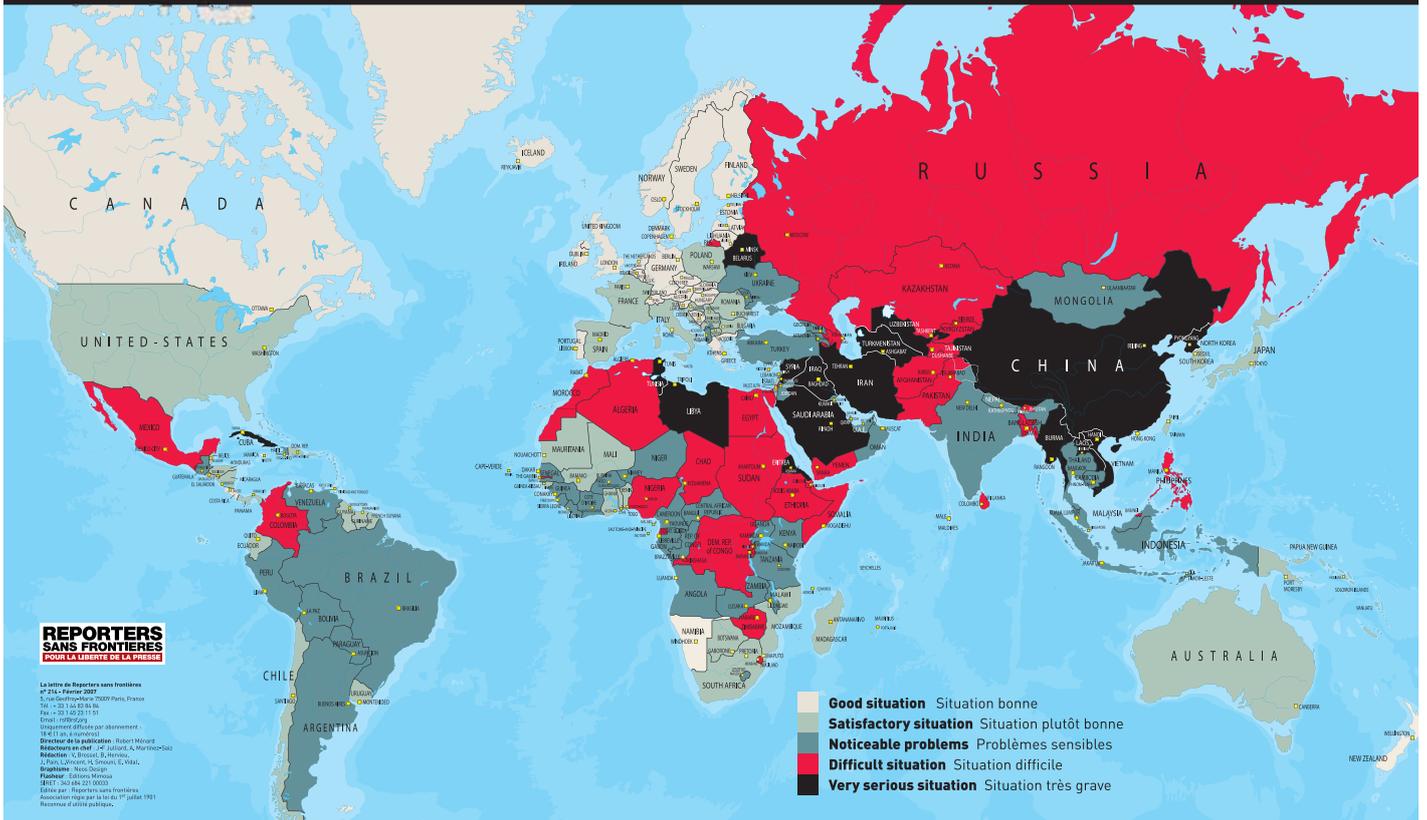


**FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WORLDWIDE IN 2007**



**LA LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE DANS LE MONDE EN 2007**

2007 Annual Report

The lists



Internet can be seen on the Reporters Without Borders website ([www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)).

Country data (area, population, languages) are taken from the French annual *L'état du monde* (Editions La Découverte, Paris, 2006).

© Reporters Without Borders 2007  
5, rue Geoffroy Marie - 75009 Paris  
Tél : (33) 1 44 83 84 84 - Fax : (33) 1 45 23 11 51  
E-mail : [rsf@rsf.org](mailto:rsf@rsf.org) - Web : [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)

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Coordination: Jean-François Julliard  
Layout: Véronique Vincent

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## ALARMING WEAKNESS

A disturbingly record number of journalists and media workers were killed or thrown in prison in 2006, but even more deplorable was the lack of interest, and sometimes even the failure, by democratic countries in defending everywhere the values they are supposed to incarnate.

1994 was the last year when as many media workers were killed (mostly in the Rwandan genocide, the Algerian civil war and fighting in former Yugoslavia). At least 110 were killed in 2006, but governments frequently gave up, displayed cowardice or made compromises instead of firmly defending freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Almost everyone believes in human rights but amid the silences and behaviour on all sides, we wonder who these days has the necessary moral authority to make a principled stand in favour of these freedoms.

Has the European Union spoken up? Has it proclaimed loud and clear these values that are supposed to unite its 27 member-states. Not really. Cooperation agreements it signs with other countries are conditioned on respect for civic freedoms, but it is still silent about massive violation of the freedom to think, say and write things in countries that receive its economic aid. Tunisia, where no criticism of the regime is allowed, is the best example of this.

After a Danish paper published cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed, European institutions did not defend Denmark, whose embassies were attacked, or the European and Arab journalists who were threatened and arrested. They seemed to choose silence for fear of offending Arab regimes.

No more courage was shown in standing up to Russia when Anna Politkovskaya became the 21st journalist murdered there since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. Everyone had their say, but the European Parliament did not propose an international enquiry commission as many NGOs had demanded. The EU chose to cosy up to Russia, one of its major sources of energy.

But major EU countries are playing a double game with Brussels, blocking any measure their economic partners and their former colonies dislike but making European institutions a scapegoat when they face a hostile public at home.

French President Jacques Chirac decorated Putin with the prestigious Légion d'Honneur Grand Cross and France stayed silent about Eritrea, which it was quietly supporting it against Ethiopia, a key US ally. French officials were also slow to defend French philosopher Robert Redeker after he received threats for criticising Islam and some of its followers.

The United States has been largely discredited for its illegal detention of an Al-Jazeera journalist at its Guantanamo military base, by its repeated imprisonment of US journalists for refusing to disclose their sources, the lack of any serious investigation of the deaths of Iraqi journalists shot by US troops and its persistent support for regimes that have no respect for press freedom. The US cannot be trusted when it talks of press freedom.

The new United Nations Human Rights Council, which replaced the thoroughly discredited Human Rights Commission, has not performed very well. The same absurdities are being repeated, with accused countries being defended by others hoping for similar support when put in the dock themselves. As a result, serious matters are being avoided, such as Darfur in 2006, and the harshest regimes are being let off. In all this bargaining, most countries from the South are making arguments and regional alliances that disqualify them.

Other major powers - Russia and China - are such serious violators of press freedom that it would be naïve, even stupid, to expect them to play a positive role in freedom of expression. The most that can be hoped is that holding the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 will be a chance to extract improved working conditions for Chinese and foreign journalists and the release of some of the journalists and cyber-dissidents now in prison. Unless Western nations are obsessed by simply conquering Chinese markets.

There are many reasons to be worried and pessimistic. In Latin America, the murder of nearly a dozen journalists in Mexico with virtual impunity, the increasingly aggressive discourse of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, the illness of Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the imprisonment of more than a score of journalists in his country, along with the deteriorating situation in Bolivia (nevertheless the best-ranked country of the

South in the Reporters Without Borders annual press freedom index), were all signals to the international community to be very vigilant in a continent that is far from being the worst on the freedom scale.

Africa is in the grip of increasingly deadly ethnic, tribal and religious conflicts that are dangerous for the media. In the Middle East, journalists are trapped between authoritarian regimes and sometimes terrorist or rebel movements, all keen to shut them up in the name of religion or state convenience. In Asia too, governments continue to mistreat, imprison and torture while the rest of the world turns its head.

So is there any cause for optimism? Not much. Unless it's the UN Security Council's unanimous adoption of a resolution sponsored by France and Greece stressing the obligations under international law towards journalists in war zones and the need to fight the impunity that too often follows attacks on press freedom.

The resolution has to be acted on but even this grand declaration is evidence that bureaucracy and habits that diplomats too often hide behind as an excuse to do nothing can be overcome with political determination. The first draft was presented by Reporters Without Borders to the French foreign ministry in October and the resolution was adopted on 23 December. It took just two months. The UN machinery can be influenced after all.

So a government or an NGO can make a difference, if only on the sidelines. But on these sidelines, lives can be saved and men and women freed from prison. It's a good challenge for democracies, especially European ones, that often lose their bearings and are looking for ways to offer their young citizens new horizons and new frontiers.

Robert Ménard  
Secretary-General

## DICTATORSHIPS GET TO GRIPS WITH WEB 2.0

A decade ago, regime opponents in Vietnam or Tunisia were still printing leaflets in their basements and handing them out to fellow militants at clandestine meetings. Independent newspapers were no more than a few hastily-stapled photocopies distributed secretly.

These days, "subversive" or "counter-revolutionary" material goes on the Internet and political dissidents and journalists have become "cyber-dissidents" and "online journalists." Most of them know how to create a blog, organise a chat group, make phone calls through a computer and use a proxy to get round censorship.

New technology allows them to receive and share news out of sight of the authorities. The Web is also a blessing for human rights groups, which can now build a file on a political prisoner with a few mouse-clicks instead of over weeks and sometimes months. The Web makes networking much easier, for political activists as well as teenagers. Unfortunately, this progress and use of new tools by activists is now being matched by the efforts of dictatorships to fight them. Dictators too have entered the world of Web 2.0.

Sixty people are currently in jail for posting criticism of governments online, with China's 50 making it by far the world's worst prison for cyber-dissidents. The Chinese have been aped by other countries - four such dissidents are in jail in Vietnam, three in Syria and one each in Tunisia, Libya and Iran.

Parliaments in these countries, along with the local cyber-police, closely follow the latest technological developments. When instant messaging, such as MSN Messenger, became all the rage, China asked the firms that made these programmes to automatically block some key-words, making it impossible for Chinese users to talk about the Dalai Lama and Taiwanese independence, for example.

And with the success of YouTube, China and Iran are keen to filter the videos that appear there - too much "subversive" content for China and too much "immorality" for Iran. In Vietnam, police and dissidents chase play cat-and-mouse with "chat rooms" and three people were arrested there in October 2005 for discussing democracy on Paltalk, a US website that organises remote meetings. One of them, Truong Quoc Huy, was still in prison at the end of 2006.

### SPYWARE THAT FILTERS E-MAIL

The Internet was not designed to protect message confidentiality. It is fast and fairly reliable but also easy to spy on and censor. From the first mouse-click, users leave a trail and reveal information about themselves and what their tastes and habits are. This data is very valuable to commercial firms, who sort through it to target their advertising better.

The police also use it. The best way to spy on journalists a few years ago was still to send a plainclothes officer to stand outside their house. This can be done more cheaply and efficiently now, because machines can spy, report back and automatically prevent subversive conversations.

Cuba has installed spyware in cybercafé computers so that when users type "banned" words in an e-mail, such as the name of a known political dissident, they see a warning that they are writing things considered a "threat to state security" and the Web navigator then immediately shuts down.

### THE INTERNET GIANTS WORK WITH THE DICTATORSHIPS

The predators of free expression are not all the same. China keeps a tight grip on what is written and downloaded by users and spends an enormous amount on Internet surveillance equipment and hires armies of informants and cyber-police. It also has the political weight to force the companies in the sector - such as Yahoo!, Google, Microsoft and Cisco Systems - to do what it wants them to, and all have agreed to censor their search-engines to filter out websites overcritical of the authorities.

This makes the regime's job very much easier because these firms are the main entry-points to the Internet. If a website is not listed by these search-engines, material posted on them has about as much chance of being found as a message in a bottle thrown into the sea.

Not all countries are strong enough to make the US multinational Internet firms bend to their will, but all authoritarian regimes are now working to censor the Web, even countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The Ethiopian regime of prime minister Meles Zenawi has blocked openly-critical websites and blogs since May 2006 and Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is considering a law allowing security forces to intercept online messages without reference to the courts. One of the first moves by Thailand's military rulers after their September coup was to censor news websites, even foreign ones, that criticized the takeover.

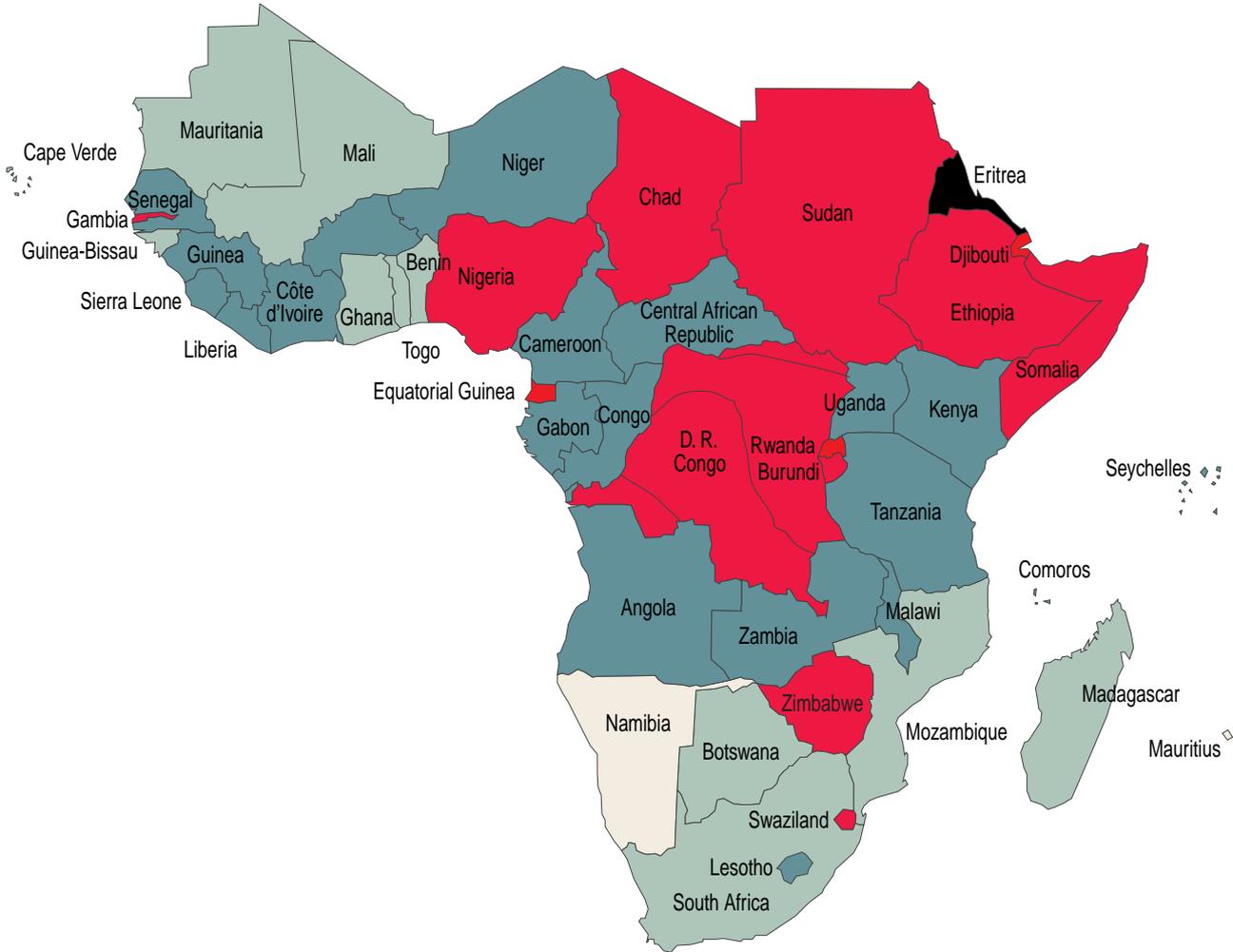
When a dictator cannot effectively censor the Internet, he can take a more radical approach - barring Internet access to virtually everyone, as in North Korea and Turkmenistan. And when a tyrant dies, as Turkmenistan's "President-for-Life" Saparmurad Nyazov did in December, his successor starts work by declaring his policy towards the Internet. These days, dictators talk about the Web when they want to show their regime is progressive.

Internet users are organising themselves and conjuring up new solutions to tackle these dictatorships, get round the filters and protect their anonymity. They use and create new technology, encrypt their e-mail and use other tools that are still not detected by cyber-police.

The Web phone service Skype, for example, has made it much easier for journalists - and Reporters Without Borders - to communicate with their sources. It works especially well because it is encrypted and so conversations are hard to tap. But China has already signed an agreement with Skype to block key-words, so how can we be sure our conversations are not being listened to? How do we know if Skype will not also allow (or already has allowed) the Chinese police to spy on its customers?

It has become vital to examine new technology from a moral standpoint and understand the secondary effects of it. If firms and democratic countries continue to duck the issue and pass off ethical responsibility on others, we shall soon be in a world where all our communications are spied on.

Julien Pain  
Head of Internet freedom desk



# 2007 Annual Report

# AFRICA

## UNDER THE STIGMA OF CONTEMPT

Contempt towards journalists and towards the treaties they have signed up to was a constant factor in many African states in 2006. Governance by contempt and crackdown is, especially since 2001, how the authorities do things in Eritrea, which is secretly holding at least 17 journalists in a variety of appalling prisons scattered around the country. After credible reports filtered out of the probable death of three of them, the reaction of the authorities in one of the world's most closed countries was a terse, "no comment". Many of the few remaining journalists to have escaped arrest tried to flee the country, for which some of them had fought during the war of independence and which today treats them as enemies. In neighbouring Ethiopia, around 20 newspaper publishers and editors are still imprisoned, accused of "high treason" for having backed an opposition challenge to the May 2005 election results. Neither the international outcry nor the protests of its western allies have been heeded by the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, which has put out callous statements about the prisoners, one of whom gave birth to a baby boy in the prison infirmary. In Somalia, journalists have been embarrassing witnesses to a war shot through with disinformation and lies. They have been arrested, beaten up or murdered without hesitation. The Islamic courts and the transitional government prided themselves on respecting press freedom while inflicting particularly brutal treatment on the media with a disdain that nothing can shake.

Even in Kenya, East Africa's foremost democracy, a newspaper was the target of contempt by a hard-pressed government, undergoing a terrifying raid and hostile statements from several officials. In Uganda, at the start of the year, Yoweri Museveni's government was prompted by the fight to hold on to power to maintain tight control of news during the election period, going so far as to expel a foreign correspondent, which saw as nothing less than a "threat to the state". The contempt for news also pushed the government in Sudan to twice accuse foreign journalists reporting on massacres in Darfur of being spies. Both were held hostage for several weeks and only released after intense political negotiations putting the state under pressure from the international community, proving the absurdity of the initial accusations. Finally, Zimbabwe is still one of the countries where the profession of journalist is an extremely tough one. Because, not content with insisting that all journalists must be registered, filed and kept under surveillance by an Orwellian commission, the Zimbabwean government does its utmost to silence media which fail to sing its praises.

Press freedom is sometimes, as in Chad, a gain that the government has no hesitation in calling into question, when it considers national security to be at stake. Faced with rebel movements with little inclination for openness, Chadian press barons are also forced under a state of emergency to bring out papers disfigured by black strips imposed by the censorship bureau, according to the whim of a few dutiful officials.

Contempt also makes itself felt in how little importance political or financial authorities accord to the press. Thus, the election campaign proved a painful episode for the press in the Democratic Republic of Congo, already regularly hit in the past by aberrant legislation applied with zeal by police and a justice system eaten through with corruption. Some journalists in Kinshasa are not exempt from criticism however, readily doing the bidding of a few generous donors anxious to smear their adversaries or turning themselves into the little foot soldiers of political heavyweights. Easily manipulated or vulnerable, the reporter can fall prey to politicians avid for power. This sad evidence was still the rule in Nigeria in 2006, where police and intelligence services, or more generally all those in uniform, took a sly pleasure in physically attacking journalists who displease them.

### PERSISTENT IMPUNITY

On the west of the continent, for the 12th successive year, president of the tiny country of Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, continued to treat journalists with aggressive condescension. His all-powerful intelligence services arrested and ill-treated at least ten journalists, forcibly closed two newspapers and threatened all those who in any way embarrassed their absolute leader, the president of the Republic. This meant added humiliation for the Gambian press, which has to live and work with the memory of the still unpunished murder of its doyen, Deyda Hydara, killed in 2004 in disturbing circumstances. Journalists in Burkina Faso have for eight years now mourned the death of Norbert Zongo, murdered with three companions in 1998. While many have accused the presidential guard and the brother of head of state, François Compaore, the Burkinabe justice system, evidently very easy to influence, dared to dismiss the case

against the chief suspect, virtually sneaking the news out in the middle of summer, in a clear indication of the indifference of the authorities for the journalist's family's thirst for justice. In Cote d'Ivoire, journalists who chose not to give allegiance to one of the belligerents become their favourite target. In January, for the second time in two years, the "Young Patriots" seized control of public media, to back up and organise their riots in the streets of Abidjan. Kebe Yacouba, who tried to make state radio and television an example of public service journalism, had insults and threats heaped on him before being abruptly sacked by President Laurent Gbagbo. The family of French-Canadian journalist Guy-André Kieffer, kidnapped in Abidjan in 2004 and missing ever since, have to live with this particularly unpromising climate for the progress of the French judicial investigation, which has implicated the first circle of the presidency. For Deyda Hydera, Norbert Zongo and Guy-André Kieffer, denial of justice is also a form of contempt.

Governments which insist in keeping prison sentences for press offences in their legislation can show their disdain for journalists at their leisure. The easy pretext of citing media "responsibility", even if sometimes used advisedly, has sent more than one journalist to a prison cell for having questioned the integrity of the powerful. The most striking example of this unequal struggle between a newspaper and the government occurred this year in Niger, when the publisher and editor of an opposition paper spent more than four months in prison for having criticised the prime minister's policies. When governments backed by the police, the justice system and the prison administration attacks journalists there is a clear imbalance of power. In Burundi, in 2006, the head of the presidential party, Hussein Radjabu, a dominant and controversial figure did not hide his hatred of privately-owned radio stations, guilty in his eyes of criticising his abuses and manoeuvring. Several journalists chose to leave the country for their own protection. Four, on the other hand, did not have the time to realise that the authorities would graduate from verbal hostility to action and as a result spend several months in prison before being acquitted.

Most of these countries are however signatories of a raft of treaties guaranteeing civil and political freedoms. Almost all of them base their authority on constitutions protecting freedom of expression. But, as in Equatorial Guinea or the kingdom of Swaziland, where the head of state is considered to be a demigod, these promises have very little value for governments who clearly despise not just journalists but their own signatures.

#### SOME PROMISES KEPT

For all these reasons, Reporters Without Borders can only welcome the fact that there is one African government which kept its promises. The military junta in power in Mauritania since 2005 had promised to guarantee press freedom, legislative reform, to respect the balance of political forces during elections, to free the state-owned press from too much government control and to treat the independent press as a development partner. In 2006 it did all this.

For all that, it should not be imagined that the African continent is a collection of tyrannies and makeshift democracies. In the South African zone of influence, for example, Namibia and Botswana guarantee a satisfactory level of press freedom, with many deficiencies but nevertheless comparable to western democracies. The same goes for the African islands and archipelagos such as Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe or Cape Verde, which appear havens of freedom off the coast of a troubled continent. The Comoros is also gradually recovering from its dark years. This is also the case of Mozambique where, in an outcome rare enough in Africa to be highlighted, the killers of journalist Carlos Cardoso, who was murdered in 2000 while investigating a wide-ranging financial scandal, received heavy sentences.

The best weapon against contempt is patience. In Africa, governments who despise journalists and who place no value on promises they have given, have to live on the defensive. Their power ends up by crumbling. Support gets scarcer. The blows are getting harder. Sooner or later, a solution has to be found. Dictatorships end up by falling and journalists by coming out of prison. A country which is being stifled must have press freedom to be able to breathe again.

Léonard Vincent  
Head of Africa desk

# BÉNIN

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Area: 112,620 sq. km.  
Population: 8,439,000.  
Language: French.  
Head of state: Boni Yayi.

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Traditionally an example of good practice in West Africa, Benin however went through a year in which much was called into question, mainly because of excesses by a section of the press which flourished in Cotonou, in the wake of presidential elections.

For several years, Benin has been seen as a model of modern democracy in West Africa, guaranteeing a satisfactory level of press freedom, despite its poverty. The year 2006 being a presidential election year, there was a risk that the country could fall into the classic trap of emerging countries which can be destabilised by political violence. But this did not happen and this was to the advantage of all, particularly its journalists.

The election as head of state of Boni Yayi, a man with a technical background rather than a political heavyweight, was achieved with respect for democratic rules. Unusually, problems were not to be found in flagrant imbalances in airtime allowed to different candidates or in appeals to violence by partisan publications. Before and during the election campaign, irregular publications, headed by non-professional journalists, flourished in Cotonou. They were sometimes working in the interests of a politician, sometimes an influential figure. Indeed, this dubious practise is commonplace in Africa and its impact on the campaign was minimal. But once the election was over these publications continued to appear and were put to the service of other masters. And the new government, which decided to clean up this jumble of "local rags", had no hesitation in using the law - one which had not been strictly applied since 2004 and still provided for prison sentences for press offences.

## RESORTING TO IMPRISONMENT

As a result, Virgile Linkpon and Richard Couao-Zotti, respectively publisher and editor of the sporadic and sensationalist *La Diaspora de Sabbat*, were arrested on 15 September. Action was taken against the two journalists following publication

the previous day of an article headlined: "An ill wind blows through the head of state's entourage: Boni Yayi's older son is suffering from insanity". In another case, Cyrille Saizonou, publisher of the daily *Djakpata*, was arrested by judicial police on 18 September and was questioned for 24 hours about the publication, on 20 June 2006, of several articles alleging embezzlement within the national police. All three were released on 19 September, after being interviewed then cleared by the prosecutor for the Republic. On the other hand, Clément Adéchian and Cécil Adjévi, respectively publisher and editor of the daily *L'Informateur*, were sentenced on 1st December to six months in prison and fined 500,000 CFA francs (752 euros) for "defamation" after a court bailiff sued them for accusing him without proof of rape, in one edition of the newspaper.

Reporters Without Borders explained to the Benin government, as it does with all states which retain illiberal legislation, that imprisonment does not constitute a fair and appropriate response to journalistic error. On the contrary, it represents a real threat to democracy. Also it had broken the general rule in Benin until now of a de facto suspension of imprisonment of journalists for the past two years. In the absence of a real decriminalisation, this moratorium had at least allowed renewal of more positive relations between the authorities and the press. Moreover, Reporters Without Borders believed that to circumvent media regulatory bodies, despite their good work in recent years, was to risk stripping them of all their power. So that when journalists working in a democracy make mistakes, press regulation should not be left to the police. Finally, the use of imprisonment lays political overtones onto cases which should remain strictly within the bounds of civil law.

# BURKINA FASO

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*Area: 274,200 sq. km.  
Population: 13,228,000.  
Language: French.  
Head of state: Blaise Compaore.*

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Political obstruction preventing the solving of the 1998 murder of Norbert Zongo continued to poison the atmosphere in this “country of honest men”, as the country’s name is translated. Even if criticism is tolerated, any challenge to the head of state, Blaise Compaoré and his closest allies, remains a high-risk exercise.

The year 2006 began like the seven previous ones: in the expectation of justice for Norbert Zongo and his three companions, murdered by unknown assailants while driving along a country road, on 13 December 1998. It ended in scandal and shame, after the justice system, obviously for political reasons, shelved the fragile legal procedure which had led to a member of the presidential guard being charged.

The courts, on 16 August upheld the 19 July decision to dismiss the case for lack of evidence against Sgt Marcel Kafando, the only person who had been charged in connection with the murder. This decision, condemned by all local and international human rights and press freedom organisations, allowed the courts to send the file back to the court clerk’s office for ten years, after which it will be definitively closed. Under the criminal procedure code, the investigation can only be reopened in the event of “new charges” capable of “strengthening charges already found too weak” or “contributing new developments useful in establishing the truth”.

## IMPUNITY MADE SACROSANCT

Norbert Zongo was the editor of the weekly *L’Indépendant*. He was found dead in his burned out vehicle along with his three companions, on 13 December 1998. This date marked the start of a wave of protest across the country. Several dozen demonstrations were held in Ouagadougou and in the principal cities. On 7 May 1999, an independent commission of inquiry (CEI), tasked with “determining the causes of death” of the journalist Norbert Zongo, presented its report to the prime minister. This investigation set up at the initiative of the authorities, concluded after hearing more than 200 witnesses, that “to find the motives for this quadruple murder (...) they should be looked for in the investigations carried out by the journalist

over several years and in particular his recent investigations into the death of David Ouedraogo, the driver of presidential advisor François Compaoré,” and brother of the head of state. The report also named six “serious suspects” in the case, all members of the Presidential Security Regiment. Only one of them, Marcel Kafando, was charged in 2001 with “arson” and “murder”. Sgt Kafando, who was also convicted in 2000 of having “held captive and tortured to death” David Ouedraogo, has however been living peacefully at his home in the capital and still receiving his military pay.

During a visit to Ouagadougou, in October 2006, Reporters Without Borders provided the prosecutor’s office with “new elements”, as a result of which it called for the case to be reopened. As a member of the independent commission of inquiry (CEI) set up after the murder, the organisation’s secretary-general, Robert Ménard, provided the justice system with its full report before it could be watered down by the two members representing the government. This version handed over by Reporters Without Borders, more clearly implicated François Compaoré and a rich businessman close to the government, Oumarou Kanazoé. Some passages, detailing contradictions in the statement given by François Compaoré and the role played by Oumarou Kanazoé to try to silence Norbert Zongo, were completely removed from the final report. Information in the document handed over to the Faso prosecutor also proved that François Compaoré and Oumarou Kanazoé had both lied to the CEI. It showed that the David Ouedraogo and Norbert Zongo cases were directly linked and revealed how and why the businessman and Dramane Yaméogo, Faso chief prosecutor at the time, tried to silence the journalist before his murder.

The justice system, which took an extraordinarily long time to investigate the murder, took less than

# BURKINA FASO

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24 hours to give its verdict. The day after receiving the Reporters Without Borders' file, the Faso prosecutor and the prosecutor of the Republic called a press conference to announce that the elements in their possession were "not new" and it was essential to do nothing. At the same time, they launched a torrent of attacks against Reporters Without Borders, going so far as to threaten that the arrest of its representatives currently in Burkina Faso "would not displease their embassy". These attacks were picked up and continued in the pro-government press for several further weeks.

This case therefore has for eight years continued to poison the life of the Burkinabé people, while press freedom is a reality in the country, despite a

few persistent taboos. Even if criticism is allowed and the disturbing investigations largely already published, challenging the head of state, his family or his closest allies remains a high risk exercise.

The privately-owned bi-monthly *L'Événement* found this out when, at the end of the year, François Compaoré lodged a "defamation" suit against it." The offending article referred to the procedure begun by Reporters Without Borders to reopen the Norbert Zongo case. The complaint objected to the paper's splash headline, opposite a photo of the brother of the head of state, which read: "Norbert Zongo case. So it is him then! Until now, one thought of him without daring to name him. Reporters Without Borders has just taken this step..."

# BURUNDI

Area: 27,830 sq. km.  
Population: 7,548,000.  
Languages: French, Kirundi, Swahili.  
Head of state: Pierre Nkurunziza.

The fairly-won election victory in 2005 of a former Hutu rebel movement changed the landscape for journalists. In 2006 privately-owned radio stations became the *bête noire* of the new ruling party, particularly after they cast doubt on the authenticity of a coup attempt allegedly foiled by the security services.

However much President Pierre Nkurunziza, elected head of state in 2005, may have vaunted his commitment to freedom of the press, nothing was done in practice. Journalists in Burundi entered a period of threats and uncertainty in 2006. Four of them were imprisoned. Several others left the country, for fear of falling in their turn into a trap set for those working in the media by the security services who viewed them as "trouble-makers". The government went in for denial, while the presidential press crowed over the misfortunes of their colleagues.

It all began in Bujumbura on 17 April, when a dissident deputy in the ruling coalition, Mathias Basabose, the former presidential campaign manager, called a press conference at his home to give his version of events about a dispute within the party. At 3.30 pm when around 20 journalists had gathered at his home, some 50 police officers toting assault rifles surrounded the house and kept the journalists inside hostage, without explanation, until 11pm.

Some who tried to leave the house despite the cordon were struck with rifle butts. The journalists were only allowed to leave following the intervention of the Bujumbura police chief, after the incident had provoked an outcry in the profession and international radio correspondents had reported live on their plight with the help of mobile phones. Basabose had been expelled two days earlier from the ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Front for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) in a row with the powerful party leader, Hussein Radjabu, about embezzlement of funds and political manoeuvring aimed at perverting the course of justice.

A few days later, Aloys Kabura, correspondent in Kayanza, northern Burundi for the state-run news

agency *Agence burundaise de presse (ABP)*, was arrested for making critical remarks in a bar about the government and the presidential party's actions in this case. The powerful intelligence services laid a complaint against him for "rebellion". He was sent to the Ngozi central prison and though in poor health he was sentenced to five months in prison, on 18 September, three and a half months after his arrest and without his lawyers or family being informed of the hearing. A magistrate came to announce the verdict to him within the prison on the following day. He was released on 31 October, after completing his sentence.

## INVESTIGATIVE WORK LEADS TO PRISON

During the summer, the alleged foiling of a supposed coup attempt, plotted by former president Domitien Ndayizeye, the truth of which was challenged by many of the independent media, gave a new twist to the downward spiral. Head of the privately-owned *Radio publique africaine (RPA)*, Alexis Sinduhije, publicly condemned what he termed a "set up job" by the "hard-liners" of the CNDD-FDD, on the authority of Hussein Radjabu.

From the start of the foiled coup episode, Alexis Sinduhije and those who quoted him - that is most of Bujumbura's privately-owned radio stations - began to be targeted by the presidential party and its media as "hate radio" and as "manipulators" seeking to bring down "democratically elected institutions". To punish the *RPA* for its stance, the authorities, on 18 August, ordered the closure of its station in Ngozi, the day after a statement by the president warned against "some radios and some journalists who have set themselves up as judge and jury". Rumours of imminent arrests, anonymous threats and verbal attacks became the daily lot of journalists over several weeks,

## BURUNDI

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including condemnations made in person by Hussein Radjabu, in front of thousands of CNDD-FDD activists who rallied at the Bujumbura stadium on 3 September.

The threats turned into reality on 21 November when Serge Nibizi, chief editor at *RPA* and Domitile Kiramvu, a star presenter at the station were placed in detention at Mpimba central prison after appearing before the Bujumbura prosecutor. They were charged with “broadcasting news damaging to state security” and “violating the confidentiality of investigation”. They were joined, on 29 November, by Mathias Manirakiza, head of the privately-owned radio *Isanganiro*. Corneille Nibaruta, director of privately-owned *Bonesha FM*,

escaped imprisonment, on 1st December, by fleeing the country. They were all accused in connection with the dissemination of a news report in August that the army had allegedly planned the attack on the presidential palace and on the home of the leader of the presidential party with the aim of using it as evidence of the alleged coup, the existence of which had been contested by the independent media.

The news that got them thrown in prison had however appeared in the bi-monthly *Intumwa (The Messenger)*, the organ of the presidential party, when the file had not yet been sent before the courts. No journalist on this publication has ever been questioned.

# CAMEROON

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Area: 475,440 sq. km.

Population: 16,322,000.

Languages: French, English.

Head of state: Paul Biya.

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Press freedom began to turn into a reality in this country ruled by President Paul Biya since 1982, even though it remained fragile. Numerous taboos were still in place and anyone who broke them suffered the consequences. But the year 2006 was difficult for the Cameroon press chiefly because of the actions of some unscrupulous editors.

Certainly, Cameroon is no longer the tense and brutal place it was in the first few years after 2000, when journalists were imprisoned even for poking fun. But it is still dangerous to be a journalist in a country in which the army, secessionist impulses on the part of the English-speaking region and corruption are still sensitive subjects. In addition, in common with other countries on the continent, poverty has fostered a press which is easily corrupted, exploited by business and political clans to outdo their rivals. In these conditions, press freedom is a precarious quality in Cameroon.

The year 2006 has been one in which the Cameroon press has been put in every shade of bad light. From the start of January, it was badly shaken by the case of the "homosexuals of the Republic", which caused rifts and provoked disgust within the profession. On the pretext of serving "public health" in a country where homosexuality is a crime, low circulation newspapers chose to splash an alleged list of "deviant" public figures, appointed to positions of responsibility as a result of alleged "favours". Quoting "reliable sources" (but always anonymous) and "concurring accounts" (but above all exaggerated), the alleged news put out by these papers was essentially a collection of rumours and vilification in extremely bad taste. If the objective of the editors was to bring in revenue for their companies, then the success was total. But unsurprisingly, several people targeted in this way took legal action against *La Météo*, *l'Anecdote* and *Nouvelle Afrique*.

Since the law in Cameroon provides for prison sentences for such ethical lapses, it is therefore likely that these unprincipled journalists will serve time in prison. Reporters Without Borders's position, expressed in a comment piece carried by the privately-owned daily *Le Messager* and the privately-owned weekly *Le Jeune Observateur*, was quite

clear: While unreservedly condemning this kind of journalism, tinged with hatred, as have a large majority of Cameroon's journalists, the organisation above all stresses that prison is not a reply to these abuses. On the contrary, these mercenaries of journalism, once sentenced, will serve their sentences and come out crowned with all the glory of press freedom martyrs. Reporters Without Borders has therefore proposed to the Cameroon government that it reforms not only its press law but also its mechanisms for regulating the media. The Communications Minister, Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, attempted to introduce reform but it was clumsy and inadequate, proposing administrative police powers for the ministry which would allow it to order the seizure of newspapers. This was rejected by parliament and the minister finished by resigning his post in the autumn without having pushed through this reform.

## THE PRESS STILL UNDER THREAT

In September and November, two incidents served as a reminder that journalists in Cameroon are not fully guaranteed the right to inform the public. Duke Atangana Etotogo, editor of the privately-owned weekly *L'Afrique centrale*, was held by military security in Yaoundé from 3-7 September. He was only released after writing a letter of apology to the defence minister and the head of state. The former editor of the weekly *La Nouvelle presse* and *La Météo*, two papers with a provocative approach, had just launched a new monthly paper. In its first edition on 28 August, it carried a report exposing mismanagement and corruption with the army. It also closely examined several incidents involving the management style of Defence Minister, Rémy Ze Meka, quoting anonymous sources.

Overnight on 6-7 November, three hooded men broke into the home of Agnès Taïle, presenter of

# CAMEROON

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an open microphone programme on privately-owned *Sweet FM* radio in Douala. They dragged her outside and savagely beat her. Taile had since June 2005 moderated a broadcast called "it's your turn to speak" in which listeners phoned in on news subjects. Three weeks before the assault, she

had received several anonymous telephone calls telling her to stop her "pursuit". She had said publicly at the time that she was not frightened by these attempts to intimidate her. As often in this type of case, the subsequent police investigation went nowhere.

## CHAD

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Area: 1,284,200 sq. km.

Population: 9,749,000.

Language: French.

Head of state: Idriss Deby Itno.

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Following a crisis between the press and the government in 2005, the situation appeared to improve in N'Djamena. But the resumption in fighting, a state of war with Sudan and the government's intolerance dealt a serious blow to freedoms in Chad. A state of emergency was declared at the end of the year. And with this came censorship.

The year started well, with the resolution of the crisis of the summer of 2005, which saw four journalists imprisoned in N'Djamena. Dialogue was restarted between the press and the government. Negotiations were even begun on law reform in line with President Idriss Deby Itno's promises made to Reporters Without Borders, in September 2005. But fast-moving political events, particularly the resumption of clashes between rebels and government forces at the Sudanese border then into the capital itself, pushed the government into taking the absurd and pointless decision to reinstate censorship.

Tension started worsening in autumn 2006, when fighting resumed and the president openly accused neighbour Sudan, the rear base of armed movements, of having declared war on Chad. Against this background, on 27 October, Evariste Ngaralbaye, a journalist on the privately-owned weekly *Notre Temps*, was arrested and imprisoned for four days along with common-law prisoners. His arrest was linked to the publication of an article he wrote about child soldiers.

### STATE OF EMERGENCY

Two weeks later, when blood was shed in inter-communal clashes and rebel columns were advancing from the border with Darfur in Sudan, the government decided, on 13 November, to declare a state of emergency in six regions and in the capital. This step included restoring advance censorship on the written press, as well as a ban on privately-owned radios from covering sensitive subjects. The independent press - reduced to a handful of weeklies appearing only in N'Djamena and a few private and community radios - found itself at the end of 2006 under strict government surveillance, while fighting continued with very little news filtering out. Forced to appear from 23 November onwards, with whole passages cut out

and criss-crossed with black bands, the written press, certain that it was now seen as an enemy of the state, joined in the resistance, in its own fashion.

After producing several defaced editions, five newspapers belonging to the Chadian Association of Private Newspaper Editors (AEPT), *N'Djamena Bi-hebdo*, *Notre Temps*, *Le Temps*, *Sarh Tribune* and *Le Messenger*, decided to suspend publication for two weeks, from 6 December. The only publication which continued to appear normally was the pro-government privately-owned *Le Progrès*. An attempt was also made to challenge the censorship decree through the courts.

### CONFLICT ZONE

Chad had however escaped a first news blackout in April, when rebels mounted a surprise attack on N'Djamena. During their advance they also took the view that journalists were in their way. Eliakim Vanambyl, a reporter on privately-owned *FM Liberté* radio was kidnapped by a rebel column, in Mongo, central Chad on 11 April 2006. He managed to escape a few hours later with the help of one of the rebels and reached the town, where he was hidden by protestant monks until he could return to the capital.

On the government side, the army also kept a close watch on the press. Several foreign correspondents reported suffering threats and harassment. On 15 April, René Dillah Yombirim, a journalist on public radio and correspondent for the French service of the *BBC*, was viciously beaten by soldiers while he was interviewing residents in the capital, before being released a few hours later.

Finally, the regular harassment of Changuiz Vatankhah, editor of the community station *Radio Brakoss* and president of the Chad Private Radio

# CHAD

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Union (URPT) had an epilogue which Reporters Without Borders hopes is short-lived. The Iranian refugee, who has lived in Chad for several decades, was arrested on 28 April and placed under an order to be expelled from the country. He was only released on 19 May after international pressure and mediation by human rights minister, Abderaman Djasnabaille. The journalist, who was already regularly threatened for his local anti-cor-

ruption campaign and arrested once before, in September 2005, on the grounds that his radio "revived animosity between different rural communities in conflict", had signed a URPT release calling for postponement of 3 May presidential elections. Forced to resign all his duties, he was however allowed to remain in Chad, with his family, which was in itself an achievement, given the Public Security Ministry hounding unleashed against him.



# CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Area: 322,460 sq. km.  
Population: 18,154,000.  
Language: French.  
Head of state: Laurent Gbagbo.

The Cote d'Ivoire, divided in two since September 2002, has a pluralistic press, mechanisms for democratic regulation and no longer legally imprisons journalists. But it is one of Africa's most dangerous countries for both local and foreign media. The year began with a new outbreak of violence from the "Young Patriots", placed by Reporters Without Borders on its list of "press freedom predators".

At dawn on 16 January 2006, barricades began to go up all around Abidjan. Checkpoints were set up by young demonstrators in response to an appeal from the several organisations for the defence of President Laurent Gbagbo. Groups began to mass in front of several strategic sites in the economic capital with the aim of forcing out the UN mandated forces. Several hundred Young Patriots rallied in front of the building housing the state-run media, particularly *Radiotélévision ivoirienne (RTI)*. They used force to get the staff to broadcast news of their action in the 1pm news bulletin and threatened several journalists, calling them "rebels with cushy jobs", and then withdrew from the building. But overnight on 17-18 January there was a further dramatic development. Soldiers guarding the entrance to the building opened the gates and the Young Patriots who were waiting outside rushed through and forced their way into the studios. They threatened the technicians to get them to broadcast a message from one of their leaders calling for "all young people to take to the streets to demand the departure of impartial forces and to fully liberate the country". They also claimed to have "taken" the television. From then on, leaders of the various groups claiming to support President Laurent Gbagbo occupied the *RTI* premises, calling for rallies against the "symbols of occupation". Local bands of Young Patriots in Daloa, a city in central Cote d'Ivoire, stormed and ransacked the premises of community radio *Radio Tchato-Daloa* after the management refused to broadcast a call from the demonstrators to attack the local UN base.

Over the next two days, journalists in Abidjan not belonging to the pro-presidential camp, lay low. The offices of opposition newspapers were deserted, for fear of Young Patriot raids as had happened in November 2004. Demonstrators at the barricades roughly interrogated journalists, saying

they were looking for staff from the daily *Patriote*, linked to the Rally for the Republicans (RDR), the party of former prime minister Alassane Ouattara, or other dailies close to the opposition. A team of journalists from the Olympe group, owner of the dailies *L'Inter* and *Soir Info*, were held up at a barricade manned by Young Patriots brandishing swords, knives and clubs. Journalist for *Soir Info* Konan N'Bra, photographer Abdoul Karim Koné and their driver were threatened with death, beaten up and robbed of their money and reporting equipment.

Negotiations in Abidjan between the Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny and President Laurent Gbagbo led to a return to normality on 20 January.

The presidential camp was not ready to yield however. On 28 November, *RTI's* director general, Kébé Yacouba, was sacked by presidential decree and replaced by Pierre Brou Amessan, who read the TV news during the period that the Young Patriots had seized control in January, and the channel's board of governors was dissolved. Laurent Gbagbo had seen as "seditious" the airing on *RTI*, on 27 November, of Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny's statement that it was "urgent to delay implementation" of decrees reinstating officials suspended for their part in the toxic waste scandal in Abidjan. The move confirmed the bringing to heel of the public media, a crucial element in controlling news and information throughout the country.

## AN UNASSAILABLE PRESIDENCY

The year 2006 therefore saw a return to the control of news by force. It was also the third year of uncertainty about the fate of French-Canadian journalist Guy-André Kieffer, who was



## CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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kidnapped by a commando from a parking lot of an Abidjan supermarket on 16 April 2004, after being lured into an ambush set by Michel Legré, brother-in-law of the president's wife, Simone Gbagbo. French examining magistrate Patrick Ramaël opened an investigation into Legré on 21 October 2004 for "abduction and a holding a hostage". He is currently under house arrest in Abidjan, after 18 months in detention. Jean-Tony Oulai, an Ivorian calling himself an army "ex-cap-

tain", and accused by some witnesses of having organised the kidnapping of the journalist, was also put under investigation for "abduction and holding a hostage" in January 2006 in France and put on probation. But the investigation has been hamstrung by the appalling state of relations between France and Cote d'Ivoire, the difficulties of investigating on the spot and the law of silence kept by those involved in the case, all close to the president.

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Area: 2,344,860 sq. km.

Population: 57,549,000.

Language: French.

Head of state: Joseph Kabila.

In this country the size of western Europe, the press is buffeted by the violence of political militants and their leaders, the anarchy which reigns in some regions and the endemic poverty which can push them into allowing themselves to be corrupted. The UN's biggest mission in the world was launched in 2006 to organise and oversee a historic presidential election. While several journalists fell victim to political hatred, others played a dangerous role, which could have tipped the country into a new civil war.

The vastness of the former Zaire reflects the scale of the problems faced by journalists in this country. In the capital Kinshasa, where the press is profuse, polemical, and unruly, death threats, unfair arrests and police brutality are commonplace. During 2006, up to 15 publishers, editors and journalists working in the capital were, as in previous years, sent to languish in the cells of the sinister Kinshasa Penitentiary and Re-education Centre (CPRK), frequently on the basis of a single complaint from a politician or businessman, or a phone call from the police chief. Reporters Without Borders and its partner organisation, Journalist in Danger (JED) have over several years been calling on the government to reform the defamation law, which provides for prison terms and allows journalists to be put in preventive detention, so far in vain. The authorities have not yet given up using and abusing an article punishing a "damaging accusation", under which judges need not rule on the truth of the incriminating news but only on the fact of whether or not it "harms the reputation or standing" of the complainant. Given, on top of this, the corruption at the heart of the judicial system, injustices are frequent.

## PARTISAN MEDIA

Indeed, there is also a corruption problem with the Congolese press. Many journalists sell their columns in their papers to the highest bidder, putting themselves in the position of master blackmailers or mouthpieces of unscrupulous politicians. Hate speech also regularly finds its way into newspaper columns or on the airwaves of some Congolese media, made use of by political or ethnic clans. The recent presidential electoral campaign was the occasion for public and privately-

owned media to noisily declare their allegiance for one candidate or another, frequently with no regard for ethics. As a result, partisan media, particularly those of Joseph Kabila and his rival Jean-Pierre Bemba, were the target of attacks from their opponents, who had no hesitation in sending their militia or militants to silence the voice of "the other".

In another sign of the times, the day after the declaration of the first round results in the presidential elections, on 20 August, fighting broke out around the TV building owned by Jean-Pierre Bemba between the praetorian guards of the two candidates. One month later, on 18 September, a suspicious fire destroyed the offices and studios of *Canal Congo télévision (CCTV)*, *Canal Kin télévision (CKTV)* and *Radio liberté Kinshasa (Ralik)*, leaving the channels' director general, Stéphane Kitutu with second degree burns.

## THREATS AND SHADOWY AREAS

Many other journalists do their best to carry out their work honestly, but pay a high price — in their safety, freedom or their lives — for challenging those who embezzle public funds. One such journalist, Kazadi Mukendi, on the weekly *Lubilanji Expansion*, spent a month and a half in prison for exposing a corruption case, despite the fact that the prosecutor had ordered his release one and a half months earlier. Bapuwa Mwamba, an opposition editorialist newly returned from exile, was murdered at his home on 8 July, probably by soldiers looking for easy money.

Less than a year earlier, political journalist Franck Ngyke and his wife Hélène Mpaka, were murdered

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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in dubious circumstances at their home in Kinshasa. Under pressure from Congolese journalists and international organisations, for the first time in the country's recent history, an investigation was opened to shed light on the double killing. This led to a somewhat muddled trial of three alleged culprits, three former soldiers whose motives were unclear. JED carried out its own independent inquiry, with the aim of exploring the political lead, despite pronounced disregard for this hypothesis on the part of the authorities. The conclusions have never been confirmed or disproved. However repeated death threats against Donat M'Baya Tshimanga, president of the organisation and its secretary general Tshivis Tshivuadi, suggests that the questions they raised in their investigation, particularly about the role played by people close to the interior ministry, were too close for comfort for some.

To confront all these challenges, in March, Reporters Without Borders sent a delegation to Kinshasa, to meet President Joseph Kabila, several ministers and ambassadors, the local UN mission and the leading media executives. While the organisation was able to secure the release of three imprisoned journalists, it was also able to establish the inadequacy of regulation and self-regulation. The High Authority on Media (HAM), is headed by Modeste Mutinga, a respected journalist subjected to such pressure that he finds it difficult to work normally. At the same time as finding it impossible not to condemn abuses by the propaganda media, the authority has to cope with constant charges of "partiality". It was against this background that its offices were ransacked on 27 July by supporters of Jean-Pierre Bemba returning from one of his political meetings.

## PERMANENT HOSTILITY

Political militants are not the only ones to show no respect for this important institution of modern democracy. The information ministry, under Henri Mova Sanakyi, a "hardliner" in Joseph Kabila's party, has no hesitation in by-passing it regularly, as it did at the end of August, when he ordered an unceremonious blackout of Jean-Pierre Bemba's channels. The minister also demonstrated his lack of regard for democratic rules on several occasions during the year. On 3 July, a foreign correspondent for *RFI*, Ghislaine Dupont, was expelled from the country at his initiative. The minister had launched a virulent attack on her in the preceding months and a hate campaign with xenophobic overtones was directed at her by the pro-Kabila daily *L'Avenir*.

The situation is little better in the provinces, with local leaders regularly sending their henchmen to beat up journalists showing too much curiosity. In one case, on 18 May, Ricky Nzuzi, cameraman with *Radio télévision nationale congolaise (RTNC)* in Lubumbashi, was kidnapped, brutally beaten and thrown into a ditch by unknown assailants. In areas infested by private armies with vague political objectives, journalists work in complete insecurity. A local *AFP*, correspondent Acquitté Kisémbé, went missing in Ituri in 2003 and everything points to the conclusion that he was murdered by local militiamen. Reporters Without Borders has moreover called on the International Criminal Court to extend its investigations into warlord Thomas Lubanga, transferred to The Hague during the year, to include this unsolved disappearance.



# ERITREA

Area: 117,600 sq. km.  
Population: 4,401,000.  
Language: Tigrinya.  
Head of state: Issaias Afeworki.

Africa's newest country, independent since 1993, has become a kind of open-air prison guarded by an ultra-nationalist sole party which sees the least democratic claim as a threat to national security. Among the hundreds of political prisoners, at least 13 journalists have just spent their sixth year in jail. Three of them may well have died as a result of conditions reminiscent of a penal colony.

Eritrea has just completed a fifth year of terror and silence. The army command and the sole party, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), continue to exert total control and to hand down severe punishment to the least tendency to criticism in this small country squeezed between Ethiopia, Sudan and the Red Sea, independent only since 1993.

Under the leadership of Information Minister, Ali Abdu, the state media continues to sing the praises of President Issaias Afeworki. Journalists who dissent from the authoritarianism of the masters of this open-air prison had no choice but to obey orders. When the pressure became too great, they left. In 2006, around a score of them fled into exile abroad, including star presenter of the English-language service of the public channel *Eri-TV*, Temesghen Debesai. The former correspondent of the *Voice of America (VOA)*, Aklilu Solomon, crossed the Ethiopian border secretly at the beginning of December. He had been arrested in July 2003 for a report on the grief felt by families of soldiers learning of the death in combat of their loved ones. The journalist was released in poor health after being held for 18 months in a metal container and then spent several weeks in a barracks to complete his "patriotic re-education".

## OPEN CONTEMPT FOR THE PRESS

The Eritrean government responded to repeated defections in its usual way - with a crackdown. From 12 November, security forces agents turned up daily at the offices of the information ministry, where state-run media are based and arrested staff without explanation. Journalists picked up in these swoops were: Ahmed "Bahja" Idris, of *Eri-TV*, Senait Tesfay, presenter of a Tigrinya-language service on *Eri-TV*, Paulos Kidane, of the Amharic-language service of *Eri-TV* and public *Radio Dimtsi*

*Hafash* (Voice of the Broad Masses), Daniel Mussie, of the Oromo-language service of Radio Dimtsi Hafash, Temesghen Abay, of the Tigrinya-language service of *Radio Dimtsi Hafash*, Yemane Haile, of the state-run *Eritrean News Agency (ENA)*, Fathia Khaled, presenter on the Arabic-language service of *Eri-TV*, and Amir Ibrahim, journalist on the same service, who suffers from diabetes. They are reportedly held in the capital, Asmara, in a police-run complex known as "Agip", in reference to the oil company which previously stood at that spot. This detention centre is "where police take prisoners to torture them before transferring them to their final destination", as a former prisoner told Reporters Without Borders.

## INHUMAN PRISON CONDITIONS

But it also seems that the irreparable may have been done in one of the country's many detention centres. Credible sources reported at the end of 2006 that three of the 13 journalists secretly imprisoned for the past five years had died in the army-run prison of Eiraeiro, situated in a remote north-eastern desert. Said Abdulkader, Medhane Haile and Yusuf Mohamed Ali were among journalists and opposition figures rounded up in the week of 18-23 September 2001, in the aftermath of President Issaias Afeworki's "suspension" of privately-owned media and the arrest of the ruling party's reformist fringe. Questioned about this report by Reporters Without Borders and several international media, the Eritrean government gave only the curt reply. "We are not prepared to make any comment". The extremely harsh conditions in Eiraeiro prison could have been responsible for these presumed deaths.

Other prisoners were referred to in this report, all working for the privately-owned press. They were Seyoum Tsehaye (or Fsehaye), a freelance



# ERITREA

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journalist, Dawit Habtemichael, editor and co-founder of *Meqaleh*, Temesghen Gebreyesus, journalist and member of the board of *Keste Debera* and Emanuel Asrat, editor of *Zemen* and all reportedly held in Eiraeiro.

Reporters Without Borders also obtained news of the co-founder of *Selit*, the country's top-selling weekly prior to 2001, the poet and dramatist

Fessehaye Yohannes, known as "Joshua". He is reportedly being held in Cell 18 at Eiraeiro prison, after being held previously in Dongolo jail in the south, in an underground cell 1.5 metres wide and 2.50 metres high, lit round the clock by electric light.



# ETHIOPIA

Area: 1,104,300 sq. km.  
Population: 77,431,000.  
Language: Amharic.  
Head of government: Meles Zenawi.

The international community might have believed that legislative elections in May 2005 would mark the end of “authoritarian democracy” and the beginning of a genuine openness. But the polling fiasco and the riots which followed them dashed this hope. Around 15 journalists have been in prison since November 2005 after being picked up in a crackdown on the opposition coalition.

After a disastrous year, 2006 in Ethiopia was a static one. Some 20 journalists spent it in cells in Addis Ababa, part of a group of at least 76 members of the opposition, civil society and the private press prosecuted for “treason”, “conspiracy” to overthrow the government and “genocide”. Their trials before the federal high court opened on 2 May. The general disapproval, including from Ethiopia’s traditional allies, failed to get Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to budge. For him, there was no doubt that the opposition wanted to engineer a coup and to take revenge on ethnic Tigrans like himself.

Fourteen newspaper editors or publishers were rounded up in the space of one month in November 2005. From December onwards, other journalists were arrested and sentenced in defamation cases. All were still detained as of 1st January 2007.

Since 1st January 2006, two other journalists were added to the list of the “November prisoners”. Solomon Aregawi, of *Hadar*, arrested in November 2005, was charged on 21 March 2006 with “insulting the Constitution” and “genocide”, along with 32 other prisoners, members or supposed members of the CUD, Goshu Moges, of the weekly *Lisane Hezeb*, arrested on 19 February was charged with “treason” on 19 April. A number of other journalists and opposition figures or organisations, were charged while out of the country and tried in absentia.

It is against this tense background, aggravated by the war with Somalia and the standoff at the

Eritrean border, that several privately-owned newspapers are continuing to appear in Addis Ababa. Self-censorship is commonplace, particularly on military issues. Ethiopian journalists are held to an imposed patriotism and foreign correspondents closely watched. Anthony Mitchell, working for the *Associated Press (AP)*, was forced to leave the country on 22 January for having allegedly “tarnished the image of the country”. Foreign media have great difficulty in obtaining accreditation from the Information Ministry, which is essential to be allowed to work legally in Ethiopia.

Reporters Without Borders has been worried since 2004, about the plight of two journalists working for the Oromo service of public television *ETV*. They were arrested in April of that year, along with other *ETV* staff, since released, following a violent crackdown on an Oromo student demonstration on the Addis Ababa University campus, on 4 January 2004. The two journalists were accused of being informers for the separatist Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

For the first time in its history, the Ethiopian government appears to have launched itself into web censorship. From May to June 2006, most blogs and opposition websites were inaccessible in the country. The government denied being behind it. However, at the end of November, these online publications against mysteriously disappeared, which makes the hypothesis of political censorship appear more plausible.



# GAMBIA

Area: 11,300 sq. km.  
Population: 1,517,000.  
Language: English.  
Head of state: Yahya Jammeh.

Ten journalists arrested, one missing, many others in exile, countless unsolved murders for which supporters of the president are suspected of responsibility or complicity, the memory of a murdered journalist besmirched by the government and a permanent climate of fear: this is the terrible track record of President Yahya Jammeh's as far as press freedom is concerned.

President Jammeh held a lavish investiture ceremony on 15 and 16 December 2006 to celebrate his re-election for a new five-year term. Many heads of state and government, including the prime minister of the very generous Republic of Taiwan, attended what the one-time coup leader, re-elected in dubious circumstances with 67.4% of the vote in September 2006, called a "big victory celebration and an opportunity for Gambia's youth to develop its musical talents".

This major "musical" festival was perhaps intended to mask another more dreadful event: the commemoration of the murder of one of the country's greatest journalists two years earlier. Deyda Hydara, co-founder and editor of the privately-owned daily *The Point*, correspondent for *Agence France-Presse (AFP)* and Reporters Without Borders in Banjul, was gunned down on 16 December 2004, while he was driving two employees home in his car. He had previously been threatened by the intelligence services, who had him under surveillance minutes before the killing, carried out in a street running alongside a police barracks, as shown by two investigative missions carried out by Reporters Without Borders. No serious investigation was held to identify the killers or the instigators. The only official statement made by the Gambian investigators, six months after the murder, produced the trumped-up suggestion that Hydara, who was referred to as a "provocateur", could have been killed because of some kind of sex case. But in a country like Gambia, where the president boasts of his contempt for journalists and human rights activists, one could hardly expect anything else.

## AREA WITHOUT RULE OF LAW

Questioned about the killing in September, Yahya Jammeh replied: "I do not believe in murder.

I believe in imprisonment for the rest of your life. Then perhaps, at some point, we will say, 'Oh he is too old to be fed by the state'. We release him and leave him to sink into a decline. Then everyone will learn a lesson from it." To a journalist who challenged him about the frequent unfair arrests of journalists and the closure of the privately-owned bi-weekly *The Independent* by an elite police unit, Yahya Jammeh replied: "Everyone should get lost. If I have good reasons to close a newspaper's offices, I will do it."

*The Independent*, which had its printing press torched in 2004 by men identified by an opposition parliamentarian as members of the National Guard, has been sealed off and illegally prevented from appearing since 28 March 2006. An interminable trial has been started against one of its journalists, Lamin Fatty, who has been held for more than a month by the intelligence services with no access to a lawyer, just a few hundred metres from the luxury tourist complexes on Banjul beach. He is being tried under a draconian law providing for heavy prison sentences, adopted by parliament two days before the murder of Deyda Hydara. The managing director of the newspaper, Madi Ceasay, who is also president of the journalists' union, Gambia Press Union (GPU), and his editor Musa Saikyhan were secretly held for nearly three weeks between 28 March and 20 April, in defiance of all legal procedure. Like them at least ten journalists were arrested during 2006 and detained in similar conditions. "Chief" Ebrima Manneh, of the private pro-government *Daily Observer* has been missing since 7 July. Reporters Without Borders learned in early 2007 that he had been held in a provincial police station since that date, but no charges had been made against him.

This appalling record has not prevented the African Union (AU), the continental organisation,



# GAMBIA

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presided over by former Malian head of state Alpha Oumar Konaré, from continuing to offer unconditional support for the government. The annual heads of state and government summit

was held in Banjul and the Gambian capital is the headquarters of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. This body also avoids discussing the actions of its hosts on this issue.

## KENYA

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Area: 580,370 sq. km.  
Population: 34,256,000.  
Language: English.  
Head of state: Mwai Kibaki.

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Kenyans woke on 2 March 2006 to learn that police had overnight carried out a brutal raid against *The Standard* newspaper and a television station. Footage of police officers burning copies of one of the country's most respected newspapers were relayed around the world. The incident was revealing of the appalling relations between the government and the privately-owned media, in one of the continent's most developed democracies.

For Kenyan journalists, the year 2006 will be remembered chiefly for the raid which came at 1am on 2 March, when police made coordinated onslaughts on the HQ of the privately-owned *Kenya Television Network (KTN)* and at the printers of the daily *The Standard*, in a Nairobi industrial zone. After beating the watchmen, numbers of police officers armed with AK-47s, triggered panic at the TV station. They forced staff to lie on the floor as they wrecked broadcast equipment, which took the station off air until early afternoon of the following day. Police stormed the film production unit, seizing equipment, including a number of computers, arrested and then quickly released four staff members. Simultaneously police officers seized copies of the 2 March edition of the *The Standard* at the printers and burned them in front of the television cameras in scenes which were shown around the world.

The government, through its Internal Security Minister, John Michuki, acknowledged it had ordered the police operation. It came after months of mounting hostility between the government of President Mwai Kibaki and the privately-owned press, in particular the powerful Nation Media Group and Standard Newspapers. This time it was an article which appeared on 25 February in the weekend edition of the *The Standard*, which unleashed the government's ire. The article referred to a meeting two days earlier, between President Kibaki and the former environment minister Kalonzo Musyoka, to discuss a possible political alliance. Mr. Musyoka had left the government in November 2005 and campaigned with the opposition, against the draft constitution proposed by the head of state and finally rejected by the Kenyan people. The press offices of both President Kibaki and Kalonzo Musyoka denied that such a meeting had ever taken place. *The Standard* repor-

ted these denials but also referred to its own suspicions of a plot on the part of the coalition to which Musyoka belonged, with the aim of discrediting him.

But that was not enough to placate the government. In the first stage of its punitive operation, on 28 February, managing editor of *The Standard*, Chaacha Mwita, editor, Dennis Onyango, and journalist, Ayub Savula, were arrested and taken to a police station in Kileleshwa, in Nairobi. The storming of the newspaper came three days later. They were not released until the day after the raid. They were charged with "publication of false rumours with the intention of panicking the public" and were released on bail of 50,000 shillings (580 euros).

Far from solving whatever problems there were, this police raid and its consequences poisoned Kenya's political and media life for the rest of the year. Who knew what? Who gave the orders? Why such brutality? These questions continued to nourish the debate, proving that physical attacks on the media are totally counter-productive for the government of a fully functioning democracy like Kenya.

### VIOLENCE

Police are still often sent to settle scores with media, who, in the eyes of the government, have "overstepped the mark". A police unit, led by head of operations for Nairobi, Julius Ndegwa, and deputy chief of the provincial criminal brigade, Isaiah Osugo, carried out a major search at the offices of the tabloid *The Weekly Citizen* and at several printers in the capital on 20 February. During this operation, journalist Johnstone Matio, graphic designer, Ken Teyie, receptionist, Catherine Oyando, printer Paul Kimani, and distribution assistant Austin Alwaka, were arrested. Several

# KENYA

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street vendors were also picked up. They were all released a few days later.

The weekly, which specialises in sex cases, had carried several articles criticising Mwai Kibaki's presidency. It had reported that the head of state, incapable of running the country, had delegated his powers to a special advisor, Stanley Murage, and that a power struggle was going on between a woman presented as his second wife, Mary Wambui, and "first lady" Lucy Kibaki.

Another problem confronting journalists in Kenya is the endemic violence that exists in one of the

continent's most troubled regions. The Nairobi offices of privately-owned *Radio Hope*, of the protestant evangelical Pentecostal Church was stormed during the night of 12 May by a band of nine assailants, two of whom opened fire on a night watchman killing him instantly, then injuring another member of the security staff and a presenter before fire-bombing studios and taking the station of air. A passer-by was also injured as the gang fled after the raid.

The attack, which the radio blamed on Muslim extremists, followed a Swahili-language broadcast of a programme called, "Jesus is the way", which promoted conversion to Christianity for Muslims.

# MAURITANIA

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Area: 1,025,520 sq. km.  
Population: 3,069,000.  
Languages: Arabic, French.  
Head of state: Ely Ould Mohamed Vall.

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In two years, there have been spectacular gains for press freedom in the former “private fiefdom” of ousted president Maaouiya Ould Taya, now living in exile. After his forced departure, in August 2005, a military junta began a process of transition to democracy which should culminate in a presidential election in March 2007. Among the promises kept so far by the country’s new rulers has been the abolition of censorship.

If proof was needed that international pressure can produce positive results for civil and political freedoms, the case of Mauritania provides an instructive example. Following the “palace revolution” of August 2005, the military junta which overthrew President Maaouiya Ould Taya promised to restore democracy and in particular press freedom. At the end of 2006, this promise was kept.

A new law, decriminalising press offences and setting up mechanisms for democratic regulation, was drawn up by a special commission made up of independent journalists in Nouakchott, jurists and top officials, in collaboration with Reporters Without Borders. Completed in March, slightly amended by the profession after its public release, the new law was promulgated at the beginning of October by the Military Council for Justice and Democracy (CMJD). Censorship was thus abolished through negotiation and with the watchful support of the international community. A High Authority of Press and Broadcasting (HAPA) was appointed to regulate the sector. Mauritanian journalists can finally breathe easily again, after 20 years of oppression, constant surveillance and police tyranny.

Certainly, the broadcast landscape is still under state control and the CMJD’s promises of liberalisation are taking time to firm up. But the major public media have been entrusted to responsible journalists who have opened their airwaves and their columns to the country’s entire political spectrum. Likewise, the June constitutional referendum and November municipal and legislative elections went off in favourable conditions, guaranteeing diversity in public discourse and access to the greatest number possible to hear the speeches. As for the presidential elections due in March 2007, these polls were preceded by consultations between the government and political movements

so as to satisfy everyone involved, including the most radical elements. Moreover, broadcasts in the capital by French public station *Radio France International (RFI)*, suspended by the former regime in November 2000, were resumed and negotiations opened with the channel’s management to extend its service to Nouadhibou in the west.

## NEW OBJECTIVES

A number of challenges remain however for Mauritanian journalists, particularly in overcoming clan and tribal pressures. Khalil Ould Idoud, editor of the Arabic-language daily *alAkhbar*, was attacked in Nouakchott on 15 February 2006. A score of armed men, under the orders of ex Colonel Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Deh, a prominent figure under the former regime turned businessman, burst into the offices of his newspaper looking for him. On the same day, the journalist was driving his car when he was hit by a four-wheel drive vehicle in the centre of the capital. He succeeded in getting away from the scene without injury, reported the incident and then immediately went into hiding, fearing for his safety. Government intervention allowed those responsible to be punished but the journalist withdrew his complaint for reasons which remained unclear.

Elsewhere, the phenomena of the “peshmerga” press — irregular publications of dubious professionalism and treated favourably under the previous regime to discredit the independent press — continue to cause problems. Chasers after “little presents” and keen to sell their services to the highest bidder, those responsible for these newspapers continue to be invited to press conferences and official events, angering journalists committed to respecting the ethical rules of the job. But the experience of 15 years of censorship has provided them with optimism which allows them

# MAURITANIA

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to face up to the challenge. "We have already stood up to the authorities which had all the power. I don't see why we should give way to others. The only threat to the press now comes from within. It must organise itself, become profes-

sional, unite, and show solidarity to confront its new predators," Ahmed Ould Sheikh told Reporters Without Borders. He is managing editor of *Calame*, one of the newspapers which suffered most from censorship prior to 2005.

# MOZAMBIQUE

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*Area: 801,590 sq. km.*

*Population: 19,792,000.*

*Language: Portuguese.*

*Head of state: Armando Emilio Guebuza.*

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Six years after the murder of journalist Carlos Cardoso, the leader of the commando which killed him was definitively sentenced to a long prison term. Mozambique's public ministry even went further by opening an investigation into the possible complicity of Nyimpine Chissano, son of former president Joachim Chissano.

It is sufficiently rare in Africa for a journalist's killer to be effectively brought to justice, for this kind of verdict to be thoroughly welcomed. This was what happened in Mozambique in 2006, six years after the murder of Carlos Cardoso, editor of the daily *Metical*, who was killed in November 2000 while he was investigating the country's biggest financial scandal since independence.

On 20 January, Anibal Antonio dos Santos Junior, known as "Anibalzinho", the leader of the commando who killed the journalist, was sentenced to nearly 30 years in prison. Anibalzinho was also ordered to pay damages to Cardoso's family of 14 billion meticals (about 490,000 euros), and 1.5 billion meticals (51 000-52,000 euros) to the journalist's driver who was injured in the ambush. The judge said that after serving the entirety of his sentence, Portuguese-national Anibalzinho should be deported to his home country. Certainly, key areas of doubt still exist in the case and neither the circumstances of the defendant's two spectacular escapes, probably with help from within the police, nor accusations of complicity against the son of the former president, Nyimpine Chissano, accused of having ordered the killing, have been ever been fully cleared up.

However, on 9 May, Mozambique's public ministry opened an investigation into the accusation that Nyimpine Chissano was allegedly the "moral author" behind the murder of Carlos Cardoso. He was being investigated for "complicity" and "various economic crimes". The prosecutor-general's offices sent the file to the High Court in Maputo. A judge will now have to interview all parties before deciding whether the son of the former head of state should be brought before a court.

Cardoso was murdered on 22 November 2000, on Avenue Martires de Machava in Maputo. He

was travelling in his car with his driver when two men blocked their route and opened fire on them. Cardoso, who was hit by several bullets in the head, died instantly and his driver was very badly injured. The journalist was at the time investigating the embezzlement of the equivalent of 14 million euros from the Commercial Bank of Mozambique (BCM). In his articles he had particularly cited the names of three very powerful businessmen, the two Satar brothers and Vicente Ramaya.

## ABUSE OF POWER

The case sent shock waves across the country and forced the government to give more respect to the press. Even if prison terms still exist as a penalty for defamation, in practice the courts never impose them. There had been no arrests recorded of journalists since 2003, when the editor of the daily *Imparcial*, José Armando Chitula, was arrested at Maputo airport and held for 24 hours before being released. The imprisonment of the editor, news editor and a reporter from the community newspaper *Mabarwe*, on 3 May, therefore provoked surprise in 2006, and was particularly revealing of the abuse of power by small-time local despots, with police complicity. Editor Sebastião Canjera, news editor João Mascarenhas, and journalist Patreque Francisco, were arrested in the provincial capital, Chimoio, on the orders of the deputy prosecutor, Jose Abede. The three journalists were imprisoned on the basis of a "defamation" suit lodged by an influential business in Barue district, Tiago Pangaia. The newspaper had reported that he had recently been arrested after being accused of stealing 70 head of cattle, and then released for lack of evidence by the office of the deputy prosecutor. The three men were freed after a week of being held illegally, following the personal intervention of the deputy prosecutor's superior.

# NIGER

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Area: 1,267,000 sq. km.  
Population: 13,957,000.  
Language: French.  
Head of state: Mamadou Tandja.

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The crisis prompted by the imprisonment, at the end of 2003, of the management of the weekly *Le Républicain*, which had been highly-critical of the government, pushed President Mamadou Tandja to promise reform of the press law. In 2006, this promise has not been kept and the *Républicain* management went back to jail.

On 1st September 2006, the high court in Niamey sentenced Maman Abou and Oumarou Keita, respectively publisher and editor of the privately-owned weekly *Le Républicain*, to 18 months in prison, 5 million CFA francs (7,600 euros) damages and a 300,000 CFA francs (about 460 euros) fine for "spreading false news" and "defamation". The prison sentences reflected the penalty called for by the prosecutor, while the fine was 100 times what the public ministry had asked for against Oumarou Keita. The two men were arrested on 4 August, on the basis of a complaint lodged by the state of Niger against an article in the *Républicain* published on 28 July. The story, headlined "Hama drops the West for Iran", accused the Prime Minister Hama Amadou of "strenuously wooing the Iranians", risking a split with "Western foreign ministries and liquidating all businesses belong to Whites". Maman Abou, told Reporters Without Borders from custody that he believed their arrests were intended to punish *Le Républicain* for publication in April of a report into embezzlement of funds within the administration. This investigation led to an audit by Niger's international donors.

The government did not give way in the face of the outcry provoked by this case and in particular the prime minister remained immovable despite multiple appeals from press freedom organisations.

The journalists had to wait for their appeal, on 27 November, before they were finally released. The prosecutor ruled that the sentence imposed by the lower court was too harsh. He called for nine months imprisonment, six of them suspended. Since the two journalists had already spent nearly four months in prison they were released at the end of the hearing.

Apart from these two journalists, for whom this was not their first brush with the authorities, three other highly-placed journalists went to prison in Niger in 2006. But these cases were different and much less political. These three journalists got on the wrong side of the law mostly after departing from the elementary rules of journalism by publishing sensationalist, unchecked or exaggerated reports.



# NIGERIA

Area: 923,770 sq. km.  
Population: 131,530,000.  
Language: English.  
Head of state: Olusegun Obasanjo.

Journalists in this "West African giant", the continent's biggest oil producer, are trapped between public violence, endemic corruption and the belligerence of politicians ready for anything to protect their privileges. Beatings, arrests, abusive trials and death threats are the daily lot of journalists in Lagos and the state capitals, where powerful governors lay down the law.

Nigerian journalists yet again lived through an appalling year in 2006. They have had to face police brutality, arrests in certain cases for the least article that annoyed local authorities and corruption in the military, among politicians and businessmen. Undoubtedly, the Nigerian press is pluralist, vigorous and irreverent, buoyed up by the support of the people and a long tradition of resistance to different military juntas and dictatorships which have bled the country since independence. But as Reporters Without Borders stressed in March, "journalists suffer from the daily violence which reigns in Nigeria". It made this comment after recording over a three-month period: three physical assaults, one censorship order, one abusive sacking, one unfair arrest and one case of intimidation. They are also routinely the punch bags for the powerful, military figures, governors, ministers and businessmen, who enjoy complete impunity and have no respect for the right to news and information. For this reason, Nigerian journalists deserve high praise for enduring the oppression of military juntas and for now working in the face of the contempt and brutality of the authorities and their protégés.

In a country in which power struggles are generally carried out against a backdrop of violence and corruption, journalists are the targets of choice. The editor of the newspaper *Ebonyi Voice*, Imo Eze, and one of his journalists, Oluwole Elenyinmile, spent more than two months in prison, from 14 June to 25 August, after carrying an article, on 16 April, headlined, "Is Ebonyi A Failed State ?" The two journalists were charged by a court in Abakaliki, capital of Ebonyi state, with "conspiracy", "sedition" and "defamation" of the governor, Sam Ominyi Egwu.

## A TELEVISION STATION IN THE FIRING LINE

The government also used abusive judicial procedures when journalists challenged President

Olusegun Obasanjo. Accordingly, Mike Gbenga Aruleba, presenter of a popular political TV programme, and Rotimi Durojaiye, reporter on the *Daily Independent*, spent two days in prison and were charged with "sedition" under a law which had been annulled by a 1983 appeal court ruling, in connection with their comments on the purchase of a new presidential jet. Durojaiye wrote an article in the *Daily Independent* on 12 June, headlined, "Controversy Over Age, Cost of Presidential Jet", in which he speculated about the details and timing of the acquisition of a new presidential plane. In his programme, "Focus Nigeria", broadcast the next day on *African Independent Television (AIT)*, presenter Mike Gbenga Aruleba also raised the subject, which provoked a huge controversy in the Nigerian press. Internal intelligence State Security Service (SSS) agents arrested Aruleba on 14 June and released him the following day on condition of reporting his movements, for using the pejorative word "tokunbo" about the plane, suggesting it was second-hand. The following day, when he left Abuja for Lagos in connection with his work, Aruleba was arrested again but he was acquitted on 10 October. As for Rotimi Durojaiye, he was arrested on 25 June, but his trial was adjourned.

The *AIT* channel also had a brush with the authorities the previous month. On 14 May, SSS agents burst into its offices and seized the tape of a documentary about failed attempts by previous Nigerian leaders to hold on to power. *AIT*, the country's oldest private channel, had been in the authorities' sights since it broadcast national assembly debates live on the controversial issue of an amendment to the 1999 constitution, presented by supporters of President Obasanjo, which would have allowed, among other things, the president and the federal state governors to remain in power for four further years. Parliament rejected



# NIGERIA

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it a few days after the raid on the newspaper. The SSS, which often launches commando operations against the privately-owned press, has been placed on Reporters Without Borders' list of "Predator of Press Freedom".

## TWO JOURNALISTS KILLED

As if the climate of permanent hostility weighing on the Nigerian press was not enough, the end of the year was marked by two murders. Both victims were well-known journalists in Lagos and the circumstances of their death, even if there is no proof the killings were linked to their work, reveal the kind of violent universe in which journalists have to operate. Omololu Falobi, a former journalist on the privately-owned daily *The Punch*, founder and executive director of Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), was killed on 5 October at around 10pm, when he had just left the headquarters of the association, in the Ogba district of Lagos. His killers fired several bullets into his forehead when he was at the wheel of his car. The first conclusions of the investigation, passed on by JAAIDS and several Nigerian journalists, suggested that Falobi

was killed for criminal reasons, but no suspect has been arrested.

Godwin Agbroko, chairman of the editorial board of the privately-owned daily *This Day*, was found dead at the wheel of his car, on 22 December, by a roadside in the Isolo district, just after he had left his office. None of his personal effects had been stolen. On the same night, three police officers and two passers-by were also shot dead in the same district. Police said they were working on the theory that Agbroko was killed for criminal reasons. His son, Tobor Agbroko, nevertheless told the Nigerian press that the family believed it was an assassination. "He had a telephone which was worth several thousand Nairas, which was left untouched. His cash, wrist watch and other things were also not touched." He dismissed the police theory, saying that one should not "fool people by saying the killers were robbers". Godwin Agbroko was a well-known journalist, who regularly had by-lined articles in *This Day*. A former editor of several newspapers under the military dictatorship (1993-1999), he continued to provide an ironic and uncompromising take on political life.



# RWANDA

Area: 26,340 sq. km.  
Population: 9,038,000.  
Languages: Kinyarwanda, French, English, Swahili.  
Head of state: Paul Kagame.

Huge challenges have been met in the reconstruction of a country left deeply traumatised by the 1994 genocide. But freedom of press is in no way guaranteed and Rwandan journalists suffer permanent hostility from their government and surveillance by the security services.

A country terribly scarred by the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994, Rwanda has struggled to emerge from these dark years. The country's infrastructure has been rebuilt and a system put in place to bring to trial those responsible for "neighbourhood genocide". But President Paul Kagame and his government have never accepted that the press should be guaranteed genuine freedom. Journalists are made to pay the price for annoying the government or revealing the shadowy side of its policies.

The year 2006 moreover began with an assault on the editor of one of the rare independent newspapers still appearing in Kigali. Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, then editor of the privately-owned weekly *Umuco* was woken at 3am on 15 January by four men brandishing clubs and knives who banged on the door of his home in a poor suburb of the capital. Once inside, they began ransacking the house and threatened the journalist, warning him to stop publishing articles unfavourable to the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). After neighbours intervened the four men calmly left the house. The previous evening, Bizumuremyi had been followed home by a police vehicle. He also received threats by telephone. In the latest edition of *Umuco*, he had condemned the lack of separation of powers in Rwanda and criticised the RPF, which he said was incapable of running the country.

The newspaper is used to government machinations. One of its journalists, Jean-Léonard Rugabage, spent 11 months in prison in Gitarama, under various pretexts, all more or less linked to the 1994 genocide. He had been arrested in September 2005, ten days after publication of the first issue of *Umuco* in which he exposed corruption on the part of certain gacaca (people's courts) judges in the Ruyumba district and the use of the courts to settle personal scores. He has

been sentenced to one year in prison on 23 November for "contempt of court", after casting doubt on the impartiality of the president of the court appointed to try him and was still under threat of a completely unsubstantiated murder charge. He was finally acquitted of these two charges on 26 and 28 July 2006 and released. Since then he has resumed his post as editor of *Umuco*.

## CONDEMNED FOR POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The other newspaper which has frequently felt the anger of the government is *Umuseso*, a weekly in the Kinyarwanda language, respected for its political analyses. On 3 August, the High Court of Rwanda, the country's highest jurisdiction, confirmed a "public offence" conviction against Charles Kabonero, editor of the weekly, and a one-year suspended prison sentence and a fine of one million Rwandan francs (about 1450 euros) for having published a series of articles critical of how the government was run. The publisher of *Umuseso* was sued by Denis Polisi, deputy speaker of parliament and secretary general of the RPF, over an article which appeared in August 2004, headlined: "Between Kagame and Polisi, who is really in charge?" The article sized up, among other things Polisi's political weight in terms of his position as party secretary general and former member of the Tutsi diaspora which sought refuge in Burundi. Kabonero also revealed that Polisi rented out office space to several para-state institutions in a building he owned.

In April, Kabonero was also the target of a vicious campaign of denigration, including in the pro-government bi-monthly *Focus*. On the basis of a faked letter, the newspaper accused him of conspiring with Lieutenant Abdul Ruzibiza, a former officer in the RPF's special services, now living in exile abroad, to launch a wave of bombings in Kigali to bring down the government.



# RWANDA

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Every year, several journalists decide to go into exile rather than continue to live with an atmosphere of tension and surveillance by the security services. Bosco Gasasira, editor of the weekly *Umuvugizi*, told Reporters Without Borders that in August 2006 he was the target of repeated phone threats and was followed everywhere by military intelligence agents. He had refused to reveal to the authorities information about Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, who had decided to leave the country because of serious threats against his person. The newspaper *Umuvugizi* was also targeted by the Rwandan authorities for having dared, along with other independent publications, to criticise the management of the minister of economy and finance, James Musoni. Gasasira had in particular published an article headlined, "transfer of the maisonette from President Habyarimana's time to the RPF", condemning favouritism in the distribution of strategic posts and "influence-peddling" which

the minister was allegedly involved in to control the country's economy.

## **RFI IN THE LINE OF FIRE**

Finally, the international press, regularly accused, with press freedom and human right organisations of "disinformation" about the situation in Rwanda, drew government fury in 2006. Sonia Rolley, accredited correspondent for *Radio France International (RFI)* in Kigali, was ordered to leave the country on 10 June for failing to renew her visa. And when in November, the French judge Jean-Louis Bruguière issued nine international arrest warrants against Paul Kagame and his aides for alleged involvement in the shooting down of the plane that killed former president Juvénal Habyarimana, in April 1994, Rwanda not only broke off its diplomatic relations with France, but also shut down the *RFI* transmitter.

# SOMALIA

*Area: 637, 660 sq. km.  
Population: 8,228,000.  
Language: Somali.  
Head of state: Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed.*

The return of the war in 2006 made it one of the most violent years for the press for a long time. One foreign correspondent was killed in Mogadishu in broad daylight, while some 30 Somali journalists, embarrassing witnesses to a conflict of lies and disinformation, were arrested by one of the belligerents.

Somalia, which at the start of 2006 was a chaotic archipelago of territories controlled by warlords, became in the space of just a few months the scene of clashes between a fundamentalist political-military movement and a fragile transitional government. Somali journalists therefore found themselves facing new challenges. When the country was divided into fiefdoms of the warlords, protected by adolescent mercenary militia, they were already the favourite targets of the powerful, businessmen or self-proclaimed governors. In 2006, as embarrassing witnesses to a war in which disinformation and lies were a major weapon, they have had to cope on one side with the devout, nationalist Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and on the other with a federal transitional government, irritable and worried about its image on the international scene.

## REPEATED ARRESTS

As a result, some 30 journalists were arrested during the year both in Mogadishu in the south-east of the country, the UIC base, as well as in the regions taken by the Islamic Courts, such as Baidoa in the south-west, the headquarters of the government, as well as in semi-autonomous Puntland in the north-east.

Fahad Mohammed Abukar, journalist working for *Radio Warsan*, Mohammed Adawe Adam, of *Radio Shabelle*, and Muktar Mohammed Atosh, of privately-owned *HornAfrik* radio station were arrested by government militia on 24 October in the village of Daynunay, 15 kms from Baidoa. The three journalists were found in possession of a digital film camera on which there was footage of an Ethiopian soldier of Somali origin killed in Burhakaba, as well as of Ethiopian troops on Somali territory. They were held for one week before being released. The footage which they had taken was never broadcast. Likewise,

Abdullahi Yasin Jama, journalist on *Radio Warsan*, fell into a trap set by transitional government militia in Baidoa, on 24 November. He was seized after being invited to a fake press conference and kept captive for three days by militiamen who mal-treated him, punishing him for reporting on the "massive presence" of Ethiopian soldiers in Somalia, which the governments in Baidoa and Addis Ababa had spent half the year denying, but without really convincing anyone.

UIC militia in Kismayo in the south-east arrested three journalists from *HornAfrik* radio on 29 September. Sahro Abdi Ahmed, Layla Sheik Ismail and Adam Mohammed Salad were released a few hours later after being ordered to stop reporting on the Islamic Courts. Moreover, on 17 December, the secretary general of the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), Omar Faruk Osman, and the organisation's co-ordinator, Ali Moalim Isak, were arrested at Mogadishu airport before starting on a business trip. They were first transferred to a police station at the airport before being taken blindfolded to the police station in Waberi district. Police confiscated Osman's computer and documents he was carrying, and both men's passports and mobile phones. A police officer interrogated them in the cell and forced them to reveal the password so they could read the journalist's emails. They were released the same evening but their property was never returned to them. Following this, for fear of reprisals, several NUSOJ officials went into exile.

## OBSTRUCTIONS FACED BY THE NUSOJ

Reporters Without Borders' partner organisation in Somalia also experienced numerous setbacks during the year as its reputation grew as an organisation defending press freedom. Militiamen in the pay of a rival expelled the NUSOJ management from its Mogadishu offices, on 3 July, forcing

## SOMALIA

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the organisation to find new premises elsewhere. In October, after negotiations with the UIC leadership, the organisation managed to avert the imposition of a draconian “code of conduct” on the press, preventing them from putting out news “likely to create conflicts between the people and the Islamic Courts”.

This country is still one of the most dangerous in the world. A car in which NUSOJ officials were travelling was ambushed on the road between Baidoa and Mogadishu on 4 August, and

their driver, Madey Garas, was killed. And 18 months after the still unpunished murder of BBC reporter Kate Peyton, a Swedish journalist was killed in the capital in broad daylight during a rally in support of the Islamic Courts. A freelance reporter accustomed to working in conflict zones, Martin Adler, was killed by a hooded man who fired a bullet into his chest, while he was filming a group of demonstrators on 23 June. The Islamic Courts, which condemned the murder, said it had made a number of arrests, but gave no further details.

# SUDAN

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Area: 2,505,810 sq. km.

Population: 36,233,000.

Languages: Arabic, English.

Head of state: Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

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**Sudanese journalists are easy prey for a government which uses and abuses draconian legislation and nationalism tinged with religion and also exploits the region's conflicts to justify repression. Some 15 journalists were arrested in 2006, as well as two foreign reporters, embarrassing witnesses to massacres in Darfur.**

The massacres in Darfur are an open wound for Sudan, and one which the government does not want anyone to touch. Two foreign journalists and their assistants paid the price for this extreme sensitivity in 2006, when they were thrown in prison for having taken too close an interest in the catastrophe in the huge border region on the border with Chad.

Slovenian photographer and human rights activist, Tomo Kriznar, who is also an advisor to his country's president, was arrested in North Darfur on 19 July. He was sentenced on 14 August to two years in prison by the criminal court of al Fashir, the state capital, for "spying", "publication of false news" and "entering Sudan without a visa". At this court hearing on 1st August, Kriznar admitted entering Sudan via Chad without a visa at the invitation of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), but denied the charge of espionage. The Sudanese embassy in Vienna, Austria, had refused to grant him a visa because of his articles seen as "negative". He has written several articles for Slovenian newspapers and posted on his website, [www.tomokriznar.com](http://www.tomokriznar.com), on the situation in Darfur. Kriznar was finally given a presidential amnesty on 2 September after negotiations.

A few weeks after the arrest of the Slovenian journalist, on 6 August, an American journalist, Paul Salopek, who was reporting on the Sahel region for the US monthly *National Geographic*, was arrested by government security forces along with two assistants. He was in possession of two US passports, a common practice for journalists covering conflict areas, and satellite photos of the region which are available on the Internet. He was charged with "spying" and "illegally disseminating information" as well as entering Sudanese territory without a visa. Salopek, who is also correspondent for the daily *Chicago Tribune*, his interpreter Suleiman Abakar Moussa and driver Idriss

Abdulraman Anu, both Chadian nationals, were only released, on 9 September, thanks to the persistent intervention of New Mexico state governor, Bill Richardson.

The mistake these two journalists made was above all to have arrived, despite administrative and political obstacles, to cover news that the Sudanese government wanted to keep hidden. There have been a number of incidents of intimidation and barely-veiled threats directed against foreign reporters in Darfur and Khartoum.

## EASY PREY

Sudanese journalists are easy prey for the government. More than 15 of them were arrested during 2006, despite the official lifting of censorship and a state of emergency, in July 2005. One of them was even murdered, traumatising the whole profession, which was already living in fear of government crackdowns. The decapitated body of Mohamed Taha, editor of the privately-owned Sudanese daily *al-Wifaq*, was found by police in a street in Khartoum's southern suburbs on 6 September after several masked men had snatched him from his home in the east of the capital the evening before. His family called police to report the abduction immediately after he was bundled into a car and driven away to an unknown destination.

Mohamed Taha had been tried for "blasphemy" in 2005 after a law suit was brought by a fundamentalist group, Ansar al-Sunnah. The offending article, written by the journalist, himself a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, referred to a more than five-century old Islamic manuscript which apparently cast doubt on the prophet's genealogy. After the articles appeared, imams in Khartoum organised major demonstrations to demand that the journalist be killed. His paper was suspended for two months.

# SUDAN

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Suspicion immediately fell on Islamist radicals, but also on rebels in Darfur, for whom Mohamed Taha was one of their openly-stated enemies. Abu Obeida Abdallah, a journalist on the privately-owned *al-Rai al-Aam*, was held in custody from 29 September to 15 October, officially in connection

with the investigation into Taha's murder. He had covered the Abuja summit in May between the government and rebel groups in Darfur. Nothing filtered out about his interrogation. At the end of the year, Sudanese investigators had not reached any satisfactory conclusion about the murder.



# ZIMBABWE

Area: 390,760 sq. km.  
Population: 13,010,000.  
Languages: English, Shona, Ndebele.  
Head of state: Robert Mugabe.

The country headed since 1980 by the now octogenarian Robert Mugabe is one of most vicious on the continent in its treatment of journalists. Surveillance, threats, imprisonment, censorship blackmail, abuse of power and denial of justice are all brought to bear to keep firm control over the news. Things have got so bad that the Zimbabwean justice system, zealously guarding its prerogatives and tired of not being respected, has started to disavow the government and its agencies.

Keeping absolute control over the news, whatever the cost, is an obvious obsession of Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe. Ever since 2002, when the government pushed through one of the most Kafkaesque press laws on the continent, closed down the leading daily in the country and jammed opposition radio, it has never let up pressure against the few surviving independent voices in the country. Thanks to the dreaded Media and Information Commission (MIC), it was able to crackdown in 2006 on privately-owned weeklies *Zimbabwe Independent*, *Financial Gazette (FinGaz)* and the *Voice of the People (VOP)*. The intelligence services made themselves responsible for all other forms of injustice meted out to Zimbabwe's journalists.

## RELENTLESS STRUGGLE

In line with its statutory responsibility, the media regulation body, the MIC, which tightly controls the media for the government, every year sets about re-examining newspaper licences and accreditations for journalists. Ready to use blackmail, from the first week of January 2006, the MIC suspended the publication licence of *FinGaz*, unless it carried a denial of an article which it published the previous week about how the commission, after deciding to award a licence to the owner of the defunct *Daily News*, finally gave way to pressure from the intelligence services and reversed its decision. Likewise, on 2 February, the MIC finally renewed the accreditation of journalists on the *Zimbabwe Independent*, only after forcing the newspaper to publish a correction of an article which had appeared the previous week.

The major preoccupation of the MIC, chaired for life by Tafataona Mahoso, an old comrade of the head of state, is clearly not the publication of the truth or the protection of journalists. His stance is

common knowledge. Besides, the Zimbabwean justice system has recognised that the Commission is incapable of judging certain cases fairly. Accordingly, on 8 February the Harare High Court, quashed an MIC decision to refuse a licence to the publishing house of the *Daily News* and its supplement the *Daily News on Sunday*, banned since 2003. The paper's lawyers had gone to court, arguing that the MIC chairman had refused to withdraw in despite of a 2005 decision by the Supreme Court which had ruled, for the first time, that he was biased. The High Court judge in Harare said that the MIC decision had effectively been biased, under the influence of the intelligence services, and that the Commission should consequently review the licence application. Boosted by these two legal decisions in its favour, the newspaper's publishing house on 28 March challenged the information and publicity minister Tichaona Jokonya, so as to force the government to decide on allowing publication, in the place of the disqualified MIC. But the Zimbabwean government used every means from legal quibbles to law breaking with impunity to delay making a decision. And, in fact, no decision has yet been made.

The MIC has therefore calmly continued its surveillance and punishment of discordant voices. Its weapons of choice are: "calls for investigation" into a particular journalist, threats to revoke licences or accreditation and denouncing journalists to the police. Police raided one of the distribution points in Harare of the privately-owned daily *The Zimbabwean* on 3 October. Police took away a copy of the paper's import authorisation as well as copies of the previous week's paper. The paper, one of the country's last independent dailies is published in the UK and printed in South Africa, to get round draconian legislation on the private press, of which the MIC is the tireless watchdog.



# ZIMBABWE

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The previous week, the paper carried an article in which military sources spoke out against corruption within the Zimbabwean police. A few days earlier, on 1st October, Tafataona Mahoso called on the information minister to investigate the Zimbabwean Union of Journalists (ZUJ), on the grounds that it was fomenting an "anti-Zimbabwe lobby". He claimed to be in possession of a document drawn up by the ZUJ, asking for funds from the Netherlands embassy and from UNESCO. At the same time, Mahoso also made an order for an investigation of the ZUJ secretary in Mashonaland West province, Nunurai Jena, accused of working for US public radio *Voice of America (VOA)*, based in Washington, without obtaining permission from the MIC. On 28 September, the Commission virulently attacked the Zimbabwean branch of the press freedom organisation the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Zimbabwe), which he said, was backing "regime change".

## RESISTANCE FROM THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

But the Zimbabwean justice system is increasingly resisting the abuse of power by the government. On 25 September, the president of the Harare court decided to refuse the prosecution a third adjournment in the trial of privately-owned radio *VOP*. "This is turning into a circus", he said, before deciding to drop charges against the radio's ten

defendants. Board members Arnold Tsunga, Millie Phiri, Isabella Matambanadzo, David Masunda, Nhlanhla Ngwenya, Lawrence Chibwe and John Masuku, had been arrested in January 2006 for "possessing and using broadcast equipment without permission". Radio staffers Maria Nyanyiwa, Takunda Chigwanda and Nyasha Boshu, were held for four days in December 2005 after a police search of the radio's offices in the centre of the capital.

As a result, when legal recourse will not answer, the Zimbabwean government calls on the army and in particular the powerful Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Unable to have foreign-based staff arrested, from the second half of June the government ordered jamming of the *VOA* programme Studio 7 beamed into Zimbabwe. They are now blocked with a rattling sound, identical to that which has been jamming shortwave programmes since February 2005 on privately-owned *SW Radio Africa* based in London and of Amsterdam-based *VOP*, since September 2005. According to information obtained by Reporters Without Borders this jamming has been made possible by the presence in Harare of Chinese experts invited to train their Zimbabwean telecommunications and radio-communications counterparts under an economic and technical cooperation agreement signed between the two countries.



# 2007 Annual Report

# AMERICAS

## A YEAR FULL OF DANGER

Do economic development and democracy ensure true freedom of the press? Not if you judge by the 2006 record in the Americas, where the holding of 12 major elections was offset by a grim toll for journalists. From five killed in 2002, the figure rose to seven in 2005 (after 12 in 2004) to 16 in 2006, plus four others who disappeared.

Mexico recorded nine dead and three missing as drug-trafficking spread, political instability was aggravated by serious unrest in Oaxaca state from May onwards and the 2 July election of Felipe Calderón to the presidency was disputed. The shooting death of American cameraman Brad Will, of the *Indymedia* news agency, while he was filming a 27 October teachers' demonstration in Oaxaca showed the ready violence of the authorities and continuing failure to punish those responsible for attacks on journalists. Two policemen reportedly close to the state governor who were involved in the killing were freed after being held for a month.

Three journalists were killed in Colombia and a dozen others were forced to flee their region (and sometimes the country) after being threatened. The break-off in negotiations between the government and the FARC guerrillas once more prevented the media travelling to some parts of the country.

The failed demobilisation of the right-wing paramilitary forces, many of whom switched to drug-trafficking and contract killings, was a major threat to local journalists in the northern provinces and coastal regions. "Demobilised" paramilitaries were reportedly behind the 4 February shooting in the northern town of Montería of Gustavo Rojas Gabalo, of *Radio Panzemu*, who died six weeks later in hospital.

### CARIBBEAN PRISON

Cuba, the last dictatorship in the Americas, is thus no longer the only country in the region to jail journalists but it remains the world's second biggest prison for them, with 24 detained. President Fidel Castro's handover of power to his brother Raúl on 31 July did not soften the regime's attitude to dissident media and secret police hounding and summoning of journalists increased in the second half of the year.

Two journalists arrested in 2005 were freed but two others were imprisoned. They were Armando Betancourt, a freelance working with the *Nueva Prensa Cubana* agency in Camagüey held without trial by state security police since 23 May, and Raymundo Perdigón Brito, founder of the *Yayabo Press* news agency, who was given a four-year prison sentence on 5 December for "socially dangerous behaviour." Guillermo Espinosa Rodríguez, of the *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental (APLO)*, was put under house arrest for two years.

A 25th journalist is a prisoner in Cuba but Sami Al-Haj, a Sudanese cameraman for the Arab TV network *Al-Jazeera*, was being held by the United States at its military base of Guantanamo (in southern Cuba) among 400 "enemy combatants" out of the reach of US laws in the name of the US "war on terrorism." He has not been charged, but has been interrogated almost daily and is now in his fifth year of captivity in this base, which is largely out of bounds to the media and which the international community has urged be closed.

This legal and humanitarian scandal was accompanied by a worsening of press freedom in the US, as shown by the imprisonment on two occasions of blogger Josh Wolf (in August and in September). He could stay in jail until July 2007 unless he formally agrees to hand over his video archives. More than a dozen cases concerning the privacy of journalistic sources are before federal courts, while 33 US states recognise a journalist's right not to reveal them. A federal bill to do the same, proposed in February 2005, has not yet been debated or voted on.

### PEACE OR FREEDOM?

In Central America, the media is fairly free in Costa Rica and Panama. The rarity of physical attacks on journalists in Nicaragua and El Salvador has less to do with true press freedom and more due to political control of the media and self-censorship. In Guatemala and Honduras, these problems combine to

produce violence against a lively media. Guatemalan radio journalist Eduardo Maas Bol was killed on 9 September and Vinicio Aguilar Mancilla, of the independent station *Radio 10*, escaped assassination in August. Journalists on the Honduran website *Revistazo.com* were repeatedly threatened by a security firm. Politicians committed violence against journalists or demanded their dismissal.

In Haiti, the media only suffered a few physical attacks or abuses of authority in 2006. However the killers of journalists murdered under the rule of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the interim government that succeeded him remained unpunished and the suspects walk freely in public. New President René Préval has a big job ahead of him to create a fair and effective system of justice.

In South America, three journalists were killed and one vanished. Two were murdered in Ecuador in 24 hours in February, though only that of José Luis León Desiderio, of *Radio Minutera*, may have been because of his work. The disappearance and probably murder in Paraguay of Enrique Galeano, of *Radio Azotey*, on 4 February and the attempted shooting of a reporter of the daily *ABC Color* showed how exposed the media was to shady links between politicians and organised crime.

Peru kept its regional record for daily physical attacks and threats against the media, with more than 100 recorded during the year. Two politicians jailed for killing two journalists in 2004 were controversially freed.

#### POLITICAL ROWS

Tension remains high between the privately-owned media and President Hugo Chávez' government in Venezuela. Nearly five years after a failed coup against him and his easy reelection on 3 December 2006, the country's broadcasting groups remain under pressure but the government has made little use of the media-curbing laws it has pushed through, such as the November 2004 media social responsibility law and a March 2005 reform of the criminal code. Indeed, 25 articles of the new code have been appealed against by the prosecutor-general as unconstitutional. The media paid the price of persistent lawlessness. Jorge Aguirre, a photographer of the daily *El Mundo*, was shot dead by a bogus policeman during a demonstration and a score of journalists were physically attacked, especially during the presidential election campaign.

Violence also increased at election time in Brazil, where a journalist was beaten to death by a town councillor and a community radio commentator was shot and wounded by a gunman while he was on the air. Some media outlets were targets of legal harassment, censorship and sometimes spying by federal police during the election campaign in October. But relations between government and the major privately-owned media became easier.

In Argentina however, President Néstor Kirchner still refused to hold press conferences. Intimidation, political pressure and especially blackmail by withholding public advertising led to broadcasts being censored and journalists at local and national level dismissed. The personal e-mail accounts of two journalists on the national daily *Clarín*, were hacked into in May, causing a scandal.

Though it came top among southern hemisphere countries in the 2006 worldwide press freedom index, Bolivia once more plunged into crisis in the last quarter of the year. Evo Morales, who took office in early 2006 as the country's first indigenous president, now faces the threat of secession by four provinces. The media was the first target of the struggle between government and opposition. As happened in Venezuela, the gap between state and privately-owned media has widened and a "media war" may erupt. Two fire-bombs damaged the pro-government TV station *Canal 7* in the opposition-controlled city of Santa Cruz.

Benoit Hervieu  
Head of Americas desk

# ARGENTINA

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Area: 2,780,400 sq.km.

Population: 38,750,000.

Language: Spanish.

Head of state: Néstor Kirchner.

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**Relations between the presidency and the media are still just as tense, while political pressures and blackmail through attribution of public advertising have led some national and provincial media to censor themselves.**

President Néstor Kirchner's wife, Sen. Cristina Fernández, publicly called journalists "fools" and "ignoramus" on national independence day on 9 July, which did not help to calm the very tense relationship between the authorities and the media. Kirchner himself still holds no press conferences and political pressure at national and provincial level has caused some radio and TV stations to drop programmes and even dismiss journalists who presented them.

2006 began badly for José "Pepe" Eliashev, of the state-owned *Radio Nacional*, whose discussion programme "Esto que pasa" was dropped from 1 January. He said he had been dismissed for criticising the federal government's silence towards the media. Threats to withhold public advertising often forced the media to fall in with the dictates of provincial governors and politicians.

In the northern province of Tucumán, the "Periodismo de Verdad" programme on TV station 5 *ATS* was suspended indefinitely on 13 March, officially because management wanted more time for entertainment and less for politics. But the real reason was that the provincial government had threatened to withhold a vital €20,000 worth of advertising. The same thing happened to a programme, "Séptimo Día," on the *LU12 Radio Rio Gallegos* station in President Kirchner's home province of Santa Cruz, on 3 May, and in July to the morning programme "Desayuno" on the state-run TV station *Canal 7*, whose presenter, Marcela Pacheco, had been dismissed without explanation a month earlier.

The mayor of Quilmes (Buenos Aires province), Sergio Villordo, tried to shut down two privately-owned radio stations - *FAN 103.9* and *Radio Quilmes 106.9* - by getting the federal broadcasting committee (COMFER) not to renew their licences. In June, the federal chamber of deputies urged COMFER to restore them but this has still not been done. The station's director, Pedro Navarro, was physically attacked in August by a politician of the local ruling Justicialist Party and hospitalised.

Thirty-four journalists were physically attacked during the year, often by politicians, civil servants or police. Carlos Furman, of the radio station *2 de octubre*, had to hide in a hotel for more than three months wearing a bulletproof vest after he criticised the mayor of Santa Elena, in Entre Ríos province, where physical attacks were common. The personal e-mail accounts of several national-press journalists, including two on the daily paper *Clarín*, were hacked into in May, causing a scandal.

Two radio journalists, Néstor Pasquini and Hugo Francischelli, have been detained in the northern city of Córdoba since 20 December for alleged "incitement to violence", "arson" and "assault" while covering a demonstration that turned violent earlier in the month. They face between three and 15 years in prison.

Relations with the media and allocation of public advertising have become issues in the campaign for the 2007 presidential elections. The parliamentary opposition has proposed three bills to allocate advertising more fairly but they have not reached parliament's agenda.

# BOLIVIA

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*Area: 1,098,580 sq.km.  
Population: 9,182,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Evo Morales Ayma.*

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The country came top in the Americas in the latest Reporters Without Borders world-wide press freedom index published in September 2006 thanks to very few attacks on journalists. But political instability may widen the gap between state and privately-owned media.

With only 13 physical attacks on journalists recorded in 2006, Bolivia did better than neighbouring Peru, Argentina and Brazil for press freedom. But this was tempered by the fact that the media is still weak in Bolivia compared with that in its neighbours and journalists seldom dare to tackle sensitive topics such as drug-trafficking and especially corruption.

The current relatively calm period for the media may not last however due to the very volatile political situation. The media, both pro-government and opposition, was the first target of political score-settling in December when a constitutional crisis arose.

The country reached a milestone in December 2005 by electing its first indigenous president, Evo Morales, a democrat who supports Cuban President Fidel Castro. Soon after his inauguration in January 2006, he publicly rebuked a TV journalist who called Castro a dictator. The former coca-growers' leader is suspicious of the privately-owned media. His nationalisation of the country's natural gas and oil resources and summoning of a constituent assembly (elected in August) is also

fiercely opposed by the country's oligarchy and right-wing parties that once held power.

The opposition governs four of the country's nine provinces and has threatened secession, staged demonstrations and attacked state-owned media. Two fire-bombs damaged the pro-government TV station *Canal 7* on 8 September in the eastern city of Santa Cruz, the most vehement opposition stronghold. The authorities said it was the work of the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, which is strongly opposed to Morales. The same week, Juan Domingo Yanique, correspondent of the state-owned radio station *Red Patria Nueva* in the northern province of Pando, another opposition base, was physically attacked by members of a local civic committee after he refused to say who he worked for. Another *Canal 7* reporter and a colleague from *Radio Televisión Popular* were also attacked while covering clashes between miners in October.

The government in turn did not spare the privately-owned media and the studios of the privately-owned TV station *Unitel* in La Paz were ransacked by government supporters on 12 October.

# BRAZIL

Area: 8,547,400 sq.km.  
Population: 186,405,000.  
Language: Portuguese.  
Head of state: Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The murder of journalist Ajuricaba Monassa near Rio de Janeiro in July and a bid to kill a community radio presenter in May continued the violence against local media. Threats and censorship of media outlets accompanied the general election campaign in October.

Freelance journalist Ajuricaba Monassa de Paula, 73, was beaten to death by town councillor Osvaldo Vivas in Guapirimim (Rio de Janeiro state) on 24 July because he had reported on financial irregularities in the town government. Community radio presenter Camelo Luis de Sá escaped an attempt by the mayor's son in the northeastern town of Quiterianópolis to shoot him dead while he was on the air in May.

The risk of reprisal is still high in the country's media, especially for local radio stations and papers. Maria Mazzei, of the daily *O Dia*, had to go into hiding in late August for revealing a racket in corpses by organised crime in the Rio area. Local police and courts often react slowly and police are sometimes themselves involved in threats and efforts to intimidate. A complaint filed on 7 June by environmentalist Vilmar Berna, editor of *Jornal do Meio Ambiente*, in Niterói (Rio de Janeiro state), after repeated death threats was not dealt with for more than a month and only after the national daily *A Folha de São Paulo* carried an article about the case.

Three heavily-armed and hooded men broke into the newsroom of the São Paulo daily *Imprensa Livre*, roughed up seven staff members and burned 3,000 copies of the May 18 issue which contained an article about the riots in the city sparked by the criminal group First Commando of the City (PCC). About 40 cases of threats and physical attacks and the ransacking of four media offices were recorded during the year.

## A TURBULENT CAMPAIGN

The national press was also involved in a scandal just before the October general elections, when Gedimar Passos, an activist of outgoing President Luiz Ignacio "Lula" da Silva's Labour Party, was

arrested on 15 September in a São Paulo hotel with a briefcase containing €600,000, which was to be used to buy a compromising file about the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and its leader, Geraldo Alckmin, who was beaten by Lula at the 29 October election.

Two days after this second round of the presidential vote, three journalists of the weekly *Veja* were summoned by federal police in São Paulo and pressured to reveal their sources in the matter. The daily *A Folha de São Paulo* said on 8 November that phones in its Brasilia offices were being tapped by federal police as part of the scandal over the file. Police wanted to know which journalists had had the slightest contact with Passos.

The election campaign also hit local journalists. *Diário de Marília*, based in Marília (São Paulo state) was physically attacked on 1 October by supporters of former mayor Abelardo Camarinha and his son, a local deputy. The two were already suspected of organising an arson attack on the paper's offices on 8 September 2005. Between August and October 2006, regional and federal election authorities gave in to demands by candidates for senator, deputy or governor to ban publication or seize material from media outlets or news websites in the states of Amapá, Minas Gerais, Paraná and the Federal District.

Despite these obstacles and the continuance of the 1967 press law inherited from the military dictatorship that allows imprisonment for media offences, the federal government promised to respect freedom of expression. President Lula signed the Inter American Press Association's Declaration of Chapultepec on press freedom on 3 May. He vetoed on 26 July a proposed law to regulate journalism by requiring journalists to have a diploma and belong to a journalism institute. The issue has

# BRAZIL

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divided the country's media and the two highest federal courts disagree on the diploma requirement. The High Court on 8 November voted for it and the Federal Supreme Court, which is above it, unanimously rejected it two weeks later.

## A WORRYING PRECEDENT

Brazil's blogosphere was furious at the closure of the blog "Repique no meio do mundo." Federal

justice officials had ordered the editor of the blog on 17 August to remove a cartoon of a senate candidate. The blog's Brazilian host, UOL, then decided of its own accord to shut down the blog, a worrying precedent because it may encourage local Internet service providers to censor online publications regardless of a court decision.

## CANADA

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*Area: 9,970,610 sq.km.*

*Population: 32,268,000.*

*Languages: English, French.*

*Head of government: Prime Minister Stephen Harper.*

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**Relations between the federal government and the media have sharply cooled under new prime minister Stephen Harper and courts have been undermining the right to keep journalistic sources secret.**

Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper, who became prime minister on 6 February 2006 after winning general elections, seems to distrust journalists. His government's attitude to the media is sometimes similar to the US administration, whose ally he is. Relations with the media became icy when the government on 22 April banned all broadcast coverage of the return of soldiers' bodies from Afghanistan. The exclusion of journalists at the Trenton (Ontario) military base three days later caused outrage, including among families of those killed. The media also criticised Harper's silence at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November.

Canadian journalists, like their US colleagues but to a lesser extent, are also threatened by attacks

on the confidentiality of journalistic sources. A new law passed on 15 September 2004 requires them to hand over documents, notes and sound and video recordings if asked by police as part of a criminal case, on pain of a maximum \$250,000 fine and/or up to six months imprisonment.

The law was used for the first time in February 2006, when reporter Bill Dunphy, of the daily *Hamilton Spectator*, was ordered by a court to hand over notes of an interview he had with a suspected drug dealer whose brother had been accused of murder. The order is being appealed. Another reporter on the paper, Ken Peters, was fined \$30,000 in 2004 for refusing to disclose one of his sources and is still waiting to hear the result of his appeal.

## CHILE

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*Area: 756,630 sq.km.  
Population: 16,295,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Michelle Bachelet.*

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**Physical attacks are still rare but the police and army have not lost repressive habits left over from the military dictatorship. Five journalists were physically attacked and three others arrested after a demonstration on 30 May.**

Chile has a good name for press freedom compared with the rest of Latin America but has not yet finished settling accounts concerning the 1973-90 dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, who died on 10 December 2006 without being tried for murdering some 3,000 people during his rule, including 68 journalists and media assistants. Several TV journalists were attacked by his supporters on the eve of his funeral.

Journalists are still meeting a wall of silence about his regime and many complain of a persistent lack of diversity in the media. Jorge Molina, of the online daily *El Mostrador.cl*, was forced out of his job at the beginning of the year after posting the names of ex-torturers with the help of a group of former political prisoners.

Police and troops have not yet lost their bad habits of the dictatorship and journalists bore the brunt during the first big demonstration under President Michelle Bachelet, who took office in March. Eight journalists were attacked or arrested in front of the presidential palace in

the 30 May protest demanding educational reform that was harshly repressed by police.

Cameramen Marco Cabrera, Gustavo Pavez and Libio Saavedra, of TV stations *Red TV*, *Canal 13* and *Canal 9*, were stoned by police before being beaten on the ground. They and two photographers similarly beaten had to be hospitalised. Editor Julio Oliva of the weekly *El Siglo* and two other journalists were also forcibly taken to a police station, where they were told that their links to the Chilean Communist Party was reason enough to arrest them. The outcry at these attacks on the media led President Bachelet to dismiss the head of the special police forces, Osvaldo Jara, the next day.

The staff of the weekly *Impacto* received death threats from neo-Nazis, a year after the Valparaíso studios of the national TV station *TVN* had been defaced by them.

Press offences have still not been decriminalised and defamation suits are common, though they do not necessarily succeed.



# COLOMBIA

Area: 1,138,910 sq.km.  
Population: 45,600,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Alvaro Uribe Vélez.

Three journalists were killed and seven others forced to flee their region or even the country after being threatened. The paramilitary forces, dismantled but not disarmed, continue to terrorise people, especially in northern provinces.

President Alvaro Uribe, reelected on 28 May 2006, started off his second term poorly, with a new breakdown in talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas (about 17,000 fighters whose leaders are active enemies of press freedom), a scandal about bogus attacks by the army that were attributed to the FARC, another about links between ruling-party politicians and the paramilitaries and the failed demobilisation of the paramilitaries.

The 2003 "Justice and Peace" plan that ended in April 2006 demobilised 30,000 militia members of the right-wing United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC), in exchange for not being punished. So the plan satisfied nobody, especially not local journalists, who continued to be threatened by these predators of press freedom too, who were not disarmed and who simply switched to drug-trafficking and contract killings.

Four men, including two former paramilitaries, were arrested in the murder of Gustavo Rojas Gabalo ("El Gaba"), of *Radio Panzemu*, in the northwestern town of Montería. He had denounced local corruption and was shot by two men on a motorcycle on 4 February, dying in hospital six weeks later.

August was the worst month for the media, with the murder on the 9th of Milton Fabián Sánchez, of the community radio station *Yumbo Estéreo*, in the western town of Yumbo. The crime has not been solved but the journalist also tackled other sensitive subjects such as lawlessness and human rights violations. Atilano Segundo Pérez, programme director of *Radio Toledar*, in the northern town of Los Alpes de Cartagena, may have been killed on 22 August

because he publicly denounced the criminal activities of a supposedly demobilised group of paramilitaries.

## FORCED TO GO INTO EXILE

The paramilitaries, condemned as leading enemies of the media by the country's Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) and well-established in northern coastal provinces, often threatened journalists and forced them to flee the region and sometimes the country. Olga Cecilia Vega, of the US daily *The New Herald*, has received death threats and warnings and been spied on ever since she interviewed a FARC military chieftain in October 2005. She had to leave the southern town of Florencia quickly on 1 February after an ultimatum from two strangers who accused her of being a "guerrilla." She twice escaped AUC attempts to kill her in 2002 when she worked for *RCN Radio*.

Nine other journalists were similarly forced to flee. Herbín Hoyos Medina, a former FARC hostage and presenter of the "Voices of captivity" programme on *Radio Caracol*, fled the country on 6 July after repeated threats from a mysterious Action and Justice Front for Freedom and Democracy. The also-unknown Social Front for Peace tried to compromise Hollman Morris, producer of the programme "Contravía" on the state-run TV station *Canal Uno*, by distributing a bogus video presenting him as a FARC spokesman. But former paramilitaries were behind it. Morris also enraged the army, the government and President Uribe himself, whose handling of the civil war he publicly criticised.

Defamatory accusations of working with guerrillas were also made in threats in June by paramilitaries (renamed The Democratic Front for Free Colombia and the United National Board for Free



## COLOMBIA

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Colombia Self-Defence) against the NGO Media for Peace and 28 others, including FLIP. A “Black Eagles” commando waged a terror campaign in the north against local media, especially *Radio Galeón*, based in Santa Marta, from October to December.

The simmering conflict with neighbouring Venezuela (Uribe suspects Venezuelan President

Hugo Chávez of collaborating with the FARC) affected the media for the first time when Freddy Muñoz, Colombia correspondent for the Caracas-based Latin American TV station *Telesur*, which has close ties to Chávez, was arrested in Bogotá on 19 November and charged a month later with “rebellion and terrorism.” He was accused (without evidence) of being behind a FARC attack in 2002 but was conditionally freed on 9 January 2007.



# CUBA

Area: 110,860 sq.km.  
Population: 11,270,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Raúl Castro (interim).

President Fidel Castro's stepping-aside in favour of his brother Raúl did not reduce pressure on the independent media and 24 journalists remain in prison. One of them, Guillermo Fariñas Hernández, staged several hunger strikes over seven months, calling for free Internet access for all Cubans. He was awarded the Reporters Without Borders Cyber-freedom Prize.

Will defence minister and army commander Raúl Castro allow more basic freedoms after taking over from his ailing brother as acting president on 31 July 2006. So far the regime has continued hounding dissidents, especially independent journalists. Cuba is still the world's second biggest prison for journalists. Two were freed in 2006 but this was quickly made up for by the jailing of two others, making a total of 24 being held.

Lamasiel Gutiérrez Romero, correspondent for the website *Nueva Prensa Cubana* on the Isle of Youth, was freed on 22 March from Mantonegro prison in Havana province after serving a seven-month sentence for "civil disobedience and resistance." She returned to her home on the Isle of Youth under heavy police surveillance and was banned from leaving the island. Oscar Mario González Pérez, co-founder of the *Grupo de Trabajo Decoro* agency, was freed on 20 November after 16 months in prison without trial. He had been arrested on the eve of a demonstration by dissidents in Havana in July 2005 and was never charged with anything.

Armando Betancourt, a freelance working with the *Nueva Prensa Cubana* agency and editor of a small underground magazine, *El Camagueyano*, was arrested on 23 May by state security police in Camagüey and sent a week later to a police station where he was put in solitary confinement and not allowed any visitors. He too has never been charged.

Just after Raymundo Perdígón Brito started up a small news agency, *Yayabo Press*, with his sister on 17 November, he was arrested and given a four-year prison sentence on 5 December for "socially dangerous behaviour before an offence" by the provincial court in the central province of Sancti Spiritus. Ahmed Rodríguez Albacia, 22, of the *Jóvenes sin Censura* agency, also refused to drop his

journalistic activities and was held from 4 to 12 December at state security headquarters in Havana.

Arrests and short arbitrary detentions (about 30) during the second half of the year exceeded the number of routine threats and physical attacks. Odelin Alfonso, correspondent for *Cubamet*, and Milisa Valle Ricardo, of *Jóvenes sin Censura*, were held for a day on 13 September in police stations in Havana and the eastern city of Holguín. The same thing happened on 2 November to Roberto Santana Rodríguez, a Havana freelance for *Cubamet*, who had been summoned twice before by police in February and April. In Santiago de Cuba, Guillermo Espinosa Rodríguez, of the *Agencia de Prensa Libre Oriental* (APLO), was put under house arrest for two years for "socially dangerous behaviour."

Pressure was maintained on those rounded up in the March 2003 crackdown, both the 20 journalists still in prison and those who have been freed for health reasons. Independent journalists Oscar Espinosa Chepe and Jorge Olivera Castillo, released in 2004 and forbidden to leave the country, had to appear before a Havana court, one for a "political check" and one for another matter.

José Ubaldo Izquierdo Hernández, of the *Grupo de Trabajo Decoro*, was declared "unfit for detention" by a prison doctor because of his very poor health, but was not released. Normando Hernández González, head of the *Colegio de Periodistas Independientes de Camagüey*, was taken to hospital on 5 December with cellular tuberculosis and sent back to jail three weeks after. Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, of APLO, and Fabio Prieto Llorente were repeatedly beaten by their guards. Alberto Gil Triay Casales, of the *La Estrella Solitaria* agency, who was given a seven-year prison



# CUBA

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sentence in November 2005 for “subversive propaganda,” went on hunger-strike in September.

## THE INTERNET

With less than 2 per cent of its population online, Cuba is one of the most backward Internet countries. An investigation carried out by Reporters Without Borders in October revealed that the Cuban government uses several levers to ensure that this medium is not used in a “counter-revolutionary” way. Firstly, it has more or less banned private Internet connections. To surf the Internet or check their e-mail, Cubans have to go to public access points such as Internet cafes, universities and “youth computer clubs” where their activity is more easily monitored. Secondly, the computers in all the Internet cafes and leading hotels contain software installed by the Cuban police that trig-

gers an alert message whenever “subversive” keywords are spotted. The regime also ensures that there is no Internet access for dissidents and independent journalists, for whom communicating with people abroad is an ordeal. Finally, the government also relies on self-censorship. You can get 20 years in prison for writing “counter-revolutionary” articles for foreign websites. You can even get five years just for connecting to the Internet illegally. Few Internet users dare to run the risk of defying the regime’s censorship.

Guillermo Fariñas Hernández, head of the *Cubanacán Press* agency in Santa Clara, staged several hunger-strikes to support his demand for all Cubans to be allowed free access to the Internet. He was awarded the Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France Cyber-freedom Prize on 12 December.

## ECUADOR

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*Area: 283,580 sq.km.  
Population: 13,230,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Rafael Correa.*

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**Two unsolved murders of journalists cast a shadow over press freedom in 2006. The campaign for the November presidential elections excessively polarised the media.**

Journalist José Luis León Desiderio, of *Radio Minutera*, was gunned down early on 14 February not far from his home in a poor neighbourhood of Guayaquil. He presented a discussion programme and his colleagues did not rule out a revenge killing, though the city is notoriously unsafe. Freelance photographer Raúl Suárez Sandoval was also killed there the same day but his murder did not appear to be linked with his work.

Assaults on press freedom have declined since the April 2005 overthrow of President Lúcio Gutiérrez and few attacks on the media occurred in 2006, apart from brutal police handling of two sports journalists on 31 May. Eight journalists

were also seized for several hours by the inmates of a women's prison in Guayaquil.

The relative peace for the media may not last since the country remains very politically unstable and no president has managed to complete his term for the past decade. The media helped to make the 26 November presidential election a dirty contest, which was easily won by left-wing economist Rafael Correa. His main rival, right-wing banana magnate Alvaro Noboa, accused the TV station *Ecuavisión* of backing Correa and "helping to destroy the country." The atmosphere is still tense and even though the media were attacked by both sides during the campaign, it risks being targeted by those wanting to settle scores.

## GUATEMALA

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Area: 108,890 sq.km.  
Population: 12,600,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Oscar Berger.

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A journalist was killed in September 2006, a month after another narrowly escaping an attempt to kill him. Despite the decriminalisation of press offences, physical attacks on journalists are still frequent and narrow ownership of the media helps the authorities to exert pressure on it.

Guatemala in 2006 followed Honduras, Costa Rica, Peru, Argentina and Paraguay in decriminalising press offences. The constitutional court accepted on 1 February the argument of national journalism institute president Mario Fuentes Destarac that articles 411 and 412 of the 2006 criminal code, providing for between one and three years imprisonment for offending the head of a state body and between six months and two years for defaming a public body or official, were unconstitutional. The court said they contradicted article 35 of the national constitution, which stipulates that freedom of expression must not be curbed by laws or regulations.

But this positive ruling did not stop dozens of physical attacks and threats against the media and journalists, often committed by police, soldiers, private security agents and former paramilitaries from the 1960-86 civil war. One journalist was killed and another escaped assassination.

Eduardo Maas Bol, a correspondent for *Radio Punto*, was shot dead on 9 September on his way home in the town of Cobán and his body with five bullets in it found in his car parked near the local police station. A definite link between his death and his work has not been found, but Ángel Martín Tax, correspondent for *Radio*

*Sonora*, later got a phone call warning that he was "next on the list" after Maas Bol.

Two motorcycle gunmen tried to kill reporter Vinicio Aguilar Mancilla, of the independent station *Radio 10*, on 23 August, but only broke his jaw; The station's director and founder, Oscar Rodolfo Castañeda, got a phone call the day before warning him to stop investigating tax evasion and as a result he fled the country. Castañeda has long been involved in exposing corrupt politicians and human rights violations and is constantly being hounded by courts for "illegal broadcasting," a campaign he says is to stop his investigations and keep the media in the hands of the country's oligarchy.

As elsewhere, the legality of Guatemala's community radio stations is an urgent issue, with only 250 of them legally broadcasting and 2,500 doing so without a licence. A proposed law to regulate them has not yet been approved by parliament.

The consequences of the civil war still persist, and former dictator (1982-83) Gen. Efraín Montt, who was defeated at the last presidential election, was cleared by a court on 30 January of responsibility for a violent demonstration of his supporters three years earlier in which a journalist was killed. Impunity for crimes against journalists thus continues.

# HAITI

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*Area: 27,750 sq.km.  
Population: 8,530,000.  
Languages: Creole, French.  
Head of state: René Prével.*

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**No journalist was killed in 2006 and physical attacks on the media declined after the February elections despite continuing lawlessness. The new government has not put an end to impunity however.**

The more positive press freedom situation, with very few physical attacks on journalists, was surprising in view of the high level of violence in the country (mostly in the capital, Port-au-Prince) and in view of recent history, when journalists were liable at any moment to be the target of reprisals by gangs, often linked with former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas Movement. Lawlessness is an urgent issue for President René Prével, who took office on 14 May, but attacks on journalists for doing their job fell sharply during the year.

An attack by armed bandits on two journalists of *Radio Kiskeya*, Liliane Pierre-Paul and her brother Stéphane Pierre-Paul, the station's editor, on 14 September in Port-au-Prince's eastern suburb of Pétionville, came amid a new wave of ransoms for money. Journalist Lydie Bain Abdon, of *Radio Lumière*, narrowly escaped being kidnapped on 26 May in an attack apparently unrelated to her job.

The media also suffered at the hands of the authorities. Police broke the arm of Ernst Cadichon, of *Radio Galaxie*, in October after he identified himself to them as a journalist while reporting on a student demonstration in the capital. A photographer from the daily paper *Le Nouvelliste*, François Louis, was roughed up by UN stabilisation force (Minustah) soldiers during clashes between them and Aristide supporters in the capital on 3 November. A UN military spo-

kesman formally apologised to the paper five days later.

The media has a long way to go before it recovers from the trauma it suffered during Aristide's rule and the subsequent interim government. Impunity may continue if Prével's government fails to build a proper justice system. The national police takes part in the lawlessness and judges still have no means of investigation. Gang leaders suspected of killing journalists are also still walking free in broad daylight. François "Bibi" Daniel, a gang leader in the Solino neighbourhood of the capital and suspected of the July 2005 kidnapping and killing journalist Jacques Roche, head of the culture desk at the daily *Le Matin*, even tried to buy his immunity by handing over weapons to the national disarmament and retraining commission on 12 September.

New investigating judges have still not been appointed in the enquiries into the murders of Jean Dominique, head of *Radio Haiti Inter*, and Brignol Lindor, of *Radio Echo 2000*. Two gang leaders suspected of killing of Dominique in 2000 are living in Martissant, a southern suburb of the capital, where they have reportedly resumed their criminal activities, and a third has fled abroad. The supreme court, where the case of Lindor (killed by Aristide supporters in the southern town of Petit-Goâve in 2001) has been stuck for the past two years, ruled in 2006 against the family's bid to become a civil party in the case.

# HONDURAS

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*Area: 112,000 sq.km.  
Population: 7,205,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Manuel Zelaya.*

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**Even politicians who are media proprietors have no qualms about physically attacking or harassing journalists, especially the most vulnerable ones. Two editors of a website were also threatened by a private security firm.**

Violence against journalists and pressure on them remains alarmingly high, especially as it is often by politicians who are sometimes also media owners. A dozen such incidents occurred in 2006, the worst when Liberal Party MP Romualdo Bueso Melghem, accompanied by armed men, stormed into a meeting of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH) in the southwestern town of Intibucá on 2 April and hurled racist insults at indigenous journalist Martha Vásquez and tried to strangle her. Bueso, who is vice-president of the parliamentary commission for ethnic minorities, was not punished for the attack.

Wendy Guerra, presenter of an investigative programme, "Denuncias 49," on TV station *Canal 49*, was summarily dismissed in April by her boss, former Liberal Party MP Amid Cárdenas, who admit-

ted he yielded to pressure from politician friends. He reinstated her on 3 May. Reporter Octavio Carvajal, of radio station *STC Noticia*, fled the country in May for three weeks after being hounded by the state phone company Hondutel and the presidential secretariat after criticising how the firm was being run.

The private sector also threatened the media. Journalists Roberto Marín García and Dina Meza, of the website *Revistazo.com* and members of the Association for a Fairer Society (ASJ), were followed and hounded after revealing fraud and labour violations at security firm Delta Security and attempts were made to blackmail them. They were cleared of "defamation" and "insults" by a Tegucigalpa court on 31 October but their lawyer, Dionisio García, was murdered on 4 December.

# MEXICO

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Area: 1,958,200 sq.km.  
Population: 107,029,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Felipe Calderón.

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**With nine journalists murdered and three missing, the country has the worst record in the Americas in 2006 and was second only to Iraq for the number killed, despite establishment in February of a special federal court to punish physical attacks on the media.**

Federal authorities seem to have realised the serious threats to the country's media when they set up a special court on 15 February 2006 to deal with physical attacks on journalists. The federal chamber of deputies approved amendments to the criminal code on 18 April (already passed by the senate) recognising the right of journalists not to reveal their sources and decriminalising press offences. But these good intentions did not prevent one of the worst annual press freedom tolls of the past decade in the Americas.

The violence began on 6 February when gunmen opened fire on the staff of the daily *El Mañana* in the northeastern state of Nuevo Laredo, seriously wounding one person. Two journalists were killed on 9 and 10 March: freelance photographer Jaime Arturo Olvera Bravo in the southwestern state of Michoacán and Ramiro Téllez Contreras, of the local radio station *Exa 95.7 FM*, also in Nuevo Laredo. The weapons used to murder Téllez Contreras suggested his killers were drug-traffickers.

The drug cartels were also suspected of kidnapping Rafael Ortiz Martínez, of the daily *Zócalo*, in Moclova (in the northern state of Coahuila) on 8 July, after he reported on new drug-smuggling centres in the region. Another drug-trafficking expert, Enrique Perea Quintanilla, founder and editor of the monthly *Dos Caras, Una Verdad*, was shot dead on 9 August in the northern state of Chihuahua, probably by professional killers. A contract on his life had been put out by the Ciudad Juárez cartel, according to a video confession by two suspected killers that was sent to the *TV Azteca* station on 12 October.

An unprecedented six more journalists were killed between October and December and two others vanished. Guevara Guevara Domínguez, editor of the online version of the weekly *Siglo 21*, vanished on 8 October while reporting near the border

between Durango (North) and Chihuahua states. Misael Tamayo Hernández, managing editor of the regional daily *El Despertar de la Costa*, was found dead in a motel in the southern state of Guerrero on 10 November, with his hands bound and killed by a lethal injection. Six days later, the former managing editor of the daily *Excelsior*, José Manuel Sánchez Nava, who had just published a book criticising the attitude of President Fox's government to the takeover of the paper, was found stabbed to death in his Mexico City apartment.

Roberto Marcos García, deputy editor of the weekly *Testimonio* in the eastern state of Veracruz, another drug-trafficking centre, was shot dead in the street on 21 November after receiving threats. Also in Veracruz, the body of Adolfo Sánchez Guzmán, who worked with the TV station *Televisa Veracruz* and radio station *Xhora Ori Estereo 99.3 FM*, was found on 30 November, apparently the victim of score-settling between highway bandits. Two brothers were arrested. Ten days earlier in Michoacán state, editor José Antonio García Apac of the weekly *Ecos de la Cuenca*, vanished.

## PITCHED BATTLE IN OAXACA

The festering year-long political and social crisis in the southern state of Oaxaca erupted in May into open warfare between aides of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and his opponents in the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). Brad Will, an American cameraman for the independent news agency *Indymedia*, was killed by a bodyguard of the governor on 27 October during riots that included ransacking of media offices and many physical attacks on journalists. Local investigators tried to blame his death on the APPO and two city policemen suspected of killing him were freed after a month. The governor also claimed score-settling between indigenous movements caused the 8 December killing of columnist Raúl Marcial

# MEXICO

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Pérez, in the offices of the daily *El Gráfico*. The investigation did not consider the possibility he was killed because of his work.

In the southeastern state of Yucatán, four attacks were made on the daily *Por Esto!* between June and September with the probable complicity of local authorities. A very harsh crackdown on a peace demonstration in the Mexico City suburb of San Salvador Atenco on 3 and 4 May included violence and sexual abuse of three young foreign journalists.

Ángel Mario Ksheratto, of the daily *Cuarto Poder*, was jailed between 4 and 22 February and then freed on €8,000 bail. He had been arrested in January 2003 and October 2005 for libelling a local official in the southern state of Chiapas. He was imprisoned on 11 November 2006 for violating the terms of his probation, then freed on bail again on 19 December. Chiapas state law allows imprisonment of up to nine years for press offences and about 40 journalists are currently being prosecuted there.

## PARAGUAY

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*Area: 406,750 sq.km.*

*Population: 6,158,000.*

*Language: Spanish.*

*Head of state: Nicanor Duarte Frutos.*

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The disappearance of radio journalist Enrique Galeano, and his probable murder by drug-traffickers in league with local authorities, deeply traumatised the country's media. The official investigation has made no progress despite the promises of President Duarte Frutos.

Paraguayans and their media were shocked when journalist Enrique Galeano, of *Radio Azotey*, in Concepción province, vanished on 4 February 2006. President Nicanor Duarte Frutos discussed the matter with a national journalists' association (SPP) delegation on 6 October but the investigation moved slowly and local political figures were suspected of being involved.

Three months after Galeano disappeared, police said he had been having an affair and shelved the enquiry. The interior minister said the journalist had asked police to protect him from local drug-traffickers just before he vanished, though district commissioner Osvaldo Nuñez denied this. The SPP said Galeano had been kidnapped on the orders of Nuñez and held by two of his aides before being handed over to drug-traffickers who killed him and threw his body in a river. Local fire service divers failed to find him on 21 October. Before he disappeared, Galeano had reported the seizure of a shipment of weapons and cocaine in the presence of Nuñez and Magdaleno Silva, an MP of the ruling Colorado Party suspected of ties with drug-traffickers.

In such a fragile democracy with deep-rooted corruption (the worst in South America, according to Transparency International), journalists do not dare probe too deeply into scandals involving politicians. The daily *ABC Color* was ordered by the supreme court to pay \$200,000 in libel damages to Sen. Juan Carlos Galaverna, an ally of President Duarte Frutos, for saying he was involved in corruption. The court also confirmed on 5 December a 10-month prison sentence (commuted to community service) on *ABC Color* journalist Luis Verón for "insults" and "libel". Juan Augusto Roa, the paper's correspondent in the southern town of Encarnación (another drug-smuggling centre), survived an attempt to shoot him on 27 February.

As in most Latin American countries, the authorities are unfriendly to community radio stations and small independent newspapers. Radio stations *Manantial FM* and *Tenondé FM*, which were awaiting a decision on their broadcasting frequency, were forcibly shut down on 19 June. The equipment of the newspaper *El Espectador Luqueño* was destroyed in Luque, near Asunción, in October by order of the mayor using the pretext of a land dispute.

# PERU

*Area: 1,285,220 sq.km.  
Population: 27,970,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Alan García Pérez.*

The country once again had a record number of about 100 threats and physical attacks against the media during the year. One journalist was targeted by a bomb and another was shot in the head at a demonstration.

Violence against the media is still high and rose in 2006 to 54 physical attacks and 47 threats, compared with a combined total of about only 60 the previous year. The very aggressive campaign for the 9 April presidential election did not help. In the first three months of the year alone, a dozen journalists were beaten and insulted, especially at election meetings of nationalist candidate Ollanta Humala, who lost in the second round of voting to former President Alan García.

Activists beat up TV journalist Karina Chávez near Lima on 8 February. Three weeks later, a local official accused of corruption used a demonstration in the northern town of Tarapoto to try to ram a crew from the TV station *Red Global* with a motorcycle. Police in Aucayacu burst into radio station *Amistad* the same month, took the names of journalists and seized information about the murder of an extremist leader.

Local corruption, drug-trafficking and resumed activity by the Shining Path guerrillas in the Andes were very dangerous subjects for the media to report. Freelance journalist Marilú Gambini Lostanau had to flee the country in April after more than a year of death threats and efforts to intimidate her because she reported on drug shipments passing through the western military port of Chimbote.

Eliás Navarro Palomino, editor of the regional weekly *Línea Roja* and local correspondent for the national daily *La República* in the southwestern town of Ayacucho, who had received death threats from coca growers, was nearly killed on 30 September by a bomb explosion near his house after he had reported on mismanagement of a credit co-op. But only material damage was caused. Four months earlier, co-op officials tried to get into the house of *Línea Roja's* printer.

Wilman Caychigua, correspondent for *Radio Inca Tropical* and the daily *El Chasqui* in the southeastern

town of Abancay, was shot in the head by police during a violent demonstration against local officials on 5 December. He was taken to hospital in a deep coma. Interior minister Pilar Mazzetti said police were right to use live bullets.

The courts gave the media a rough year. The Lima public prosecutor called on 15 August for an eight-year prison term for Mauricio Aguirre Corvalán, former presenter of TV station *Canal 4's* programme *Cuarto Poder*, for "disclosing state secrets." The journalist had shown a video in September 2003 of ex-President Alberto Fujimori made when he was in power in 1998. Fujimori's son Alberto had used it during his father's election campaign in 2000 and had allowed the media to use it. Aguirre Corvalán was cleared in October 2006. His prosecution violated the Organisation of American States Declaration of Principle on Freedom of Expression, which Peru has ratified.

Journalist Humberto Ortiz Pajuelo still risks a four-year prison sentence and payment of €2,500 damages for an "offence against the judicial system" after refusing to reveal his sources in an extortion case involving an intelligence official.

#### KILLERS AT LARGE OR RELEASED FROM PRISON

Five people who killed radio station *Frecuencia Oriental* journalist Alberto Rivera Fernández in the east-central town of Pucallpa in April 2004, were jailed in February 2006 for between 10 and 30 years each, but those who ordered the killing (former mayor Luis Valdez Villacorta and town councillor Solio Ramírez Garay) were freed on a habeas corpus writ in April and went into hiding. The ex-mayor of the western town of Yungay, Amaro León León, and two henchmen were freed on 20 July by the Ancash provincial supreme court after being sentenced on appeal to 17 years in prison each for the 2004 murder of journalist Antonio de la Torre Echeandia.

# UNITED STATES

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Area: 9,629,090 sq.km.  
Population: 298,213,000.  
Language: English.  
Head of state: George W. Bush.

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The press freedom situation worsened in 2006 with the imprisonment of blogger and freelance journalist Josh Wolf. A Sudanese cameraman for Al-Jazeera TV, Sami al-Haj, remained a prisoner at Guantanamo. With government support, federal courts continued to punish journalists for refusing to reveal their sources.

After the jailing of *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller for three months in 2005 for refusing to name her sources, 2006 saw a decline in press freedom in the country whose national constitution guarantees it (through its First Amendment). The federal supreme court declined once again on 5 June to rule on the right of journalists not to reveal their sources, thus continuing the contradiction that 33 US states, but not the federal government, allow them to.

A vote on a proposed federal "shield law" giving journalists this right has been delayed because of the 7 November congressional elections. The Bush administration, already criticised for its violations of civil liberties, must now work with a congress controlled by the opposition Democrats. Will it pass the Free Flow of Information Act, which has been stuck in congress since February 2005, before Bush leaves office in 2008?

Federal courts meanwhile continue to use the "national security" argument to punish journalists and more than a dozen cases involving protection of sources are under way, some of them nothing to do with national security. Lance Williams and Mark Fainaru-Wada, of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, were ordered by a federal judge on 15 August to reveal their sources or face imprisonment. The journalists had reported in 2004 part of a grand jury's findings about a firm (BALCO - Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative) suspected of supplying top sports figures with drugs. The case is being appealed.

## A BLOGGER SENT TO PRISON

Blogger and freelance journalist Josh Wolf went to jail however. The 24-year-old Californian had filmed a demonstration at a G8 summit in 2005 during which a police vehicle was attacked and

damaged. A federal judge ordered him to hand over his film and when he refused, he was sent to prison for a month in August 2006, then sent back to jail on 18 September by a federal appeal court, which refused to rehear the case on 16 November, meaning he will probably stay there until a grand jury finishes its investigation of the vehicle attack in July 2007. A California state appeal court on 26 May allowed bloggers the same right not to reveal sources enjoyed by journalists.

The *New York Times*, criticised by the Bush administration for revealing the government's banking and phone surveillance activities, was once again a victim of the gap between state and federal law when the federal supreme court refused on 27 November to suspend a lower court ruling that the paper must hand over phone records of two reporters, including Miller. Further intelligence service leaks had led a federal court on 1 August to demand that she and a colleague, Philip Shenon, provide the names of their sources. The journalists had won a ruling in their favour from a New York judge in February 2005.

## A FIFTH YEAR IN GUANTANAMO

The worst press freedom case was that of Sudanese *Al-Jazeera* cameraman Sami al-Haj, who has been imprisoned without charge at the US naval base at Guantanamo (Cuba) since 13 June 2002 and interrogated about 150 times to get him to confess supposed links between the Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* and Al-Qaeda. During a rare contact with his British lawyer, Clive Stafford-Smith, who has himself been threatened by the base authorities, he spoke for the first time of killing himself.

The federal supreme court declared on 29 June that the military tribunals set up to try the base's 400 prisoners were unconstitutional. Despite this small

## UNITED STATES

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legal victory, the base is still largely banned to the media and four US journalists, from the daily *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald* and *Charlotte Observer*, were expelled from it on 14 June. A law allowing the prisoners to be tortured was passed on 17 October as one of the last acts of the outgoing congress.

### US FIRMS HELP CENSOR THE INTERNET

The government has respected the first amendment to the national constitution by not censoring the Internet in the US. However, US firms are helping repressive regimes in Tunisia and Burma to filter the Web and in China, US search-engines Yahoo!, Google and Microsoft (MSN) have agreed to censor search their results. A bill - the Global Online Freedom Act (GOFA) - was tabled in the House of Representatives to regulate the activities of these Internet giants, but is making little headway and its prospects are uncertain.

The principle of Internet neutrality was rejected by the Senate in June 2006. The principle is cur-

rently respected worldwide and means that telecom firms are not allowed to distinguish between individuals and organisations that provide an online service. A small blog and a big commercial website have a right to same level of service. Reporters Without Borders says that "defending Internet neutrality is defending freedom of expression." If telecom operators are allowed to offer different levels of service according to the price paid by content providers, small online publications, especially blogs, will be pushed into a cut-price service and be available at much slower speeds than commercial websites.

Good news came from the California state supreme court which ruled in November 2006, in a defamation case, that Internet service providers (ISPs) cannot be held responsible for the content their customers post online. This also applies to forum moderators and managers of blogs where libellous messages are posted. Only the authors of the messages can be prosecuted, the court said.

# URUGUAY

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*Area: 176,220 sq.km.  
Population: 3,463,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Tabaré Vázquez.*

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The media is fairly free but journalists still run into obstacles when investigating human rights violations under the former military dictatorship. The supreme court has also made a decision that harms freedom of expression.

No media outlets were ransacked or censored and only one physical attack and very few threats were recorded in 2006, when Uruguay maintained its long-standing reputation as the “Switzerland of Latin America,” at least for press freedom. But as the country began to call to account those involved in the 1973-85 military dictatorship, the army still seemed unwilling to allow the media to look too closely at this painful period.

An expert on the dictatorship, Alfonso Lessa, of the TV station *Canal 12* and the daily paper *El País*, received written death threats in October 2006 from a self-styled “active soldier” after he publicly supported the recent start of legal proceedings against soldiers and police for human rights violations, notably retired Gen. Gregorio Álvarez, who was president from 1981 to 1985.

The Montevideo apartment of investigative journalist Eduardo Preve, of the TV station *Canal 10*,

was mysteriously burgled on 26 March despite two policemen guarding the building, after he had received secret army documents about the Condor Plan for cooperation between military intelligence services in six Latin American dictatorships in the 1970s. He had reported that this cooperation had continued after the dictatorships had fallen.

Parliament has still not decriminalised media offences and Gustavo Escanlar Patrone, of *Canal 10*, was sentenced on 18 May to three months imprisonment for “insults” after making fun of a media proprietor in a talk-show. The supreme court confirmed on 18 September a suspended five-month prison sentence passed on Carlos Dogliani, of the now-closed weekly *El Regional*, for libelling a politician. He had earlier been cleared on appeal, but the court reversed this, ruling that reputation was more important than freedom of expression. It had said the opposite in a similar case in 1997.

# VENEZUELA

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Area: 910,050 sq.km.  
Population: 26,749,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of state: Hugo Chávez Frías.

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**A journalist was killed by a bogus policeman during a demonstration and a score of others physically attacked, especially in the run-up to the 3 December presidential election. Relations between the government and privately-owned media outlets are still tense, although prosecutions of journalists rarely produce results.**

The easy reelection of President Hugo Chávez on 3 December 2006 raised fears of new tensions between his government and the privately-owned media, often accused of taking part in a failed attempt to overthrow Chávez in April 2002. Tension is still high nearly five years later but the record was better than expected in 2006, despite the death of one journalist and a score of physical attacks on others.

The spate of laws pushed through by the government in 2004 and 2005, greatly curbing press freedom, began to be applied during the year after being little used until then. A Caracas court on 23 January accused 10 media outlets, including two state-owned TV stations, *Canal Metropolitano* and *Venezolana de Televisión*, of "obstructing justice" and banned them from broadcasting anything about the investigation into the November 2004 murder of Judge Danilo Anderson and from citing the name of a key witness. The move was based on the November 2004 broadcasting media social responsibility law that can fine offending media outlets between 1 and 2% of their previous year's income. An appeal against the decision by the national media workers' association was rejected on 14 February.

The March 2005 criminal code reform law, which increased penalties for "insulting" public authorities and institutions, has been used more as a warning than a punishment. It was applied for the first time in 2006 against Ibéyise Pacheco, of the daily *El Nacional* and a harsh critic of the government who had accused a soldier of falsely obtaining a lawyer's certificate. Pacheco was convicted and put under house arrest on 15 March but after apologising to the soldier was freed a week later. Legal action

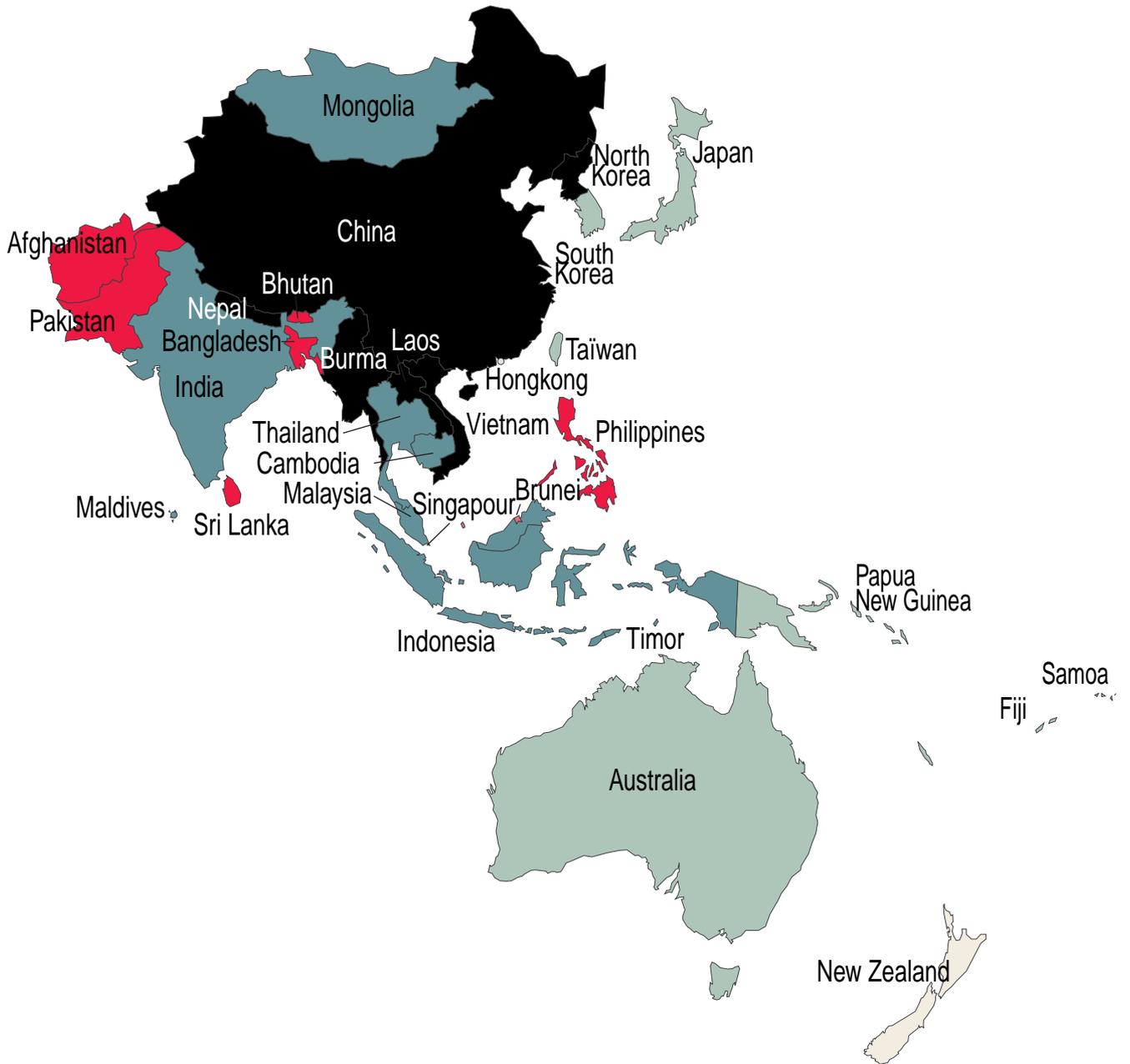
against her for "inaccurate information" after she claimed in print that a plot against the opposition had been hatched in the presidential palace, was dropped on grounds of "insufficient respect for the rights of the defence."

Prosecution of Napoleón Bravo, formerly with TV station *Venevisión* and now with *Unión Radio*, for "insults" was also dropped on 16 May after three months. Prosecutor-general Isaías Rodríguez asked the high court to rule on the constitutionality of 25 articles of the new criminal code. The ruling is still awaited.

The fight against impunity advanced with the arrest of drug trafficker Ceferino García, suspected mastermind of the murder of Mauro Marcano, presenter on the station *Radio Maturín 1.080 AM* and columnist for the daily paper *El Oriental*, on 1 September 2004 in the northeastern town of Maturín. But the investigation did not touch senior police and army officers in Monagas province suspected of links with drug-traffickers.

The calmer judicial atmosphere contrasted with routine violence against journalists and a score of them were physically attacked and attempts made to censor others during the presidential election campaign, both by supporters of Chávez and those of his rival Manuel Rosales, governor of the north-western province of Zulia.

Journalists were victims of the still-high level of lawlessness. Jorge Aguirre, a photographer with the Caracas daily *El Mundo*, was killed on 5 April, by a man in uniform on the edge of a demonstration. A former policeman, who was pretending to still be one, was quickly arrested.



# 2007 Annual Report

# ASIA

## INDIA OR CHINA, A CHOICE OF MODEL

Has there been any improvement in press freedom in Asia in 2006? The very high numbers of journalists still being killed or assaulted and numbers of media censored would suggest not. However, Asians now have access to more independent and better quality news. A score of military or communist dictatorships view the media simply as channels for relaying propaganda. But, in 2006, authoritarian regimes, particularly that of King Gyanendra in Nepal, were swept away by democratic revolutions.

Press freedom violations in Asia are still at alarming levels: Sixteen journalists were killed, at least 328 arrested, 517 physically assaulted or threatened and at least 478 media were censored in 2006.

These disturbing figures are paradoxically signs of greater freedom. For example, journalists in Bangladesh suffer constant assaults and death threats because they tirelessly expose nepotism and corruption among local politicians. In China, the propaganda department regularly removes editorial chiefs in an attempt to curb their desire for independence.

In Asia, it is not war that is responsible for the deaths of journalists. In the Philippines for instance, where six were killed during the year, it was local public figures who put the lives of journalists in danger. It is the same story in India, China and Indonesia, where five journalists were murdered. However, in Sri Lanka, media representatives are, along with thousands of other civilians, the innocent victims of a war which is stoked up by the government and the Tamil Tigers. The para-military Tamil groups have sown terror in the north and east, killing four journalists and attacking around a dozen media.

### CENSORSHIP, AN "ASIAN CUSTOM"

Censorship remains a very widespread phenomenon in Asia. At its extreme end is North Korea where the "dear leader" Kim Jong-il and his loyal inner circle impose total control on news content. Journalists, who are under police surveillance and the threat of re-education, have no choice but to relay grotesque official propaganda. To a lesser extent, the other communist regimes, Laos, Vietnam and China, use the press to put over the message of the sole party. But quite often, media more dependant on advertising than on state subsidy, take the risk of handling previously taboo subjects. Some liberal publications in China and Vietnam have breached state control entirely. But the party still knows how to set limits. At the start of the year, the Chinese propaganda department removed renowned journalist Li Datong from the editorship of the weekly *Bing Dian*. Among other things, he had authorised publication of an article taking a fresh look at a controversial period in Chinese history. In Vietnam, the information ministry suspended at least five publications within a few days after articles appeared on scandals implicating family members of a prominent figure in the regime.

The junta in Burma imposes relentless advance censorship on the Burmese press. At times more than a third of the articles and illustrations in privately-owned publications are banned by army officers employed by the censorship bureau. Any item containing the least reference to democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi is banned. There is no permanent censorship in Thailand, but hundreds of local radios have been closed by the military junta which overthrew Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in September.

News is also controlled through financial leverage exerted by investors close to the authorities. In Singapore and Malaysia, the authorities only award licences to press groups of whose loyalty they are assured. Former members of the security services head the leading privately-owned publications in Singapore.

Religion is also a source of censorship and self-censorship. Criticism of the religious authorities in Afghanistan and Pakistan can lead to a blasphemy suit. A score of media have also been sanctioned in Asia for having reproduced or referred to the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed published in Denmark. Upholding morals is also a favourite reason for censorship in Asia. A TV channel in Kabul was heavily fined for showing Indian films seen as contrary to Islam. In December, law suits were taken out against eight Indonesian stations for showing too much "sex" and "violence". In the same country, the editor of the local version of the magazine *Playboy* was taken to court. And authorities in Sri Lanka closed a radio station because it talked about sexuality.

Asian monarchs also know how to impose censorship on news about themselves. The crime of "lese majesty" is punishable in Thailand by several years in prison. A Bangkok press baron narrowly escaped prison in 2006 after being accused of insulting the king. In Bhutan, the media, only one of which is privately-owned, are obliged to speak about the king in the most respectful terms. Finally, in Brunei, the sultan and his family are almost systematically featured on the front pages of the press and criticism is extremely rare.

There are very few Asian countries which allow absolutely anything to be said or written. Even in South Korea, a favourable position towards their northern neighbour is liable to mean a prison sentence. It is not easy to speak freely about organised crime or violent nationalist groups in Japan. New Zealand is in this context a successful example of virtually total respect for press freedom.

#### SIGNS OF HOPE

There are some genuinely hopeful signs on the continent. The development of privately-owned TV channels brings news free from government control into hundreds of millions of homes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and India. Breaking decades of state monopoly on broadcast news, *Geo TV* in Pakistan, *Tolo TV* in Afghanistan, *Phoenix TV* in China or *CNN-IBN* in India, have pushed back the boundaries of censorship. Some countries are resisting this progress. The Maldives government has failed to honour a promise to open up the electronic media sector before the end of the year. And in Burma, the army bans people from watching independent *DVB TV*, broadcast by satellite from Norway.

The number of journalists imprisoned in Asia is down overall. Detention centres in Nepal were emptied after the democratic revolution in April. Those in Burma hold fewer and fewer journalists, even if U Win Tin, laureate of the 2006 Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France press freedom prize, is still serving a 20-year sentence for his pro-democracy articles. China has freed Jiang Weiping and Gao Qirong, given heavy prison sentences for writing articles about corruption and no journalist arrested in 2006 was held in custody.

However governments in Asia still have a number of laws at their disposal which allow them to imprison journalists for press offences. This year, only Cambodia made the courageous decision to decriminalise defamation. Indonesia, for its part, has lifted the offence of insulting the head of state, which was used against journalists in the past. On the other hand, governments in Manila and Dhaka have done nothing to prevent a raft of abusive defamation cases being brought against the press. In the Philippines, the husband of the president, Gloria Arroyo, has taken out more than 40 law suits against privately-owned media. In reply, journalists' organisations are claiming a peso per inhabitant in damages.

Asia's two heavyweights, India and China, have chosen a radically different model of press freedom. In the first, the media make themselves felt more every day as an effective counter-balance to government, capable of exposing even the most powerful. In the second, the press, although subject to competition, is still under the control of the party-state which is sure of its authority and which has no intention of dropping its capacity to censor.

Vincent Brossel  
Head of Asia-Pacific desk



# AFGHANISTAN

Area: 652,090 sq. km.  
Population: 29,860,000.  
Languages: Pashtu, Dari, Uzbek.  
Head of state: Hamid Karzai.

Press freedom is one of the few achievements of the five years since the fall of the Taliban regime. But it remains fragile as journalists feel the effects of deteriorating security, threats from warlords, conservative religious leaders and an increasingly hard-pressed government.

In October 2006, a writer contributing regularly to the weekly *Payame Mojahed*, was arrested on the basis of a complaint from the minister of parliamentary relations. "Media freedom ends the minute you touch a warlord or a government official," said Mohammad Hassan Wolesmal, editor of *Afghan Milli Jarida*, whose home was attacked in March after the paper carried an article critical of President Hamid Karzai. The leader of Afghanistan's Independent Journalists Association, Rahimullah Samander, has said those who are protected by private militia have no time for freedom of speech and try to impose censorship and self-censorship on journalists.

The volatile situation and the increase in suicide bombings in the east and south of the country have made journalists' work more and more dangerous. In July, Abdul Qodus, a cameraman and driver for *Aryana* television was killed in a double suicide bombing. Italian photographer Gabriele Torsello was kidnapped and held hostage for three weeks by armed men near Kandahar.

Behind the encouraging official statistics - 400 publications, 50 privately-owned radio stations, five news agencies and six TV channels - the reality is much more complex. Most of the titles are weeklies with very limited circulations. In November, one of the most independent papers, *Kabul Weekly*, ceased publication because of a lack of advertising. Similarly, in Mazar-e-Sharif, the daily *Baztab* closed after failing to increase distribution.

But the boom in privately-owned radio and TV has had a real effect on the way in which Afghans get their news. Journalist Zarghona Saber has commented: "The media is the winner in this game. People realise what the warlords are. The media is getting stronger every day."

However privately-owned television stations are the first to be targeted by the religious conservati-

ves. In January, *Afghan TV* was fined the equivalent of more than 1,000 euros for broadcasting Indian films and videos deemed to be un-Islamic. Its editor, Ahmad Shah Afghanzai, is enraged by the new media law which provides for the creation of a commission which will be able to impose fines without going before a court.

In August, conservative members of parliament physically attacked a team from *Tolo TV* and called for them to be expelled from the premises after it broadcast footage of slumbering deputies. The previous month, warlord Abul Sayyaf sent his henchmen to attack a *Tolo TV* crew near Kabul. At least 20 journalists were assaulted or received death threats in 2006 from politicians or their families.

The Taliban, predators of press freedom, hold sway in several southern provinces. At the end of November, they detained two Pakistani journalists for one week after they entered Helmand province without asking their permission. At the start of the year a Taliban military chief warned, "I want to say to journalists that if, in the future, they use incorrect information from NATO we will target them (...) We have the Islamic right to kill them". However, theology students stepped up their contacts with the press in 2006. "They need someone to put out their criticism of the government. They know that propaganda has a major role in this war," said *Tolo TV* presenter Massod Qiam.

The growing presence in the media of Taliban rebels has led the secret services to try to impose a degree of censorship. Leading media editors were summoned in June to be given a 24-point list of banned news. This list, which the press immediately rejected, outlawed contact with the Taliban and broadcasting news contrary to the country's or the international coalition's foreign policy. The secret services ordered journalists to stop using the



# AFGHANISTAN

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expression “warlord” and to support the efforts of the Afghan army. Despite the outcry, Hamid Karzai confirmed that he had been consulted by the authors of the list, because, he said, certain imperatives had to be taken into account in the interests of national security.

The government’s adoption of a third press law gives a relatively liberal framework for media development, in a country governed by Sharia. But par-

liament, in particular the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) which is dominated by the conservatives, has drawn up a list of reactionary amendments. The Religious and Cultural Affairs Commission has increased references to Islamic principles and banned publication of news contrary to stability, national security and territorial integrity. The draft law which could go before parliament at the beginning of 2007 includes a ban on promotion via the press on any religion other than Islam.

# AUSTRALIA

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*Area: 7,741,220 sq. km.*

*Population: 20,200,000.*

*Language: English.*

*Head of government: John Howard.*

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The John Howard government has continued to beef up its arsenal of anti-terror laws, some of which represent a threat to journalists' capacity to protect their sources of information and to freedom of expression.

The adoption by the Senate, in March 2006, of the law on interception of communications increased the risks of anti-terror legislation being used abusively against the press. The law allows phone tapping without any real judicial control of journalists investigating terrorism or organised crime cases. The 2005 anti-terror law has already been used to force journalists to give information to police or the courts.

Two reporters on the *Herald Sun* are still facing prison sentences for refusing to reveal their sources for a report on a controversial decision by the conservative government. In August, a court rejected their appeal, after refusing to recognise their right to protect their sources.

Another setback in 2006 was the High Court's refusal in September to allow a journalist access to documents on the Australian government's tax policy. The Australian Press Council condemned the decision which it said would give the authorities a "fresh impetus to suppress information that is embarrassing or politically inconvenient". In February, the government also banned the press from freely covering the arrival in the country of Papuan refugees. Generally speaking, numerous restrictions are imposed on journalists wanting to cover the plight of people in Australia's camps for asylum-seekers.



# BANGLADESH

Area: 144 000, sq. km.  
Population: 141,822,000.  
Languages: Bengali, English.  
Head of state: Iajuddin Ahmed.

**A perpetual political crisis prevented the press from working normally in 2006. Politicians pursued numbers of abusive defamation cases, putting journalists at risk of arrest. But for the first time in several years, no journalists were killed while doing their job.**

Although no journalists lost their lives in 2006, there were almost daily violent attacks on the press by political militants, criminal gangs or the security services. Militants in the ruling political parties, especially the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were behind the majority of press freedom violations. Threats, beatings, torchings and abusive legal action were all put to use by deputies and ministers in Khaleda Zia's government in a bid to silence the press. Threats forced more than 30 journalists to flee cities run by the BNP during 2006.

Nearly 25 news correspondents were targeted for intimidation for writing articles seen by armed groups as "un-Islamic". After a long period of playing down the existence of jihadist groups within the country, the government, through its Interior Minister, Lutfuzzaman Babar, was forced to admit the extent of the danger they represent. However, it was this same minister and his predecessor who had cracked down on journalists and human rights activists who were investigating this new threat.

Police and the justice system also lacked determination and efficiency in pursuing investigations or trials connected to the murders of journalists Manik Shaha, Humayun Kabir Balu and Dipankar Chakrabarty, in 2005, mostly in the Khulna region. On the other hand, in March, police arrested the chief suspect in the murder of Gautam Das, of *Dainik Shamokal* who was killed in 2005. At the same time, the courts handed down sentences against 12 defendants in the 2004 murder of Kamal Hossein, of the daily *Ajker Kagoj*. Five of them were members of the BNP.

## DAILY VIOLENCE

Despite an apparent commitment to press freedom, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has proved inca-

pable of curbing the daily incidents of violence against the press. This has made it extremely difficult for them to freely cover crucial subjects, such as collusion between political leaders and organised crime, corruption or human rights violations. In March, members of the BNP youth movement beat up 11 journalists at an opposition press conference in Sharishabari, in the north-west. In May, 25 journalists were injured in Kushtia, (western Bangladesh) by henchmen of deputy in the ruling party Shahidul Islam, as journalists demonstrated against an assault on three colleagues a few days earlier. BNP deputy Manjurul Ahsan Munshi had journalist Mizanur Rahman Kawser beaten up and then arrested in Comilla, in the south-east in September. A few weeks before, members of the politician's family forcibly prevented the holding of a conference on press freedom in the constituency.

Reporters and photographers struggled to do their job during the many street demonstrations which marked the country's political life in 2006. Fifteen journalists were injured at the end of October, either by police or demonstrators in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Mohonganj. Eight others were hurt in the capital, including Shafique Kajol, an experienced reporter from the *Daily Shamokal*, who was viciously beaten by members of the opposition Awami League.

Some journalists were threatened both by extremist groups and by the authorities. Editor Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury of the *Weekly Blitz*, who spent several months in prison in 2003 for "sedition", was targeted in July when two bombs exploded outside the weekly's offices. Then in October he was attacked in his office by unknown assailants. Police have always refused to protect the *Weekly Blitz*, despite threats from the radical Khatmey Nabuat (KNM) movement. Shoaib Choudhury is still facing the death penalty for



# BANGLADESH

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having written articles on the role of the media in dialogue between Muslims and Jews, and for trying to travel to Israel.

Despite violence and harassment, the media, and in particular the national dailies, continued to investigate the corruption and nepotism which undermine the entire country. As well as the *BBC World Service*, there are two independent radio stations broadcasting on FM. The country has eight privately-owned TV channels but their licences are always conditional on a degree of submissiveness towards the government.

## **ABUSIVE COMPLAINTS BROUGHT AGAINST THE PRESS**

The privately-owned press was confronted with a significant rise in defamation cases in 2006 - more than 40 - launched by BNP deputies or ministers.

Former minister, Mirza Abbas took legal action against six publications. A total of 18 publishers and journalists faced legal action over articles deemed to be "defamatory". One of whom called, Shahadat Chowdhury, had died two years earlier.

Control of news was stepped up at the highest political level. An advisor to Khaleda Zia is still head of the country's sole terrestrial TV station, *NTV*, and of a new daily *Admar Desh* (My Country). These two media, which have huge financial resources, only showed any views critical of the government in the run-up to general elections in January 2007.

# BHUTAN

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Area: 47,000 sq. km.

Population: 2,163,000.

Language: Dzongka.

Head of state: King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk.

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**Bhutan's first privately-owned newspaper made its appearance in the country in 2006. Controlled by a new press law, this cautious media development is an encouraging sign, even if most news remains highly favourable to the authorities.**

The kingdom's first privately-owned newspaper the *Bhutan Times*, was first published in April. At his inauguration, Prime Minister Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup said that press freedom could only be achieved with journalists showing responsibility. On its first front page, *Bhutan Times*, carried an article setting out the vision for democratic transition of Prince Jigme Kesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who is due to accede to the throne in 2008.

Despite King Jigme Wangchuck's policy of openness, including the introduction of universal suffrage, the monarchy makes few allowances for plu-

ralist news. Almost all the media, including the weekly *Kuensel* and *BBS* radio and television are controlled by the state. The few owners of televisions connected to the only cable operator can get Indian channels. The only criticism of the monarch's policies can be found on discussion forums on the website [kuenselonline.com](http://kuenselonline.com). Internet-users sometimes raise the thorny question of the tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees, particularly from the Lhotshampa minority, who are being held in camps in Nepal after being expelled from the kingdom at the beginning of the 1990s.

# BRUNEI

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*Area: 5,770 sq. km.*

*Population: 374,000.*

*Language: Malay.*

*Head of state: Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah.*

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The sultan, who has since 1967 held the posts of prime minister, defence minister, financial minister, rector of the university, chief of police and commander of the believers, has never favoured the emergence of a pluralist press.

Journalists on the rare privately-owned publications in the sultanate can be punished by prison sentences of up to three years for publishing "false news". Self-censorship is commonplace and freedom of expression limited. In June 2006, three men were sentenced to one year in prison for having sent "seditious" and "insulting" mobile phone messages to the family of the leader.

television, which is, of course, state-owned. The expansion of the Internet makes it impossible to censor articles "contrary to Islam or the honour of the royal family" as laid down by the authorities. *Borneo Bulletin*, which has a web version, carries a photo or an article about the sultan's activities on almost every one of its front pages.

The sultanate's subjects have access to a television network via cable, including the BBC, which marks a contrast with the staid programmes on Brunei



# BURMA

Area: 676,580 sq. km.  
Population: 52,400,000.  
Language: Burmese.  
Head of state: General Than Shwe.

Despite growing international pressure, the military junta has not released its iron grip on the media. Burma's most renowned journalist, U Win Tin, laureate of the Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France 2006 prize, spent his 76th birthday in his prison cell. The privately-owned press is still subjected to unrelenting advance censorship.

The information ministry blows hot and cold on both the private press and foreign journalists. New titles were granted publication titles on several occasions in 2006. And in October, foreign journalists, some of whom had been banned from the country for years, were invited to cover the resumption of the work of the convention drawing up a new constitution.

But alongside these signs of openness, the security services, reorganised within the Military Security Force (Sa Ya Hpa), has stepped up surveillance of the press. Civilians have also reportedly been trained to identify international media "informers". Telephone tapping capacity was boosted during 2006, with the creation of two new eavesdropping centres in Mandalay, central Burma.

The control system never sleeps. In November, the political police and members of the pro-junta militia UDSA harassed hundreds of writers and journalists who attended the birthday party of Ludu Daw Amar, founder of the *Ludu Daily News*, in Mandalay. The junta resented the fact that she used the occasion to speak out against political and social oppression and the lack of press freedom in the country.

The junta does not jam international radios broadcasts in Burmese but they do harass and punish some of their participants. The film-maker and journalist Thura "Zar Ga Nar" was in May banned from all artistic activity after taking part in a broadcast on the Burmese service of the *BBC*. This decision was taken by Major Thein Htun Aung, director of the information ministry's cinema department.

In the face of ever more overt hostility from the United States, the military regime has stepped up propaganda against "imperialists" and other "neo-colonialists". In February, information ministry offi-

cialists told a group of Burmese journalists and local correspondents for the foreign press in Rangoon to respond to criticism carried by the foreign press. Identical articles regularly appear in most of the country's media attacking Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the United States and opposition figures. They are written by agents of the junta's propaganda body, the Office of Strategic Studies.

There are now more than 100 privately-owned publications in the country, all of them subjected to advance censorship. Alongside traditionally forbidden subjects, such as democracy, the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi and the socio-economic crisis, national and international events routinely go unreported. This was the case in 2006, when Asian and UN diplomats visited the country in a bid to soften the junta's stance. Anti-government demonstrations in the Philippines and Thailand were never covered in the press. The magazine *Padauk Pwint Thit* was forced to withdraw an issue in December after the Censorship Bureau rejected seven of its articles. Even within the prisons, a censorship committee ensures that any "subversive" reading matter is removed. In March, the wife of the jailed journalist and writer, Than Win Hlaing revealed that her husband was denied all reading matter because of his "defect" of taking notes of what he read.

## U WIN TIN, DETAINED SINCE 1989

As of 1st January 2007, at least seven journalists were behind bars in Burma. Among them, U Win Tin, who has been imprisoned since July 1989. He is receiving treatment for high blood pressure and an inflamed prostate. Although a prison doctor gives him twice-monthly checkups, he is dependent on the support of his family, who regularly bring him food and medication. After 16 years in prison, his health has deteriorated badly. He has suffered two heart attacks.



## BURMA

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In June, the regional court in Mandalay upheld a three-year prison sentence handed down to photo-journalist U Thaung Sein, alias U Thar Cho, and to Ko Moe Htun, alias Ko Kyaw Thwin, editorialist on the religious magazine *Dhamah-Yate* (*The shadow of Dhamah*). It appears that no witnesses were called to give evidence at their trial. They were arrested in March and found guilty of taking unauthorised photos of the new capital Naypyitaw.

Also in June, Aung Than, a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD), and Zeya Aung, a student at Pegu University, were sentenced to 19 years in prison for having written and distributed a collection of poems "Daung Man" ("The power

of the fighter peacock", in reference to the NLD). The Burmese government's Internet policies are even more repressive than those of its Chinese and Vietnamese neighbours. The military junta clearly filters opposition websites. It keeps a very close eye on Internet cafes, in which the computers automatically execute screen captures every five minutes, in order to monitor user activity. The authorities targeted Internet telephony and chat services in June, blocking Google's Gtalk, for example. The aim was two-fold: to defend the profitable long-distance telecommunications market, which is controlled by state companies, as well as to stop cyber-dissidents from using a means of communication that is hard to monitor.

# CAMBODIA

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*Area: 181,040 sq. km.  
Population: 14,071,000.  
Language: Khmer.  
Head of government: Hun Sen.*

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Prime Minister Hun Sen took a step virtually unprecedented in the region of decriminalising defamation, soon after releasing a jailed radio boss. However threats and law suits continued against journalists investigating corruption.

Mam Sonando, director of radio *Sombok Khmum* (Ruche FM 105), was freed in January under international pressure, three months after his arrest along with other figures critical of the government. The head of state followed this up with a draft law to decriminalise defamation, which was quickly passed by parliament. This decision made Cambodia one of the very few Asian countries to stop imposing prison sentences for libel or slander. But Hun Sen publicly reminded journalists that they risked heavy fines if they attacked him.

Several suits were entered against journalists under laws inherited from the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) providing for one-year prison sentences for putting out "false news".

The often partisan press faces competition from Khmer-language news programmes broadcast by international stations such as *Radio Free Asia* and

*Radio France International* which are very popular in the capital and in the country's cities.

Threats against journalists who probe corruption among high officials has never stopped. The editor of an opposition bi-weekly, was forced to flee the country after receiving a death threat in June. He had condemned the misdeeds of a nephew of Hun Sen. Five other reporters, including a *Radio Free Asia* correspondent, were threatened in 2006.

Government interference also extended to television. A news programme due to go out in August on *Cambodia Television Network (CTN)* was pulled after Hun Sen accused it of putting the country's reputation in danger.



# CHINA

Area: 9,598,050 sq. km.  
Population: 1,315,844,000.  
Language: Mandarin.  
Head of state: Hu Jintao.

Faced with burgeoning social unrest and journalists who are becoming much less compliant, the authorities, directed by President Hu Jintao, have been bringing the media to heel in the name of a "harmonious society". The press is being forced into self-censorship, the Internet is filtered and foreign media very closely watched.

More journalists were handed down prison sentences in 2006. Ching Cheong, a Hong Kong reporter for a Singapore daily was sentenced to five years for "espionage". Zhao Yan, a researcher for the *New York Times*, was sentenced to three years for alleged "fraud". In both cases they were convicted after shoddy trials with no defence witnesses, under political pressure and with no right to an appeal hearing.

On the other hand, Gao Qinrong and Jiang Weiping, who were serving harsh prison sentences for investigating corruption, were released in 2006 before the end of their sentences. One journalist, Yu Dongyue, who was arrested during the Tiananmen Square massacres of 1989, was released in February but had been driven insane as a result of long periods in solitary confinement. At least 31 journalists were in jail as of 1st January 2007.

Hu Jintao's voiced rage against "hostile forces", whom he accused of fomenting a "coloured revolution" backed by the United States and led by human rights activists and liberal journalists, when he spoke to an audience of ministers, ambassadors and party provincial officials in August 2006. As preparations got under way for the next Communist Party Congress in October 2007, public security arrested at least 12 journalists and placed scores more under surveillance. This crackdown has also extended to lawyers. In March they were banned by China's Association of Lawyers from speaking to foreign journalists about "masses incidents", concerning groups such as the unemployed and the peasants. In September, Chinese judges had the same ban on speaking to the press slapped on them.

The authorities, who were confronted by 87,000 public order incidents in 2006, compared to 10,000 in 1994, have tried to prevent the press

from reflecting this widespread discontent. In December, the news agency *Xinhua* again turned on the "hostile forces" of human rights activists and foreign journalists who were attempting "to benefit from these masses incidents to spread disorder". A few weeks earlier, a US photo-journalist was arrested and beaten up by police after he travelled to a village in the south of the country where peasants had rebelled against the local authorities.

## A NEW ILLIBERAL LAW

In a bid to silence its detractors, the government has tabled a draft law on crisis management for the People's Assembly which will impose fines of up to the equivalent of 10,000 euros on media who publish unauthorised reports on these subjects. The newspaper, *Xin Kuaibao* (*New Express*) condemned this new law in an editorial which pointed out that it did not take into account the fact "that there is no way to check whether information put out by the authorities is reliable and correct. The law will prevent it being known whether behind 'natural disasters' hide 'catastrophes provoked by man' (...). In this case, the law becomes the tool of corrupt officials to conceal their dishonesty".

The Propaganda Department continues to attack each article deemed to be contrary to the new ideology of a "harmonious society" proclaimed by Hu Jintao. Media editors receive regularly a list of banned subjects. These might be demonstrations by peasants, the unemployed or Tibetans. Nothing escapes the censors, who cultivate a climate of fear within editorial offices. Censorship cases can be measured in their tens of thousands each year. For example, the press was prevented from talking about a new case of avian flu that was identified in the south of the country in April. In June, a demonstration by tricycle delivery workers in



# CHINA

Xian, northern China passed off without any press coverage. In the run-up to a series of anniversaries, including the 30th since the death of Mao Zedong and the 40th since the Cultural Revolution, the General Administration of Press and Publication issued a warning in July: "News publication has an important role in ideological education and our country's security depends on strict control of news production." Censorship was also applied to TV programmes considered "too frivolous", such as the Chinese version of Star Academy broadcast by *Hunan TV*.

The year 2006 was marked by an ideological crackdown on media judged to be too liberal. At the beginning of the year, the Propaganda Department dismissed prominent journalists Li Datong and Lu Yaogang from the weekly *Bing Dian*. This purge provoked a strong reaction within the profession and the communist party. To quell this defiance, the authorities banned any reference to it, put forums used by journalists under surveillance and sent police officers into editorial offices. "The new generation of journalists has studied according to Western standards and no longer believes in the Communist Party's new ideology (...) but there is no press freedom and almost no sector of the state allows us to play a supervisory role," said Li Datong.

The daily *Xin Jing Bao* and the weekly *Nanfang Zhoumo*, standard bearers of investigative journalism for several years, were again punished by the authorities for their articles which were viewed as too independent. *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, which is under the control of the Youth League, was brought to book: several editors were dismissed and censorship by the heads of departments was strengthened. In Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, press groups, particularly in the financial news area, regularly try to push at the limits of censorship, particularly by investigating abuse of power. Many journalists took refuge in the online press, but they have run into the same censorship difficulties.

The privatisation of the media sector is continuing with press groups occasionally quoted on the stock exchanges in Beijing and Shanghai. The coun-

try's 2,000 newspapers which this year published 100 million copies daily, 8,000 magazines and more than 700 TV stations, jostle for position in an expanding market. Even though the country has been a member of the World Trade Organisation since 2001, the government is more and more protectionist. In 2006, *Xinhua* laid down that it was the sole agency entitled to sell news, photographs and film to the Chinese media. The official agency thus is attempting to protect its economic and political monopoly, while hogging the dividends from financial news which was freely available before. Elsewhere, the government in April banned the development of new joint ventures in the press domain. Nationalism also reaches into the world of entertainment. In September the regulatory authority banned evening TV showings of non-Chinese cartoons.

## INCREASE IN ASSAULTS AND DEFAMATION SUITS

Increasing physical attacks on journalists are no longer being committed only by members of the security forces. Delinquents or henchmen in the pay of businessmen are also involved. Reporters Without Borders has recorded around 40 such incidents. But, according to the official organisation, journalism has become the third most dangerous job after mining and the police. The most at risk are reporters on tabloid newspapers whose zeal for crime stories sometimes leads them into danger in pursuit of scoops. Two journalists, Wu Xianghu and Xiao Guopeng, were killed by police in 2006.

Defamation cases are also becoming ever more common, sometimes to silence the investigative press. In June, a Taiwanese supplier of Apple claimed the equivalent of three million euros damages from two journalists working for *Diyi Caijin Ribao* which had investigated working conditions in factories producing iPods. The complaint was later withdrawn in response to international pressure.

Radio remains very popular in the cities as well as the countryside. Hundreds of millions of Chinese own radios on which they can pick up international stations whose output is in sharp contrast to



# CHINA

Chinese radio. Millions listen to the *BBC* and *Radio Free Asia* programmes in Chinese, but their broadcasts are jammed. Some of the equipment used to create this "great wall of sound" was purchased from French company Thalès. In 2006, Reporters Without Borders tested the jamming of *Voice of Tibet* and *Radio Free Asia* in Tibet. The authorities overlay programmes on short and medium wave with thudding sounds or educational programmes in Chinese.

The Television sector - particularly cable stations - is rapidly expanding. The country has more than 700 national and local stations and nearly 2,000 cable stations broadcasting 56,000 hours of programmes. But it is the state broadcaster, *CCTV*, with a presence in all areas, which dominates the market. Regional TV is very dynamic but under surveillance from Beijing and local government. In March, the presenter of a financial programme in Shanghai was taken off the air for being too outspoken. Phoenix TV of Hong Kong is accessible by satellite, possession of which is a privilege open only to foreigners and large numbers of officials. Tourist hotels show *BBC* and *CNN*, but censors still unplug them whenever a sensitive subject is broadcast. This happened during 2006 when an Amnesty International researcher was interviewed by *CNN* on the question of human rights in China.

## PROMISE OF FREEDOM FOR THE FOREIGN PRESS

Criticised for failing to keep promises made during the awarding of the 2008 Olympic Games, the Beijing government has announced changes to rules about foreign journalists. In 2006, there were at least 25 incidents of arrests, threats or assaults against members of the foreign press. A German reporter was arrested in July while he was doing a report on the controversial building of a dam in Yunnan province in southern China. In September, several foreign media crews were expelled from Fujian province, southern China where a devasta-

ting cyclone had just battered several cities. Elsewhere, many media websites, including that of the *BBC World Service*, are blocked in China.

Hong Kong continues to enjoy real press freedom but political and financial pressures from Beijing are constantly increasing. Those running the pirate station Citizen Radio were taken to court for broadcasting without a licence. A five-year prison sentence against Hong Kong-resident journalist Ching Cheong, has worsened apprehension felt by reporters covering China from the autonomous region.

## INTERNET UNDER CONTROL

China unquestionably continues to be the world's most advanced country in Internet filtering. The authorities carefully monitor technological progress to ensure that no new window of free expression opens up. After initially targeting websites and chat forums, they nowadays concentrate on blogs and video exchange sites. China now has nearly 17 million bloggers. This is an enormous number, but very few of them dare to tackle sensitive issues, still less criticise government policy. Firstly, because China's blog tools include filters that block "subversive" word strings. Secondly, because the companies operating these services, both Chinese and foreign, are pressured by the authorities to control content. They employ armies of moderators to clean up the content produced by the bloggers. Finally, in a country in which 52 people are currently in prison for expressing themselves too freely online, self-censorship is obviously in full force. Just five years ago, many people thought Chinese society and politics would be revolutionised by the Internet, a supposedly uncontrollable medium. Now, with China enjoying increasing geopolitical influence, people are wondering the opposite, whether perhaps China's Internet model, based on censorship and surveillance, may one day be imposed on the rest of the world.

# EAST TIMOR

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*Area: 14,870 sq. km.  
Population: 947,000.  
Languages: Tetun, Portuguese.  
Head of state: Xanana Gusmao.*

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Riots and political tension did not make the job of the press any easier. Several publications were threatened by supporters or opponents of the former prime minister, Mari Alkatiri. Despite this violence, the young country continues to enjoy a favourable atmosphere for press freedom.

A military rebellion against the government triggered a serious deterioration in working conditions for journalists from May 2006. Several publications had to work in secret for fear of reprisals. The *Timor Post* and *Suara Timor Lorosae* had to halt publication for several days under pressure from supporters of Mari Alkatiri, who was forced to resign at the end of June. The former head of government had openly criticised and called for a boycott of independent media like *Suara Timor Lorosae*.

Journalists were physically attacked on several occasions. On 10 June, an Associated Press reporter was manhandled and briefly detained by Australian peace-keeping soldiers. On 12 June, a gang of youths stoned journalists from the *Timor Post*. Political militants ransacked the offices of the leading radio and television channel *TVTL* in Dili on 29 June demanding the suspension of news programmes. Finally, on 9 November an *Agence France-Presse* correspondent was hit in the face by a stone thrown by a demonstrator.

# FIJI

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Area: 18,270 sq. km.

Population: 825,000.

Languages: Fijian, English, Hindi.

Head of state: Ratu Josefa Iloilo Uluivuda.

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**After threatening to apply a system of advance censorship, the military, which took control at the beginning of December did offer some guarantees to the press. But a crackdown on any criticism continued.**

On 5 December 2006, public television interrupted its news programmes, just a few hours after Commodore Frank Bainimarama announced he had taken power in a military coup. The TV announced that the *Fiji Television* "news service would only resume broadcasting when it could be independent and free from censorship." Likewise, the leading daily *Fiji Times* suspended publication and two privately-owned radio stations *Radio Fiji* and *Communications Fiji* suspended broadcasts, after visits from soldiers wanting to impose advance censorship on them. Guards were posted in the media offices.

A few days later, the coup leaders guaranteed the independence of the country's main media. Bainimarama said: "We have withdrawn our soldiers from the media. We did not totally censor

the press. But we wanted to prevent people from exploiting the situation to incite people to disturb the peace that is currently prevailing." The *Fiji Daily Post*, close to the ousted Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, was however threatened and suffered reprisals. The paper's editor, Robert Wolfram, an Australian national, was arrested and had his passport confiscated and the family of a reporter on the paper, Jyoti Pratibha was threatened by soldiers who were apparently searching for the daily's general manager, Mesake Koroi.

The coup leaders also tried to gag other people, such as businessman and former journalist, Imraz Iqbal, who was questioned after having an article published in the magazine *Fiji Living*. Soldiers also threatened people who had written letters highly critical of the coup to the letters page.

# INDIA

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Area: 3,287,260 sq. km.  
Population: 1,103,371,000.  
Languages: English, 15 official languages.  
Head of government: Manmohan Singh.

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**The Indian media is dynamic and protective of its freedoms and plays a crucial role in the country's democratic system. However, in states shaken by separatist or Maoist rebellions, journalists are caught in the crossfire.**

Privately-owned television stations, which specialise in spectacular scoops, made some very serious ethical blunders in 2006. In August, journalists on local stations in Bihar state purchased petrol and matches for a desperate man so that he could commit suicide on camera.

But parliamentarians are determined to amend the broadcast law chiefly to curb press sting operations to entrap people. "The media only reflects public anger (...) these operations show political corruption and rackets that are too common in our society," said a presenter on *CNN-IBN* opposed to any restrictions on this practice. With more than 60 million subscribers, cable news channels have taken over as the country's leading media.

The New Delhi government in November promulgated a revolutionary law on community radios which opened the way to long-awaited development of local media. But at the start of the year, a local news and music station, *Raghav FM Mansoorpur 1*, launched without a licence by a young equipment repair man in Bihar State, was closed down under the archaic Indian Telegraphs Act. The federal government awarded several hundred licences for privately-run FM stations in 2006, after years of protectionism. *BBC Worldwide* obtained seven licences for the country's major cities.

The intrepidity of Indian journalists often leads to reprisals. At least 65 were assaulted or received death threats from police officers, criminals, company heads or political militants during the year.

Two journalists were murdered while doing their job during 2006. Prahlad Goala, working on a regional daily in Assam State in the north-east, was killed after writing articles exposing nepotism on the part of a local official. Also, in the north-east, a

bureau chief escaped a murder attempt by an armed communist group. A young correspondent for a regional newspaper in Maharashtra State, central India, Arun Narayan Dekate, was stoned to death by gangsters he had named in his articles.

The authorities in Chhattisgarh State, east-central India, badly hit by a Maoist revolt, sacrificed press freedom to the fight against this new "terrorism". A security order was adopted which allowed imprisonment from one to three years, for journalists meeting Maoist rebels. A score of reporters were assaulted or threatened with death by police officers or members of local militia supposed to counter the Maoist influence. At least two correspondents on the daily *Hind Sat* were forced to give up their work for fear of reprisals.

The press did not really benefit from the Indian-Pakistani rapprochement in Kashmir. Some increasingly radical separatist groups threatened suicide attacks on local cable television operators. Fearing for their safety, some of them decided to stop broadcasting channels considered "obscene" by the armed groups. Journalists were also targeted by these same groups. In June, Shujaat Bukhari, correspondent in Kashmir for the national daily *The Hindu*, escaped a murder attempt by armed men. Indians security services have also been implicated in attacks against the press, as in the assault, in September, on three reporters, who were beaten by police officers in the streets of Srinagar. Elsewhere, Abdul Rouf, of the *Srinagar News*, and his wife Zeenat Rouf, were arrested in November in disturbing circumstances. Photojournalist, Muhammad Maqbool Khokar has been held since September 2004, under an emergency public security law. Despite calls for his release from the justice system and the National Human Rights Commission, police have refused to let him go.

# INDONESIA

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Area: 1,904,570 sq. km.  
Population: 222,781,000.  
Language: Bahasa Indonesia.  
Head of state: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

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President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono made statements in favour of press freedom but took no significant steps towards any improvement. On the contrary, the government tried to restore its control over the granting of broadcast licences and a new anti-terror law gave security forces very wide powers.

Pluralism of news and information continued to develop in the world's most populous Muslim country, which boasts at least 700 publications and 1,200 radio stations, as well as a score of local and national TV channels. Enthusiasm for electronic media has led to the launch of hundreds of pirate radio and TV channels which the government struggles to regulate

The Constitution and the press law guarantee freedom of expression, and in December, a constitutional court edict decriminalised "insult to the head of state". Unfortunately, the still archaic criminal code continues to allow prison sentences for press offences.

Sadly, journalists still suffer violence in some regions. In May, independent journalist Herliyanto was murdered in the east of Java Island, after investigating a local corruption case. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AIJ) recorded more than 20 incidents of physical assault or threats against the press. Half of these violations were committed by criminals or angry mobs and the other half by police officers or officials.

Businessman Tomy Wiranta continues to harass journalists working for the press group Tempo. In February the Supreme Court overturned a one-year jail sentence against prominent journalist Bambang Harymurti. Wiranta had seen to it that the "defamation" case had gone before the lower court under the criminal code and not under the press law. For their part, Islamist groups directed their demonstrations against local publications *Petra* and *Rakyat Merdeka Online* which had carried the caricatures of the prophet Mohammed produ-

ced by Danish cartoonists, but also the Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine. The authorities, in response to pressure, took legal action against the editors of the three publications. In September, the editor of *Rakyat Merdeka Online* was acquitted of a blasphemy charge.

The 2005 peace accord between the government and rebels in Aceh had very beneficial effects for press freedom. The media there has experienced a huge reduction in attacks on it from security forces and separatists. The peace has also allowed a consolidation of independent media, which were long term victims of the war. For all that, the authorities do not accept all criticism. The radio regulator had two independent radio stations shut down in July. Elsewhere, US reporter William Nessen is still banned from entering Aceh, and one of his documentaries on the Indonesian Army's "dirty war" was banned from being shown at a festival in Jakarta. Four other films on East Timor, also exposing human rights violations by the army, and the Bali bombings, were censored. The Indonesian Army, often criticised for its conduct in separatist regions, refuses to sanction its troops. As a result, Jakarta has never carried out serious investigations into the murders of foreign reporters in East Timor, including the Dutch journalist Sander Thoenes in 2002 and the Balibo Five in 1975, in which suspicion fell on elements in the Indonesia Army.

The authorities have refused to lift a ban on the foreign press from working in Papua, scene of a crackdown on an independence movement. An Australian TV crew was expelled from the island and a score of Indonesian journalists have been assaulted by police in the province.

# JAPAN

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*Area: 377,800 sq. km.*  
*Population: 128,085,000.*  
*Language: Japanese.*  
*Head of government: Shinzo Abe.*

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The rise of nationalism had a negative impact on press freedom and there has been a rise in the number of assaults and threats. The government has not undertaken any reform of the system of kisha clubs which obstruct the free circulation of information.

In July 2006, a bottle of petrol was thrown at the offices of the financial newspaper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* which had just broken news embarrassing to nationalist groups. Several other Japanese journalists and writers were threatened in 2006. There were also attacks on foreign TV crews in Tokyo. Those responsible, most likely the extreme right Uyoko groupuscules, are rarely punished. Police wound up an investigation into the murder of a journalist and several attacks against media in the 1980s and 1990s.

Before he left office, former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi accused the media of being opposed to his regular visits to the Yasukuni memorial, where war criminals are honoured. "Whatever I do, they attack me," he said.

The deep-rooted ruling Liberal Democratic Party and financial circles maintain the system of kisha clubs which ban independent and foreign journalists

from getting some news. Despite criticism from foreign correspondents, the European Union and press freedom organisations, the government shows no interest in reforming this archaic system. In 2006, a representative of the EU in Japan called the system a serious violation of the free circulation of information. There are officially 800 kisha clubs in Japan (Up to 1,500, according to some sources). The majority of them operate within public institutions such as ministries, provincial governments, large companies, political parties and the Imperial Agency.

But the justice system also knows how to protect press freedom. In October, the Supreme Court recognised the right of a journalist from *NHK* television to protect his source. He had been the object of legal action by a North American company since 1997 for uncovering tax problems within its Japanese subsidiary. In June, a reporter for *Yomiuri Shimbun* obtained a similar judgement from an appeal court in Tokyo.

## LAOS

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*Area: 236,800 sq. km.*

*Population: 5,924,000.*

*Language: Lao.*

*Head of state: Choummaly Sayasone.*

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President and leader of the sole party, Choummaly Sayasone, who was appointed in June 2006, has done nothing to change the country's ideological line. The party controls all media and a more liberal press law unveiled in 2001 has never seen the light of day.

As head of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (PPRL) and thus of the state, Choummaly Sayasone, formerly defence minister, has maintained censorship since coming to power, in June 2006. A seminar was held in Vientiane to remind media directors of "the party's policy towards journalists", all of whom are officials in the Information and Culture Ministry.

Media bosses and senior ministerial officials meet several times a month to comment on articles which have appeared and to decide on which subjects should get priority. The media relay unedited reports from the official news agency Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL) on a wide range of subjects.

Since the media only offers propaganda, many Laotians prefer to watch Thai television which can be picked up in areas close to the border. *Radio France International* was given permission, in March 2006, to broadcast on FM in the capital, but this did not extend to its Laotian language service.

Even though the French-language weekly *Le Rénovateur* and the English-language weekly *Vientiane Times* occasionally take the risk of publishing reports on socio-economic problems, the majority of the media only disseminate news which is favourable to the sole party. The party's organ, *Paxaxon* (People), continues to present itself as a "revolutionary publication produced by the people and for the people and which serves the revolution's political programme". The foreign ministry also has a say in the content of the media, as a result of which it is forbidden to criticise "friendly countries", particularly Vietnam and Burma.

The criminal code provides for heavy prison sentences against journalists who "spread news which weakens the state". The law also stipulates a one-year prison sentence for anyone who brings into the country a "publication contrary to national culture".

The draft press law, which was published in 2001, has still never gone before parliament even though it has been amended several times by the government and the Lao Journalists' Association. This law would protect journalists' sources of information, set out conditions for obtaining a publication licence and allow the creation of privately-owned media.

The foreign press is still prevented from freely covering the plight of the Hmong minority and more particularly the isolated groups in the jungle which continue to fight against the Vientiane government. Two Laotians of Hmong origin are still in prison for having served as guides, in 2003, to Belgian journalist Thierry Falise and French cameraman Vincent Reynaud. Thao Moua and Pa Phue Khang were sentenced on 30 June 2003 for "obstruction of justice" and "possessing weapons" to prison sentences of 12 and 20 years. Thierry Falise and Vincent Reynaud have spoken out in support of their guides, saying that they had only tried to "make the humanitarian tragedy experienced by some of the Hmong people better known".

Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, the author of many articles and leaflets about the situation in Laos and the need for democratic reform, has been in prison since October 1999. He was one of five leaders of a pro-democracy movement and in 2002 was sentenced to 20 years in prison for "anti-government activities".

# MALAYSIA

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Area: 329,750 sq. km.

Population: 25,347,000.

Languages: Malay, Mandarin, English, Tamil.

Head of government: Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has still not fulfilled the promise of openness which he made when he came to power in 2003. Censorship and self-censorship have not gone away and media concentration in the hands of the families of government members has been further boosted this year.

On 7 December 2006, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also public security minister, told parliament that he planned to intervene regularly with the media to warn them off certain subjects. "If the media persist in not respecting the law, the ministry will send a caution, which could turn into a suspension or withdrawal of a licence", he said. The government, which is extremely vigilant on issues which might provoke tension between the country's different communities, regularly puts the press under pressure. Sensitive subjects are censored or avoided completely. For example, in March, demonstrations against a hike in the price of petrol went off without any coverage in the main media. In June, the presenter of a radio talk show in Chinese was replaced and the phone-in section of the programme was axed. In the same way, in November, police summoned several journalists to tell them to cut back their coverage of a particularly grisly murder in which police officers were implicated.

The rare independent publications are to be found online, including *Malaysiakini* which did not suffer any official harassment in 2006. On the other hand, bloggers and discussion forums did find themselves in the government's sights.

The Public Security ministry and censorship bodies are also very prompt to defend good morals in the press. In November, a weekly and its editor were suspended for having published an article about sexuality. Hundreds of international publications and books on sex and religion are banned in the country. The authorities invoke Article 6 (2) of the press law to punish media accused of putting out indecent news.

The Danish cartoons case also caused damage to the Malaysian press. Three publications were sus-

pending, one of them permanently. The government was quick to politically exploit the case, once again condemning western arrogance.

The government has an impressive legal arsenal at its disposal. The 1984 law on publications and the written press covers books and newspapers as well as foreign publications. It gives discretion to the Ministry of Internal Security to grant or revoke newspaper publication licences. The 1948 sedition law, inherited from the British colonial era, is poorly defined. It punishes "seditious tendencies" such as incitement "to hatred or contempt of the government, administration, or the justice system", provocation "of discontent between subjects, hostility between the races or classes" or challenges to "constitutional articles about the language (...) and the sovereignty of the rulers".

As in Singapore, there are very strong links between ruling parties and the media. The biggest press group, Media Prima, is owned by Malaysia Resources Corporation Berhad which has close ties with the ruling United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the government. Media Prima owns the leading English-language newspaper *The New Straits Times*, the second biggest Malaysian-language paper *Berita Harian*, *Maly Mail*, *Harian Metro* and the *Shin Min Daily News*. In addition, Media Prima owns four terrestrial TV channels.

In 2006, the group Sin Chew owned by Malay business magnate Tiong Hiew King strengthened its control of the Chinese-language press in buying *Nanyang Siang Pau*, adding to his ownership of the *Sin Chew Daily* and *Guangming Daily*. This press tycoon, who also has a presence in Hong Kong and south-east Asia, does not hide his ambition to build a worldwide Chinese press empire.



# MALDIVES

Area: 300 sq. km.  
Population: 329 000.  
Language: Divehi.  
Head of state: Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

The government, which has embarked on a major democratic reform plan, oscillates between negotiations and crackdown in relation to media, which are growing ever more independent. Journalists close to the opposition have been the target of repeated attacks.

Information Minister, Mohamed Nasheed, who in May 2006 met members of an international mission of which Reporters Without Borders was a member, said the broadcast sector would shortly be liberalised and that laws to protect press freedom would be adopted before the end of the year. Unfortunately, the end of the state monopoly on radio and television has been postponed and the government had a draconian law on defamation adopted by decree. As a result, 38 requests made to the authorities to set up privately-owned radio and television stations have gone unanswered.

The government headed by the immovable Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who has been in power since 1978, has therefore failed to honour all its promises in relation to press freedom which were set out in the "road map" for democratic reform. Moreover, police continue to harass and sometimes imprison pro-opposition journalists.

The end of restrictions of publication licences did allow the emergence of many private media: six dailies, 15 weeklies and 70 other publications. Some titles have already proved their worth, including independent weekly *Adduvas* which revealed the existence of very advantageous loans made to several officials. The editor of the newspaper, Aishath Velezini, has received a number of threats against her life as a result of this scoop.

The daily *Minivan* has come in for regular government criticism and been accused of calling for violence and insulting the head of state. At one time or another during the year, every journalist and

contributor to this title, founded by an opposition leader, has been arrested or summoned by police, threatened or assaulted. One of them, Abdullah Saeed, has been in prison since March, while cartoonist, Ahmed Abbas, was arrested in November. Editor, Aminath Najeed and her deputy Nazim Sattar, have been the target of several law suits. On the other hand, Jennifer Latheef, a photojournalist and human rights activist, was pardoned in August. Finally, the newspaper's founder and opposition leader Mohamed Anni Nasheed, was released in September after several months under house arrest.

Police action can be violence. In February, a photographer on *Adduvas* was arrested and handcuffed while covering a demonstration in the capital. In April, Abdul Hameed, one of the managers of the political weekly *Manas* was arrested by police officers who accused him of carrying out activities against the state. He was freed two weeks later after undergoing several interrogation sessions. At the end of August, Fathimath Shaheeda, of *Minivan Radio* (the station is forbidden in the country and based in Sri Lanka) was struck by police officers while she was standing outside police HQ in Malé to do an interview. Finally, state media employees were harassed during opposition demonstrations.

On the eve of an opposition demonstration in November, the authorities expelled two foreign reporters, whom they had arrested on an atoll in southern Maldives. One of them was the correspondent in the Maldives for the website *Minivannews.com*, based in Sri Lanka.

# MONGOLIA

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*Area: 1,565,000 sq. km.*

*Population: 2,646,000.*

*Language: Mongol.*

*Head of state: Nambaryn Enkhbayar.*

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The press is pluralist, but journalists remain at risk of prison sentences for “defamation” and “violation of state secrets”. Media which exposed corruption within the state or wider society were censored.

The authorities in Ulan Bator regularly stress their commitment to press freedom and head of government Miyegombo Enkhbold spoke in May of his admiration for “journalists who fight social injustice and work hard to develop a free press”.

The government headed by the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party continues to use public radio and television as a tool for promoting itself. There are more than 30 newspapers, 20 FM radios and 26 television stations in the provinces but they are financially limited and are often harried by the local authorities.

Reporters Without Borders recorded 12 flagrant press freedom violations, including two incidents of censorship. The editor of the television station

*Nomin* was brutally beaten by unknown assailants in July. She had received threats after broadcasting a report on the disappearance of privatisation vouchers promised to 9,000 employees in the mining industry. A few weeks earlier, a journalist on the daily *Udriin Sonin* received threats after writing an article on credit companies after which she obtained police protection.

Politicians coming in for criticism sometimes opt for radical solutions. In March, a parliamentarian seized with police help all the copies of a newspaper which had an article about her. Some public figures, including President Nambaryn Enkhbayar, laid a complaint against an editorialist on *Udriin Sonin* who made accusations of corruption.

# NEPAL

Area: 147,180 sq. km.  
Population: 27,133,000.  
Language: Nepali.  
Head of government: Girija Prasad Koirala.

Before he was ousted in a democratic revolution, King Gyanendra had put the very existence of the independent press under threat. Several hundred journalists were arrested, beaten up, censored or threatened by rampant security forces. The press, first in line in the fight against the monarchy, progressively regained its rights from April onwards.

The democratic revolution which in April allowed the restoration of parliament, then in November, the signing of a peace agreement and historic power-sharing with the Maoists, put an end to the all out crackdown on the independent media and opposition. Until his fall, King Gyanendra, a predator of press freedom, had operated strict censorship throughout the country. The monarch who had declared himself head of government had wiped out almost all the constitutional and legal protection acquired by the independent press since 1990. In addition, more than a thousand journalists were sacked and the economic crisis provoked by the government had affected many media.

During the pro-democratic demonstrations on 1st February 2006, one year after the King's power grab, more than 50 journalists were arrested while either taking part in or covering demonstrations organised throughout the country by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ). Some, like Shyam Shrestha, editor of an opposition monthly, were held for several months by police under radical security laws and often in appalling conditions. Young journalist Bhawana Prasain of the monthly *Majdur Aawaj*, was tortured and threatened with rape by soldiers, during her detention, in February.

During the April revolution, security forces killed more than a score of civilians. The journalists, in the front line of the demonstrations, were especially targeted by the police and army. Between 5 and 10 April, nearly 100 press representatives were questioned or arrested, mostly without warrants. Reporters Without Borders also recorded at least 117 incidents in which media were attacked or injured by the security forces while covering demonstrations, a score of them suffering bullet wounds. In the vast majority of cases, repor-

ters, who were easily identifiable, were deliberately attacked by police. In one instance, Tilak Koirala and Janak Pandit, reporters with *Nepal One* television were clubbed by police officers, in Kathmandu on 23 April. Five journalists were also injured in shooting, on 19 April in the Jhapa district in eastern Nepal.

In the face of this widespread popular revolt, the palace stepped up censorship. The Ministry of Information and Communications on 13 April ordered cable TV operators to stop putting out programmes from *Kantipur TV* (KTV) and other news channels. Several FM radio stations were also censored.

The FNJ provided remarkable leadership in the struggle for the restoration of rights confiscated by the government, both on the streets and through the courts. On 5 April, a dozen journalists, including the president and the secretary general of the FNJ, were arrested after being the first to break the curfew and ban on demonstrating imposed by the security forces throughout the country. The following day, 24 journalists including Kanak Dixit, the famous director of *Himal South Asia* was arrested and manhandled by police. Demonstrators chanted slogans against censorship of the press.

After the announcement of the restoration of parliament, militants attacked journalists working for the pro-government press and demonstrators vandalised the offices of Shankar Thapa, correspondent for *Radio Nepal* in Dipayal, western Nepal.

Once the government of Girija Prasad Koirala was in place, public freedoms were restored one by one. The Supreme Court in May annulled Article 8 of the law on radio and television and Article 15(1)

## NEPAL

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of the law on publications and newspapers, which were ruled unconstitutional. The government decided on 9 May, to cancel the media order, banning FM radio from broadcasting news, promulgated by the Gyanendra government. In the same way, the government quashed the anti-terror law which have been used on frequent occasions to imprison journalists. After this, the authorities went on to grant new licences to privately-owned radio and television stations and lifted censorship on all websites, which had been applied by the previous government.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) in 2006 carried out fewer attacks on journalists than in previous years. Members of the central committee of CPN-M promised Reporters Without Borders in March to guarantee journalists freedom of expression and to move about freely to do their jobs. In November, the leader of the CPN-M, Prachanda, announced that his party was ending 11 years of armed struggle, after signing an agreement with democratic parties which provided for a constitutional assembly and a transitional government. Despite this, the

Maoists regularly threatened the press in the regions which they control. In August, 21 people, 12 of them journalists, were held by a group of Maoists in the Bara district in the south of the country. Photographer Ram Sarraf was manhandled. In October, the correspondent for the *Kantipur* group and president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists in Khotang, eastern Nepal was threatened and accused of putting out false news by Maoist party cadres.

From April to December 2006, Maoist militants detained, assaulted and abusively summoned or censored at least 15 journalists. "The Maoists do not always want the press to know about their imperfections. (...) journalists are always under psychological pressure and under threat when they publish or transmit news which is critical of them," said the FNJ.

In total, at least 245 journalists were arrested in Nepal in 2006, while 180 others were injured, attacked or threatened. Finally, at least 30 media were censored and four others destroyed as a result of clashes between the army and the Maoists.



# NORTH KOREA

Area: 120,540 sq. km.  
Population: 22,488,000.  
Language: Korean.  
Secretary General of Worker's Party of Korea: Kim Jong-il.

International tension created by the first North Korean nuclear test in October was accompanied within the country by new propaganda campaigns against foreign imperialism. The totalitarian regime in Pyongyang did its utmost to prevent North Koreans from obtaining any independent information on the subject.

The day after the first North Korean nuclear test on 30 October 2006, state-run media broadcasted footage of popular celebration. Commentators, zealous officials of the regime, boasted of the glory of Pyongyang's nuclear programme and, of course, of the key role of Kim Jong-il.

All radio stations broadcasting to the country in Korean are jammed. In May, the Japanese government confirmed that a station recently set up by an organisation campaigning for the return of Japanese kidnapped by North Korea had experienced interference coming from the Korean peninsula. In October, the Pyongyang media condemned the activities of radio *FreeNK* broadcast online and on shortwave radio from Seoul. North Korean officials took advantage of the occasion to condemn the "clumsy charade" perpetrated by US authorities which support the station and called on its South Korean counterparts to get the broadcasts stopped.

Despite police campaigns to check individual radios (every radio is sealed so it can only pick up official radio frequencies), a growing number of radios are smuggled across the border from China. They allow people to hear South Korean radio programmes, stations set up by exiles and the *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia*.

Few foreign media can work in North Korea. Delegations of South Korean journalists do indeed make regular visits to their neighbouring country, but many obstacles are put in their way. In March, for example, a crew from *SBS* television was held for several days by North Korean police who threatened the journalists that they would be tried under laws in the North for "lying". In protest, all

the reporters who had entered the country to cover family reunions between North and South left the country. In May, North Korean officials at the last moment blocked the arrival of 200 journalists from the South at the Gaeseong special economic zone after the South Korean press criticised North Korea's decision to cancel a project to build a railway line connecting the two countries.

Elsewhere, very few international TVs, including the US channel *ABC News*, have been allowed to broadcast from North Korea, but only after lengthy negotiations. "This permission was obtained only after a large number of meetings and a lot of work and effort," an *ABC News* executive said. Foreign reporters are closely watched by local journalists or North Korean police, who have orders to limit their contact with local people as much as possible.

Kim Jong-il directly controls the North Korean press, particularly the *Rodong Shinmun* (The Workers' Newspaper), the *Korean Central News Agency* and national television *JoongAng Bang Song*. In February, to mark his birthday, all the media vaunted the "immortal exploits" of "the dear leader". Every journalist is indoctrinated so as to be able to bear witness, without any mistakes, to the grandeur of the late president Kim Il-sung and his son. The press also has the responsibility of demonstrating the superiority of North Korean socialism over "bourgeois and imperialist corruption". A typing error can prove expensive: several North Korean journalists have been sent to "revolutionisation camps" for a single spelling mistake. Song Keum-chul, of state television, was sent to a concentration camp at the end of 1995, for having set up a small group of critical journalists. Nothing has been heard of him since.



# PAKISTAN

Area: 796,100 sq. km.  
Population: 156,600,000.  
Languages: Urdu, English.  
Head of state: General Pervez Musharraf.

**An explosion in the number of independent TV channels boosted pluralism and the quality of news. But the security forces radicalised their methods of repression: a score of journalists were kidnapped and tortured by the military. The situation is worst of all in the tribal areas.**

The murder of reporter Hayatullah Khan in the tribal areas in June 2006 provoked an unprecedented wave of protests across the country. The correspondent for Pakistani and foreign media in the very troubled Waziristan area had been kidnapped several months previously by armed men, apparently belonging to military secret services. The case underlined the brutality of security forces towards journalists who take too close an interest in what goes on in the tribal areas and in Baluchistan. Under pressure, the government set up two investigative commissions but has never made their conclusions public.

In 2006, at least ten other journalists were kidnapped by security forces, sometimes held for a few hours only, but often in very harsh conditions. Mukesh Rupeta and Sanjay Kumar of *Geo TV* were held by military secret services from March to June after being arrested for filming an air base used by the US Army. After their release, Mukesh Rupeta said, "Those who detained us seemed to be secret agents. When they were beating me, I wondered if I was a Pakistani in their eyes". Likewise, Mehruddin Marri, of the Sindhi language daily *Kawish*, said that after being held for three months by the military, "I received blows and electric shocks. I fainted. Then, they stopped me from sleeping for three nights". Before his release a soldier warned him, "Never defy the state and the secret services".

Soldiers were also implicated in the arrest in April of Munir Mengal, one of the promoters of a Baluchi language TV *Baloch Voice*, in Karachi, southern Pakistan. His family had to wait until December before they were allowed to see him in a military detention centre. Dilawar Khan, a journalist for the *BBC* and the daily *Dawn* was kidnapped and threatened for several hours in November. His brother had been killed in unexplained circumstances in Waziristan in August.

Another journalist, Munir Sangi of the privately-owned *Kawish Television Network (KTN)* was killed in Larkana, south-east Pakistan in May 2006. The suspects, who were arrested by police, were believed to be acting on the orders of a local politician.

The very few journalists based in the tribal areas in Baluchistan are caught in the crossfire between security forces, jihadist militants and tribal chiefs. Some imams and Taliban chiefs used their clandestine FM radios to relay propaganda and to call for reprisals against journalists. The majority of these illegal stations have been closed by the federal government. In November, the Taliban kidnapped the son of a journalist in North Waziristan and stopped distribution of newspapers for two days after the press published an inaccurate article. "The Taliban accuse us of being spies and the authorities and the army do not allow us to work freely" said one of the leaders of the Tribal Union of Journalists.

The Pakistani and international press have been regularly kept away from the border area with Afghanistan. In January, two reporters from Peshawar were arrested while travelling in the Bajaur region where a village had just been bombed by the US Army. It was also near Bajaur that five journalists were arrested and beaten in November while covering demonstrations linked to the bombing of a madrasa by the army.

Harassment and threats remain the preferred methods of the security services. Reporters Without Borders recorded more than 40 such cases in 2006. For example, Mushtaq Ghuman of the *Business Recorder*, received phoned threats while he was working on an article embarrassing for the prime minister. At the end of December, journalist Carlotta Gall of the *New York Times* and her Pakistani fixer Akhtar Soomro were assaulted

## PAKISTAN



and threatened by the secret services while they were reporting in Quetta, western Pakistan. These methods prompted leading investigative journalist Amir Mir to refuse to accept a professional prize which was due to have been personally presented to him by President Pervez Musharraf. The head of state's services have just drawn up a list of 30 editorialists and journalists "to turn" in a bid to ease criticism in the press.

### BROADCAST MEDIA UNDER STRICT SURVEILLANCE

Privately-owned television has considerably contributed to an improvement in quality and pluralism of news and information. But they have also faced obstacles. In September, police forced cable operators in Punjab province, eastern Pakistan, to stop putting out programmes by *ARY TV* which had just broadcast footage of police officers attacking three journalists. In November, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) banned cable and satellite operators from putting out privately-owned *Sindh TV*. After a series of negotiations, PEMRA authorised resumption of programmes two weeks later. PEMRA also banned in March the broadcasting in Baluchistan of Afghan channels *Tolo TV* and *Ariana TV*, accused of spreading "poi-

sonous and aggressive language towards Pakistan".

Radio stations also found their operations were hampered. In August, PEMRA refused to renew the licence of *Mast FM 103*, set up in Balakot to assist people in the regions affected by the 2005 earthquake. In November, the same radio lost a case against PEMRA, in which it was asking for the right to relay Urdu programmes from the *BBC World Service*.

Pakistan had its first cases of Internet censorship in February 2006. The Pakistan Communications Authority (PTA) blocked 12 websites which reproduced the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, published in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten*. Two months later the PTA censored five websites on the grounds that they contained "misleading information". In July, Pakistan's Internet blacklist was again extended to take in 30 new addresses, most of them linked to the Baluchistan nationalist movement, whose supporters have been fighting the army for several years to obtain their independence. In order to stop access to blogs linked to the Baluchis or Hindu extremists, the PTA for several weeks blocked all publications hosted by *blogger.com*.

# PHILIPPINES

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Area: 300,000 sq. km.  
Population: 83,050,000.  
Languages: Tagalog, English.  
Head of state: Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

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Despite new arrests of murderers, the authorities failed to stem the wave of violence against journalists. At least six were killed in 2006. And the press also found itself facing a new enemy: José Miguel Arroyo, the husband of President Gloria Arroyo, who took out a raft of defamation suits.

While her husband was lodging “defamation” complaints against more than 40 journalists, President Arroyo said, on 18 November 2006, that her government was “respectful of press freedom, an institution of Philippines democracy”. On the same day, journalist Ellen Tordesillas, a stern critic of the government received an email warning her: “Your days are numbered”. Murders, assaults, arrests, abusive law suits and censorship were the hallmark of 2006 in this country.

The avalanche of suits brought by the “first gentleman” in a country where defamation is still a criminal offence, put the liberty of scores of journalists in danger. In October, eight members of the management on privately-owned daily *Malaya* narrowly escaped arrest after publishing an editorial accusing the head of state's husband of “corruption”. In a total of 43 suits brought against journalists, José Miguel Arroyo claimed a total of 70 million pesos (almost 1.1 million euros) in damages. In December, journalists’ organisations counter-attacked by bringing a complaint in their turn against the president's husband for violating press freedom and demanding one peso in damages for each Philippine citizen.

Faced with a rebellion within the army, the president declared a state of emergency, on 24 February 2006. Several generals were locked up and the crackdown extended to the opposition press. Police searched The *Daily Tribune* on the same day and seized documents.

At least six journalists were murdered while doing their job in 2006, the majority of them were presenters on one of the country's very numerous FM radio stations. In the Philippines, local stations sell airtime to private individual known as “block timers” who can then put out their own commercial or political programmes. Rolly Canete, gunned down in January 2006 in the city of Pagadian,

Zamboanga del sur province in the south, presented programmes on local radio on behalf of a deputy and his wife, the province's governor. Hit-men sometimes show extreme determination. Fernando Batul, commentator on *dyPR* radio was shot dead on his way to work on Palawan Island, south-west of Manila in May. A few weeks earlier he narrowly escaped a murder bid in which two grenades were thrown at his home. His assailants had left a letter advising him to “hold your tongue”. A police officer was arrested a few days later and the instigators were reportedly local politicians. The local press can also be targeted in the same way. Orlando Mendoza, aged 58, editor of the newspaper *Tarlac Patro* in Luzon province was murdered in April after receiving threats from a paramilitary group.

Gloria Arroyo's administration has been widely criticised for its inability to act against the murderers of opposition and human rights activists. Some politically committed journalists have been victims of this political violence as in the case of Mazel and George Vigo who were killed on Mindanao Island in June. Community media defending the rights of peasant farmers were also targeted. In July, armed men torched a building housing *Radyo Cagayano*, one of whose presenters, a peasant union leader, was killed a few months later. The military is suspected of being behind these attacks.

Police and the courts have chalked up some successes in their struggle against the murderers of journalists. Four men found guilty of the murder of Marlene Esperat, a journalist specialising in corruption, who was killed in March 2005, were sentenced to life imprisonment. But collusion inside the justice system allowed those who ordered the killing to escape court for the time being. On the other hand, a former police officer suspected of being the “brains” behind the June 2004 murder of

# PHILIPPINES

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journalist Ely Binoya, was acquitted in March. The regional court in General Santos, southern Philippines, said that there was insufficient evidence against him.

There were at least 25 murder attempts and assaults and ten arrests during 2006. Censorship also bit deeper, often because of local politicians seeking to silence opposition media. In March the mayor of Valencia City, south of Manila, ordered the closure of radio *DXVR*, some of whose pre-

senters were close to their political opponents. In the capital, a programme of reports on *ABS-CBN* was banned by the regulatory authority over the controversial subject of drug use in the country.

Finally the authorities in Aurora province, north-east of Manila, failed to mount any search for radio presenter Joey Estriber, a specialist on environmental issues, who was kidnapped in March. He had spoken out against illegal logging in the region.

# SINGAPORE

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Area: 620 sq. km.

Population: 4,326,000.

Languages: English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil.

Head of government: Lee Hsien Loong.

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The government headed by Lee Hsien Loong, with his father Lee Kuan Yew behind the scenes, has been engaged in a fierce battle with several foreign publications and at the same time has cracked down on Singaporean bloggers and cyberdissidents.

While hosting a World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting in October 2006, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong spoke out against the international media, which he said were trying to impose "their norms and their standards" on the country in relation to freedom of expression. The head of government justified control on the press in comments in July when he said that Asian countries who got "the best financial results were those whose media was less aggressive".

The opposition was given very little opportunity to get its message across during the legislative election campaign in May. The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) was given two and a half minutes air time on TV channels while many pro-government media spread false information about opposition candidates. And the government used a number of ruses to silence critical voices. Before the campaign, they banned political podcasts which are increasingly popular in Singapore.

Under threat of a defamation suit brought by both father and son Lee, the printer of *The New Democrat*, the SDP newsletter, was forced in April to apologise and promise not to print it again. To intimidate him still further, local pro-government newspapers published rumours about his private life. Police summoned SDP secretary general Chee Soon Juan on several occasions for selling *The New Democrat* in the street.

After the ruling PAP comfortably won the election, one leader, Baey Yam Keng speaking in November called for more debate in the national media. "When I read commentaries in the press and those published on blogs, it seems to me as though they come from two different populations speaking about two different countries," he said. There was no reaction from the government.

The authorities tried to browbeat the foreign press into submission in 2006, in particular the *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*. After the paper carried an article about opposition leader Chee Soon Juan, which it called the "country's martyr" because of the numerous legal suits which he has had to face, the prime minister unleashed a series of retaliatory measures against the Hong Kong-based FEER. Lee Hsien Loong and his father brought a "defamation" case at the end of August against editor Hugo Restall and the magazine's publisher. They were also told to conform to section 23 of the law on newspapers and the written press which obliges foreign media to recruit a legal representative in the country and to pay a deposit of 200,000 Singapore dollars (100,000 euros). Four other English-language newspapers the *International Herald Tribune*, *Time*, the *Financial Times* and *Newsweek*, all received instructions to comply with the same rules when their licence expired. The FEER decided not to give in and, on the contrary, its editor announced that he planned to fight the government in the courts. At the end of September the FEER was banned from circulating in Singapore.

The Singaporean press is relatively independent as far as regional and international news goes. But it clearly operates self-censorship on domestic politics. In July the weekly column of blogger Lee Kin Mun, alias "mr brown", in the daily *Today* was axed after a criticism of a member of the government. The blogger had received several warnings.

In 2006, the government struck hard at the Internet. Several legal cases were launched for posting news, podcasts or videos on the Web. SDP activist Yap Keng Ho was sentenced in November to a fine of 2,000 dollars for posting a video of an illegal gathering of his party on his blog. Since the blogger refused to pay the fine, it was commuted to a prison sentence and he was jailed the same day for a period of ten days.

# SOUTH KOREA

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*Area: 99,260 sq. km.  
Population: 47,817,000.  
Language: Korean.  
Head of state: Roh Moo-hyun.*

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The Constitutional Court in June 2006 overturned a newspaper law passed in 2005, which contained some draconian articles. This marked a defeat for the party of President Roh Moo-hyun who sought to regulate a market dominated by the conservative press.

The Constitutional Court ruled on 29 June 2006 that the Act Governing the Guarantee of Freedom and Functions of Newspapers was contrary to freedom of the press and enterprise. "We do not see any particular danger because readers decide freely which newspaper they want to read," the judges said in relation to an article that banned the country's three principal dailies from holding more than 70% of market share. The government announced it would respect this decision.

The conservative press and in particular the three dailies *Chosun Ilbo*, *Dong-a Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo* were behind the appeal to the Constitutional Court. They had been the object of far-reaching

investigations by the Fair Trade Commission in 2006 in relation to accusations that they were offering their subscribers advantages which damaged free competition.

Elsewhere, in November an appeal court sentenced a journalist on *MBC* to a six-month suspended prison sentence, for broadcasting recordings of conversations between managers of the company Samsung. In August, judges in Seoul had found in favour of the journalist in the name of press freedom.

Finally, the law on national security still allows the government to censor publications or block access to websites favourable to North Korea.



## SRI LANKA

Area: 65,610 sq. km.  
Population: 20,743,000.  
Languages: Sinhala, Tamil, English.  
Head of state: Mahinda Rajapakse.

The resumption of the civil war had dramatic consequences for Sri Lankan journalists and in particular the Tamils. Seven media workers were killed in 2006. Pro-government militia (predators of press freedom) and occasionally the army have attacked the press which they accuse of supporting Tamil nationalism. On the other side, the Tiger Tamils threatened those who oppose their political position.

The escalation of the conflict pitting the army against the Tiger Tamils (LTTE) forced scores of Tamil journalists into silence or hiding. Most correspondents for Tamil media in the east of the country no longer have their by-line on their reports for fear of reprisals. "Investigative journalism is dead in the Tamil media and everyone is self-censoring", said the editor of one media, himself a target of intimidation. The war against the Tamil press has reached the most respected and influential journalists. In August, the news editor of privately-owned radio *Sooriyan*, Nadarajah Guruparan, was kidnapped and held for a day by unknown hostage-takers who threatened him with reprisals. Then, in November, the editor of the *Shakthi* television was threatened with death after giving extensive coverage to the assassination of a Tamil parliamentarian.

Three journalists and four media assistants were killed in 2006. No suspects have so far been arrested. In January, Subramaniam Sugirdharajan, correspondent for the Tamil daily *Sudar Oli* in Trincomalee, eastern Nepal, was murdered the day after writing an article about excesses committed by pro-government paramilitary groups in his region. In July, the independent Sinhala journalist Sampath Lakmal was found dead in Colombo. The following month, Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah, politician and editor of a Tamil nationalist newspaper was shot dead at his home in Jaffna.

There is total impunity for these killers in Sri Lanka. Investigations into murders of journalists, including that of Dharmaratnam Sivaram, editor of the news website *Tamilnet* and editorialist on the *Daily Mirror*, killed in 2005, have been blocked by the authorities. The suspects - militants in pro-government Tamil militia - have never been troubled by the police, even though some of them were clearly identified by the investigators.

For fear of being next on the list of journalists killed, many have stopped working as journalists or have fled the country. In December, photographer Auruddha Lokuhapuarachchi of *Reuters* news agency sought refuge in India after being threatened for his coverage of the plight of Tamil residents in the east and north of the country. A few days earlier, Sinhala journalist Rohitha Bashana Abeywardena, fled to Europe to escape threats.

The army attacked media accused of relaying Tiger Tamil propaganda, which they termed terrorist. In October, the studios of *Voice of Tigers* radio near Kilinochchi, in an LTTE-controlled area was hit and destroyed by air strikes injuring two employees. The military imposed new restrictions on the movements of the press reporting from the field. As a result, the army and the LTTE prevented reporters from reaching the site of a battle around Muttur, in August. In November, officers summoned newspaper managers in Jaffna and ordered them not to publish news coming from the Tamil Tigers.

The daily *Uthayan*, published in Jaffna had three employees killed in 2006. Its offices came under murderous attack on 2 May, eve of World Press Freedom Day, celebrated by UNESCO in Colombo on 3 May. Armed men believed to be pro-government militia sprayed its offices with machine-gun fire, killing two staff members, the day after it carried a cartoon of Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a member of the ruling coalition. A few weeks later, a newspaper vendor selling the daily was killed by soldiers in the streets of Jaffna. In August, armed men threatened fresh reprisals if the paper published a statement from striking students, and then set fire to its presses. At the end of the year, soldiers blocked its news print supply.



## SRI LANKA

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Tamil media also suffered serious interference with distribution in the east of the country. Distributors on several occasions were forced to stop selling some papers in the face of death threats from pro-government militia headed by Colonel Karuna. These were *Virakesari*, *Thinakural* and *Sudar Oli*. The state-run Tamil newspaper *Thinakaran* was not interfered with however.

Under strong press criticism, President Mahinda Rajapakse and his government stepped up their control over state-run media. At least two journalists, including Rajpal Abenayaka, editor of the government weekly *Sunday Observer*, were removed from their posts after publishing news seen as too independent. Two state radio programmes were

also pulled because they reported on the ethnic conflict in outspoken terms. The government in November also used a 1966 law on good social behaviour to block *Raja FM*, supposedly broadcasting shocking programmes about sexuality.

Finally, hate campaigns were launched in extremist Sinhala press, particularly those linked to the nationalist JVP party, against journalists and non-governmental organisations accused of supporting the Tamil Tigers. Anger was unleashed online, where independent media were regularly threatened by supporters or opponents of the Tamil Tigers. The Tamil and Sinhala services of the *BBC World Service* were successively attacked by both camps.

# TAIWAN

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*Area: 35,980 sq. km.*

*Population: 22,715,000.*

*Language: Mandarin.*

*Head of state: Chen Shui-bian.*

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The press produced massive coverage of corruption cases implicating the family of President Chen Shui-bian. Pluralism is an established reality on the island, but political tensions had a negative impact on the work of journalists.

Four journalists were manhandled in September 2006, during a demonstration in Taipei in support of President Chen Shui-bian. At the same demonstration, a presenter for satellite channel *CTi*, was physically assaulted for interviewing two deputies in the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, the protestors believing they should not be interviewed by a channel so close to the opposition Kuomintang party. In December, leaders of the ruling party said they were refusing to reply to questions from the *China Times*, a pro-opposition daily.

In April, a court in Taipei sentenced Kao Nien-yi, a journalist on the *United Daily News*, to a fine of 30,000 Taiwanese dollars (770 euros) per day for refusing to reveal his sources in a financial scandal. The sentence was applied for three days before it was suspended.

Under pressure from China, Taiwan's journalists are still ostracised internationally. The UN in May repeated its refusal to accredit journalists from Taiwan to cover the body's meetings in Geneva.

# THAILAND

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*Area: 514,000 sq. km.*

*Population: 64,233,000.*

*Language: Thai.*

*Head of government: General Surayud Chulanont.*

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Before he was overthrown in a military coup in September, Thaksin Shinawatra had continued to weaken the independence of the media and to harass dissidents. The government set up by the junta has not lifted pressure or censorship, particularly online.

The year 2006 turned into a nightmare for Prime Minister and media magnate Thaksin Shinawatra. At the start of the year, the Thaksin clan suffered a stinging defeat in the courts with the victory of press freedom activist Supinya Klangnarong whom it had tried to gag. She had in particular condemned the head of state's conflict of interests. Under growing pressure from street demonstrations, Thaksin Shinawatra mobilised his supporters against media hostile to the government. At least six journalists were physically attacked or threatened in April by some of his supporters. Despite his promises, the prime minister continued to bring "defamation" suits against media who criticised him, demanding grossly inflated damages. In 2006, at least five journalists were sacked as a result of government pressure.

The leading newspapers decided to make a stand against the interventionism of the Thaksin government and in May carried a collective editorial in which they stressed their commitment to public service journalism. The Thai Journalists' Association (TJA) also campaigned for defamation to be decriminalised.

During the 19 September coup, troops were deployed around TV stations and the junta, which proclaimed itself the National Security Council, threatened to bring back censorship. The national terrestrial channels along with *CNN* and the *BBC* broadcast on cable were blacked out for several hours, apart from the independent *Nation TV*. A few hours after the coup, the new information minister instructed the media to be "co-operative" and "to limit, control, stop or destroy news which could damage the constitutional monarchy". In the days following the coup, around 300 community radios suspected of supporting Thaksin Shinawatra, were shut down in the northern provinces.

General Surayud Chulanont, who was named as interim prime minister on 1st October, promised to guarantee press freedom and to draw up a new constitution, to "cleanse the country of corruption" and to pacify the Muslim south. It was only on 11 December that the government lifted martial law in 40 of the country's 76 provinces. A thousand people took advantage of the situation to urge Bangkok to restore the 1997 constitution, of which Articles 39, 40 and 41 guaranteed press freedom.

The press, which was mostly favourable to the departure of Thaksin, did not get much more freedom from the military government. Journalists questioned by Reporters Without Borders confirmed that they were still under pressure. When in December the administration presented a budget in which military spending was hiked by 34%, the press did not dare publish critical editorials. Likewise, the Thai Journalists' Broadcast Association (TJBA) said in October that the television was no freer after the end of the Thaksin regime. "In the past, we suffered from self-censorship. Today, we cannot even investigate the activities of the junta (...) we are being stifled", said one of the organisers of the TBJA, three weeks after the coup.

Under the threat of the crime of "lese majesty", punishable by 15 years in prison, the press is very limited in talking about King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his family, who quickly gave their support to the military government. During anti-government demonstrations, Thaksin Shinawatra and his opponents mutually accused each other of such an offence, putting several media magnates, including his fierce opponent Sondhi Limthongkul, at risk of being sentenced to heavy prison terms.

The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology acknowledges that it blocks thousands

# THAILAND

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of website, most of them pornographic. A few sites criticising the king or condemning corruption are also filtered. In the days after the coup, there was an increase in cases of political censorship online.

Some pages of the *BBC* and *CMN*, along with Thai online publications hostile to the army takeover, were made inaccessible. By the end of 2006, filtering of the Internet had returned to its usual level.



# VIETNAM

Area: 331,690 sq. km.  
Population: 84,238,000.  
Language: Vietnamese.  
Head of state: Nguyen Minh Triet.

As a dissident press emerged in 2006, the liberal media pushed at the boundaries of censorship. The government initially adopted an illiberal law then, at the end of the year, threatened to bring the media nationwide to heel.

Everything seemed to be smiling on the Vietnamese press at the start of 2006. In April, a dissident publication *Tu Do Ngon Luan* began appearing in the big cities and online. In the aftermath of the founding of a new dissident movement, Bloc 8406 (created on 8 April 2006), a second paper *Tu Do Dan Chu* (Freedom and Democracy) was launched in August. But police quickly summoned and placed under surveillance dissident journalists Hoang Tien, Nguyen Khac Toan, Nguyen Van Dai, Duong Thi Xuan and Bach Ngoc Duong. Two other publications - *To Quoc* (Fatherland) and *Dan Chu* (Democracy) - were produced online from within Vietnam. In defiance of the government, journalists and dissident bloggers even went so far as to rally to the Free Journalists Association, a first in Vietnam.

On the other hand, the officially sanctioned press (nearly 600 publications, around 100 radio and TV stations, around 100 websites) took advantage of the preparations for the communist party congress to raise the most sensitive issues. An article carried by a newspaper in Ho Chi Minh City implicitly challenged Article 4 of the Constitution which underscores the predominance of the party over the state. The conservatives immediately condemned this unwelcome drift in the official newspaper *Nhan Dan*, party ideologue Nguyen Duc Binh saying that, "open discussions are dangerous".

The liberal press, led by *Tuoi Tre* (Youth), also distinguished itself by its outspokenness during a scandal in which a transport minister was implicated in a corruption case. *Tuoi Tre*, whose reporter was assaulted while investigating this case in Hanoi, openly called for the minister to resign. The government reacted by bringing in a new law in July punishing media and journalists defaming and attacking the prestige of the state. This decree also targeted news which "violates cultural traditions, distorts historical reality, denies revolutionary

achievements, and harms the nation, great men and national heroes." The law did not provide for prison sentences but for fines and suspensions. In October, the culture ministry used the law to temporarily shut down two publications and to sanction two others which had carried articles on a scandal linked to the release of new bank notes.

During the congress in April, Nong Duc Manh, predator of press freedom, was re-elected for five years as head of the communist party with 80% of the vote. Prime Minister Phan Van Khai was replaced by Nguyen Tan Dung, an orthodox communist nevertheless seen as an economic reformer. Conservatives still control the security services so as to prevent those contesting the sole party from doing any damage. In November, three Americans of Vietnamese origin and four vietnamese were sentenced to 15 months in prison for "terrorism". The seven, who were linked to a US-based radical group, were accused of illegally bringing broadcast equipment into the country with the aim of putting out anti-government messages. Elsewhere, foreign journalists are still denied free access to the country's mountainous centre, home to ethnic minorities whose rights are trampled on by the authorities.

Repression of dissident activities was stepped up in November, in the run-up to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hanoi. Journalists working for independent publications *Tu Do Ngon Luan* and *Tu Do Dan Chu* were put under house arrest, with notices in front of their homes reading, "Security zone. No foreigners". Police deployed for several days in front of the home of Hoang Tien, while newly-released cyber-dissident Pham Hong Son was savagely beaten by police.

Once the foreign delegations had left Vietnam, the government launched its counter-attack. The foreign ministry spokesman, Le Dung, said it was

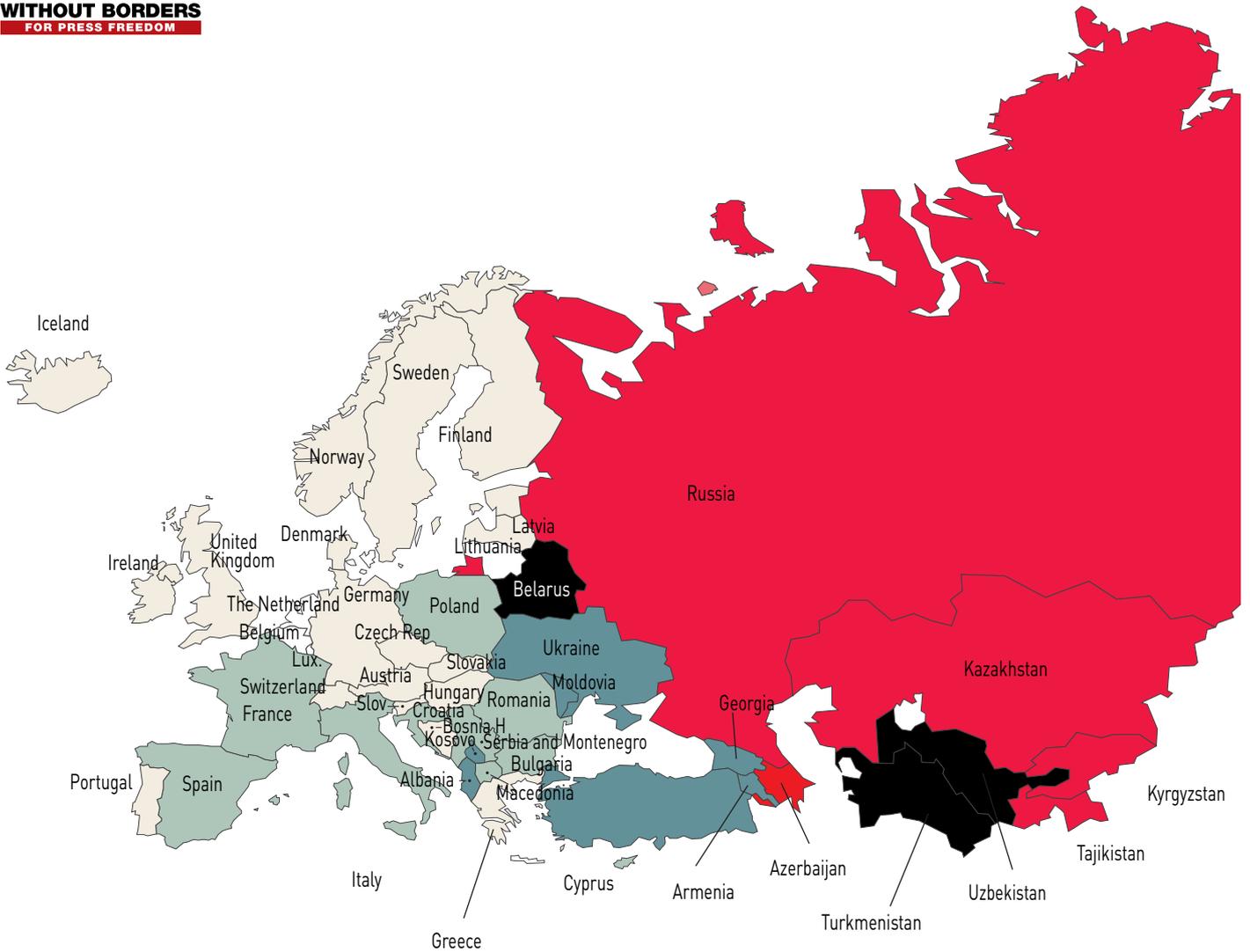


# VIETNAM

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unacceptable that people should abuse the “mask of democracy, with false, distorted and invented claims about the situation in Vietnam”. The authorities gave a firm reminder that dissident publications were illegal.

In the face of this crackdown, Father Phan Van Loi, founder of *Tu Do Ngon Luan*, wrote to Reporters Without Borders: “We want to deliver a message to the party and the people: Only the truth frees!”



# 2007 Annual Report

## EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC

## THE TEMPTATION TO BAN

2006 was a very worrying year for press freedom in Europe, not just in countries whose governments naturally caused anxiety but also in European Union (EU) member-states. Moves to censor or self-censor appeared, sometimes violently, concerning religious topics. The range of subjects that can be covered freely also shrank, with harming the reputation of the state and denying or mentioning historical events drawing threats or legal action. The banning in three countries, including Turkey, of the January-February 2007 issue of the magazine *Historia* about religious fundamentalism is the most recent example.

Western Europe, and also Turkey, were frequently tempted to ban some topics from public discussion. The row over a Danish paper's September 2005 publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed and the reprinting of them in solidarity in several countries spread across Europe and beyond. Supporters of freedom of expression faced those who said religious feelings should be respected. French newspapers *France Soir* and *Charlie Hebdo*, which both reprinted all 12 cartoons, were legally challenged by the French Muslim Council.

French philosopher Robert Redeker was threatened in southern France for a very critical article he wrote about Islam. A leading opera house in Germany cancelled performances of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo* for fear of Muslim reaction. Other concerns were a new law in France banning denial of the 1915 Armenian genocide and Turkey's frequent use of article 301 of its criminal code to prosecute journalists and intellectuals mentioning the genocide.

The situation was grim in Russia, where campaigning reporter Anna Politkovskaya became the third journalist to be murdered during the year on 7 October, after Yevgeny Gerasimenko and Ilya Zimin, Moscow correspondent for the nationwide NTV network. Twenty-one journalists have now been killed since President Vladimir Putin came to power in March 2000. New media takeovers by firms close to the Kremlin and lack of broadcast news diversity showed Putin's determination to increase his control of the media.

Five journalists were murdered in the former Soviet bloc countries in 2006, including leading investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, showing the problems this region has in shaking off its authoritarian past.

Greater press freedom since the 2004 "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine was offset in 2006 by physical attacks on journalists and failure to satisfactorily resolve the murder of journalist Georgy Gongadze. The campaign for the November presidential election in Tajikistan saw websites shut down and very unequal media access for candidates.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko was reelected with 80% of the vote in March in grim conditions, having virtually eradicated the independent media since coming to power in 1994 and returned the country to the era of clandestine publications. Violence and physical attacks on journalists and hounding of the opposition press also made it a dark year in Azerbaijan.

Things did not improve either in Central Asia. The regime in Uzbekistan maintained pressure on independent local and foreign media. The Kazakh government stepped up legal harassment of opposition media and a young French journalist was murdered.

In Turkmenistan, which has the world's worst press freedom record along with North Korea, the local correspondent for *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* died in prison while serving a six-year sentence for working with foreign media. Two other journalists were given similar sentences for the same reason on 25 August and have not been heard of since. The death of "President-for-Life" Saparmurad Nyazov in December raised hopes for liberalisation of one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

Elsa Vidal  
Head of Europe desk

## AZERBAIJAN

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Area: 86,600 sq.km.

Population: 8,410,000.

Language: Azeri.

Head of state: Ilham Aliiev.

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The regime frequently uses violence and threats against the media and the country came near the bottom of the 2006 worldwide press freedom index.

A court in Yasamal rejected a complaint on 27 January 2006 filed by journalist Sarvan Rizvanov (of the Turan news agency) against police officer Col. Chingiz Mamedov for hitting him with an iron bar during an authorised demonstration on 9 November 2005. The local prosecutor refused to take action and ignored medical reports and photos taken of the attack.

Fikret Huseynli, of the main opposition daily *Azadlig*, was kidnapped and badly beaten in Baku on 5 March 2006. He was on his way to the Badamdar district for his work when he was knocked unconscious from behind. When he came to he was in a car with three men who took him to the outskirts of the capital and threw him out. They broke his fingers, stabbed him in the neck and left him for dead at the roadside. He was later found and taken to hospital.

The editor of the opposition daily *Bizim Yol*, Bahaddin Khaziev, was kidnapped from his car on the night of 18 May by five men who put a sack over his head, beat him and ordered him to stop writing articles. They then left him for dead near a lake about 20 km outside the capital after driving over his legs. He was found unconscious the next morning and taken to hospital in critical condition. He had reported on caviar smuggling and on corruption by a top security ministry official. Local and foreign pressure obliged the authorities to open an enquiry into the attack but many people demonstrating in support of Khaziev were arrested.

Journalist and writer Sakit Zahidov, of *Azadlig*, was arrested on 23 June and charged with possessing a large quantity of drugs with intent to sell it. A support committee of prominent people, independent journalists, politicians and human rights activists called for his release. Zahidov said 10 grammes of heroin police claimed they found on him had been

planted by them. Medical tests showed he was not a drug-user. He began a 10-day hunger-strike on 25 July to protest against his detention. He was given a three-year prison sentence on 4 October, even though the prosecution failed to prove he had bought, consumed and intended to sell the heroin.

Journalists and opponents of President Ilham Aliiev stepped up their campaign against the regime in October after the authorities said they were expelling the opposition papers *Azadlig* and *Bizim Yol*, the main independent TV station *ANS*, the *Turan* news agency and the Azerbaijan Popular Front party from their offices in central Baku. Delegates of the *Azadlig* ("Freedom") opposition coalition began a hunger-strike on 30 October and were joined on 9 November by representatives of the independent media in protest against what they called "the government's unofficial war on the free press."

But the regime went ahead and evicted *Azadlig* and *Turan* on 25 November from their offices to new premises on the outskirts of the city, some of which were already occupied. Equipment and archives were badly damaged during the forced move. The state broadcasting council announced the same day it was cancelling the operating permit of *ANS TV* and the station went off the air a few hours later. The council also said it would ban the transmission in the country of the *BBC*, *Voice of America* and *Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe* from 1 January 2007.

The killer of editor Elmar Huseynov, of the newspaper *Monitor*, who was shot dead in March 2005, has still not been identified. The public prosecutor on 8 August 2006 accused former economic development minister Farkhad Aliiev, whom Huseynov had often strongly criticised, of being involved in the murder. Aliiev strongly denied this.

## BELARUS



Area: 207,600 sq.km.  
Population: 9,755,000.  
Languages: Belarusian, Russian.  
Head of state: Alexander Lukashenko.

President Alexander Lukashenko's reelection with more than 80% of the vote in very tense conditions on 19 March 2006 showed his firm intent to resist the wind of change in neighbouring Ukraine. The deplorable press freedom situation in Belarus did not improve and Lukashenko has managed in his three terms of office to silence nearly all opposition and independent media.

Many foreign journalists were deported or refused entry visas in spring 2006, including Laure Mandeville, of the French daily *Le Figaro*, who was officially told she had written "lies" about the situation in Belarus.

Repression focused on media outlets giving a voice to the opposition or simply mentioning its existence. At least nine journalists were arrested and beaten on 2 March by plainclothes police while reporting on the arrest of opposition presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin. A week later, all 250,000 copies of a special edition of the independent paper *Narodnaya Volia* about Kazulin were seized. Distribution of three independent papers containing manifestos of opposition candidates was prevented by their Russian printing firm which broke off its contracts with them. Police on 17 March seized 200,000 copies of the opposition paper *Tovarishch* (which had been closed for several months) because they contained the manifesto of presidential candidate Alexander Milinkevich.

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) said the state-run TV station *ONT* gave 89% of its airtime to election candidates between 21 February and 4 March. Two opposition candidates - Milinkevich and Sergei Gaidukevich - were not mentioned at all, while a third, Kazulin, got just 0.4% of the airtime.

The free media has almost disappeared or been forced underground as in Soviet times. Printing and distribution of newspapers is done by monopoly state firms and the state post office *Belpochta*, which has a monopoly on handling subscription copies, said it would stop distributing in 2007 four national papers (*Narodnaya Volia*, *Nasha Niva*, *Tovarishch*, *Svobodnie Novosti Plus*) and more than a dozen regional ones.

Systematic legal hounding by the authorities of media outlets that stray from the official line enables them to be silenced through bankrupting them. Suspension of the cultural magazine *Arche* was confirmed on 8 November on grounds that its September issue had contravened the magazine's licence terms banning it from mentioning politics. The cover photo showed police breaking up an opposition protest in March and an article detailed a 1995 crackdown on opposition MPs who were protesting a referendum imposed by Lukashenko to make Russian one of the country's official languages.

The suspension threatened the magazine's existence. The post office told *Arche* that if its next issue did not appear before 18 December, it would stop distributing the magazine. Journalist Valentin Akudovich said the magazine "would never recover - the regime has banned it from newsstands, then from bookshops and now from simply appearing."

Administrative reasons were used as a threat to suspend the country's oldest independent weekly, *Nasha Niva*, on the eve of its centenary. The information ministry said the November issue failed to mention its editorial address, thus violating article 26 of the press law. The weekly's application for a licence to send out subscription copies was refused in April. It had not been distributed by the post office since January and had managed to publish thanks to private donations and to printing fewer copies (only 2,500).

The investigation of the July 2000 disappearance of cameraman Dmitri Zavadski was closed again on 31 March 2006, after being reopened in April 2005. The prosecutor-general's office cited an article of the criminal code allowing closure in case of "failure in a search for a disappeared person." Zavadski's body has not been found since he vanished at Minsk airport.

## BELARUS

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The government has a monopoly of telecommunications and does not hesitate to block access to opposition websites if it feels the need, especially at election time. Independent online publications are

also often hacked. In March 2006, for example, several websites critical of President Alexandre Lukashenko mysteriously disappeared from the Internet for several days.

## BULGARIA

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*Area: 110,910 sq.km.  
Population: 7,965,000.  
Language: Bulgarian.  
Head of state: Georgi Parvanov.*

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Reforms were introduced in preparation for the country's entry into the European Union on 1 January 2007. Meanwhile organised crime and corruption are priority problems that undermine Bulgarian society and affect the work of journalists.

Organised crime is a huge problem in Bulgaria, with corruption and money-laundering so pervasive that they affect the whole society and hamper the work of journalists. A bomb went off in front of the Sofia home of Vasil Ivanov, of the *Nova TV* station, early on 6 April, destroying the apartment but causing no casualties. Ivanov's mother was in at the time but miraculously survived.

Investigators suspected the blast was connected with Ivanov's work. He had received regular death threats during the previous year because of his reporting on enquiries into organised crime and had to have bodyguards. At the end of 2005, he had reported on a solicitor who certified stolen vehicle sales without checking the relevant papers. Ivanov had obtained proof by "purchasing" vehicles belonging to the former prosecutor-general and even President Georgy Parvanov.

Access to public information generally improved in 2006. After declassification of a first spate of Communist-era material (halted in 2002 at NATO's request), the government said it was opening up nearly 250,000 files as their legal confidentiality expired. Interior minister Rumen Petkov said on 20 May that several journalists, including

*Nova TV's* political commentator, Georgy Koritarov, and former presenter Kevork Kevorkian, had been recruited by the communist secret police in the 1970s.

Koritarov admitted he had worked with the secret police, especially in fact-finding missions to Yugoslavia, China, Romania and Albania. But Tocho Tochev (editor of the daily *Trud*) and freelance journalist Angelina Petrova, who were also accused of collaboration, protested and won a letter of apology from the ministry, as did two other journalists (Ivo Inzhev and Ivan Garelov) wrongly suspected of belonging to the secret police.

These sensational revelations revived the heated debate on the subject. The prime minister favoured destroyed the archives but on 6 December parliament voted to extensively open up the files and even post online the names of politicians, judges, diplomats and journalists who had been agents or had worked with the espionage and counter-espionage services until July 1991, when these bodies were disbanded. The names of department heads up til July 1990 will also be released. But none of the exposed people will be prosecuted.

## DENMARK

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Area: 43,090 sq.km.

Population: 5,430,000.

Language: Danish.

Head of government: Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

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Publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in 2005 continued to stir impassioned debate in Denmark in 2006. Three journalists on the *Berlingske Tidende* were also prosecuted for "undermining state security," which threatened to create an unfortunate precedent in a country with one of the world's best records for press freedom.

Publication by the daily *Jyllands-Posten* of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed on 30 September 2005 sparked a huge crisis between Denmark and Muslim countries and quickly spread to other European states, some of whose media outlets reprinted them in solidarity. *Jyllands-Posten* editor Carsten Juste formally apologised to Muslims on 30 January 2006 on the paper's behalf, but this was not enough to avoid a bomb scare and evacuation of the building shared by the paper and the Danish news agency *Ritzau*.

Prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who had originally defended freedom of expression, yielded to heavy pressure and implicitly deplored publication of the cartoons. But Flemming Rose, cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, defended on 19 February his decision to publish the cartoons in the first place as a legitimate journalistic subject and said he opposed the media giving special treatment to Islam. He was later sent on indefinite leave by the paper.

Denmark's excellent reputation for press freedom was threatened when two journalists of the daily *Berlingske Tidende* were prosecuted in April 2006

for publishing extracts in February and March 2004 from a Danish intelligence service report saying there was no serious evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The supposed existence of them was used by the Danish government to justify its participation in the US occupation of Iraq. The two journalists, Michael Bjerre and Jesper Larsen, were charged with "publishing material illegally obtained by a third party." Frank Grevil, the military intelligence officer who passed on the report to them, was given a four-month prison sentence in 2005.

The charges against the two journalists were increased in April 2006 and the paper's editor, Niels Lunde, was also charged. All three went on trial in November for "undermining state security" and faced up to two years in prison. They were cleared on 4 December to the relief of the country's media. The case emphasises how secrecy of journalistic sources is crucial to press freedom in Europe.

## FRANCE

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Area: 551,500 sq.km.  
Population: 60,496,000.  
Language: French.  
Head of state: Jacques Chirac.

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**Respect for religious beliefs and private life and for the right not to reveal journalistic sources were at the centre of the press freedom debate during 2006.**

The managing editor of the daily *France Soir*, Jacques Lefranc, was dismissed by the paper's French-Egyptian owner, Raymond Lakah, for reprinting 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed on 1 February that were first published by a Danish newspaper. Five days later, on 6 February, a bomb threat was made to the paper.

The day before, a fire extinguisher had been placed outside the offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, hinting at an imminent attack. A legal effort by Muslim organisations, including the French Muslim Council (CFCM), to obtain seizure of the issue of the weekly devoted entirely to the cartoons, failed on 7 February. The CFCM began legal action on 10 February against French papers that had reprinted the cartoons. An article in the daily *Le Figaro* by philosophy teacher Robert Redeker headed "What should the free world do about Islamism intimidation?" got the issue of the paper banned in Egypt and Tunisia. Redeker was given police protection after getting death threats and had to stop his teaching activities.

So-called "revisionist" laws also substituted ideology for debate, as shown by the National Assembly's passage of a Socialist proposal banning denial of the 1915 Armenian massacres on pain of five years in prison and a fine of €45,000 euros, thus helping to build an official version of history and shutting down debate, which is against the principle of freedom of expression.

As in the previous year, 2006 saw numerous prosecutions of journalists in a bid to make them reveal their sources. Justice minister Pascal Clément pro-

mised however to include privacy of sources in the revised 1881 press law. This did not stop the formal investigation of six journalists for "possessing legally confidential material" (two journalists of *L'Equipe*), "violating professional secrecy" (*Midi Libre*) and "violating confidentiality" (in the Clearstream corruption scandal). A Paris court's dismissal of charges against journalist Claude Ardid on 14 November was a welcome contrast. The court said a journalist's only job was to help inform the public, including in ongoing legal cases, and could not be interfered with except where freedom of expression was abused but not because of violations of secrecy that have helped to inform the public."

The aim of restricting journalists is also behind the protection of the private life of public figures. The dismissal of Alain Genestar as editor of *Paris-Match* in June 2006 aroused strong protests. He said he had been removed because he printed a cover photo on 25 August 2005 of conservative leader Nicolas Sarkozy's wife Cécilia in New York with her boyfriend. The magazine's owners, Lagardère, a friend of Nicolas Sarkozy, claimed he had been dismissed because of a "professional" dispute.

The situation remained worrying in New Caledonia, where the media was frequently accused in local conflicts. Things at the broadcaster *RFO* returned to normal in November after eight months of intermittent disputes. But the printing press of the weekly paper *Les Infos* was shut down in late August and early September, and that of the daily *Les Nouvelles calédoniennes* briefly in November. Journalists were frequently barred from press conferences or prevented from filming.

## GERMANY

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Area: 357,030 sq.km.  
Population: 82,689,000.  
Language: German.  
Head of government: Angela Merkel.

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Spying on the media by the intelligence services and police to discover journalistic sources was a hot topic in 2006 and several journalists were prosecuted for "complicity in disclosing state secrets." The new freedom of information law came into effect but implementation was not satisfactory.

Freelance journalist Bruno Schirra and Johannes von Dohnanyi, foreign editor of the Swiss weekly *SonntagsBlick*, were charged on 15 March 2006 with "complicity in disclosing state secrets" along with Wolfram Weimer, editor of the political magazine *Cicero*. The Potsdam prosecutor said Schirra included in an April 2005 *Cicero* article part of a confidential police report on Al-Qaeda that von Dohnanyi had passed on to him. In September that year, police violated the right to secrecy of journalistic sources (article 53 of the code of criminal procedure) by searching the magazine's offices and Schirra's house.

Weimer agreed to pay a fine of €1,000 in exchange for the dropping of charges, but refused to admit his guilt and said he had wanted to speed up the legal process and get a decision from the Constitutional Court, which on 22 November 2006 began hearing his appeal against the police search as a violation of press freedom. A verdict is expected in 2007.

The Potsdam regional court overruled a decision against Schirra and von Dohnanyi in July 2006. It argued that the state secret had already been disclosed when the information was passed to Schirra. It also said the content of the confidential report was known to a French journalist months before the article appeared in *Cicero*.

Two opposition parties in the German parliament, the FDP and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, are pushing for a new law to protect journalists from prosecution for "complicity in disclosing state secrets."

The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* revealed on 12 May that a former senior judge had said in a confidential report to a parliamentary commission that the German intelligence service BND had spied on journalists between 1990 and late 2005 to discover which of its officials were leaking material to the media. Major magazines *Stern* and *Der Spiegel* then found out they had been spied on. The government was forced to react

on 15 May by banning the BND from spying on journalists. The report, which was eventually published on 26 May, said that as well as tapping journalists' phones, the BND had paid some journalists to spy on their colleagues.

Another phone-tapping case was revealed in December by *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which said conversations between journalists of *Stern* and of the publicly-run TV station ZDF with the lawyer of Khaled el-Masri, a German citizen kidnapped in 2003 and held in Afghanistan until May 2004 had been spied on. The public prosecutor had ordered the phone-tapping in January 2006 to obtain information about the kidnapers of Masri, whose lawyer, Manfred Gnjidic, appealed against the phone-tapping to the constitutional court.

*Der Tagesspiegel* cartoonist Klaus Stuttmann received death threats after one of his cartoons appeared in the paper on 17 February. With the caption "Why the army must be present," it showed four Iranian football players with explosives strapped to them standing next to armed German soldiers. It was an ironic comment on the debate about use of the army during the soccer World Cup.

A day after the 17 September elections in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, two journalists were attacked by supporters of the extreme right-wing NPD party while taking pictures of and filming party members. A journalist and photographer were attacked and beaten while covering a neo-nazi-meeting on 4 November

A new freedom of information law came into effect in January 2006. The law officially guarantees access to such data but includes many exceptions for reasons of supposed public and national security and requires that disclosure of information about a company must be approved by the company itself. Those seeking information must also pay for it.

## ITALY

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*Area: 301,340 sq.km.*

*Population: 58,093,000.*

*Language: Italian.*

*Head of government: Romano Prodi.*

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Press freedom and independence were a major issue in the April 2006 parliamentary election campaign, during which outgoing prime minister Silvio Berlusconi was sanctioned at least three times for overshooting his allotted media-time. As in many European countries, protecting journalistic sources became an issue when police searched the premises of daily papers.

The 9-10 April parliamentary elections were won by the centre-left coalition of Romano Prodi, who became prime minister, replacing Silvio Berlusconi, who was rebuked at least three times for violating electoral law. On 7 April, Berlusconi unexpectedly appeared on the TV station *Rete 4* and was interviewed for 20 minutes, despite the intervention of the state broadcasting regulator. The station belongs to the Berlusconi-family-owned *Mediaset* group, which was fined three times, including €250,000 on one occasion, for bias in favour of its owner's centre-right coalition. The regulator accused *Rete 4* of inviting Berlusconi to appear on the programme "Liberi Tutti" without any opponent and only with journalists who supported him.

The offices of the daily *Repubblica* in Rome and Milan, and those of the daily *Piccolo* in Trieste, were searched by tax police on 11 August as part of an investigation into the 2003 CIA kidnapping of former Imam Abu Omar. The homes of two journalists - Cristina Zagaria and Claudio Ern  - were also searched and they were accused of "violating legal confidentiality" and "possessing secret documents" for quoting a military intelligence official about the case in their respective papers. The tendency to prosecute journalists for revealing confidential information spread throughout Europe during the year.

The supreme court on 26 October cleared journalist Mario Spezi of involvement in the 1985 murder of a Tuscan doctor and of "insults" for his investigation of a series of unexplained murders (the Monster of Florence case). Spezi, who had been arrested on 7 April and had covered the case for the daily *La Nazione*, was writing a book about the murders that challenged the police version.

The Perugia prosecutor ordered his home to be searched in November 2004 and police seized material for articles he wrote for the paper in the 1970s and in the 1980s. They also took away computer files and all material to do with his book. He spent 23 days in prison in 2006 and the judge in the case agreed to the prosecutor's request to hold him in secret for five days, treatment usually reserved for the most dangerous criminals.

Blogger Roberto Mancini was fined €13,500 on 26 May for allowing readers of his blog to post libellous comments about local journalists, a decision that clashed with European jurisprudence and could harm the country's blogosphere by making editors inclined to unduly censor visitors to their sites.

## KAZAKHSTAN



Area: 2,724,900 sq.km.  
Population: 14,825,000.  
Language: Kazakh.  
Head of state: Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The crackdown on opposition and media in the run-up to the December 2005 election that gave President Nursultan Nazarbayev a new seven-year term barely let up in 2006 and prosecutions for “defaming” him continued, along with closure of opposition papers and physical attacks on journalists. A young French journalist was also murdered in Almaty.

An opposition leader, Altynbek Sarsenbayev, and two aides were shot dead in February and the opposition media joined a protest movement calling for a thorough investigation. Editor Yergaliev Gulzhan, of *Svoboda Slova*, was given a 10-day prison sentence in March for saying President Nazarbayev and his daughter (member of parliament Darigha Nazarbayeva) were behind the murders.

Two months later, journalist Kazis Toguzbayev was prosecuted by the committee for national security for supposedly harming the president’s “dignity and reputation” (article 318 of the criminal code) in a 3 May article on website [www.kub.kz](http://www.kub.kz) headed “Mafia regime shadows the murder of Altynbek Sarsenbayev” and accusing the authorities of not investigating the murder energetically enough. His trial began on 23 November and he faces up to three years in prison and a fine of up to \$7,600. He was banned from leaving Almaty.

The regime continued to target the opposition press. Kenzhegali Aitbakiev, a sub-editor of the weekly *Ayna-Plus* (whose liquidation had been ordered in early April after being sued for libelling Nazarbayev), was attacked and beaten up by a dozen men near his home on 23 April and lay unconscious in the street for three hours before being taken to hospital for an emergency operation for a fractured skull and jaw.

*Ayna Plus* had only started up in January as a new version of the opposition newspaper *Dat*, founded in 1998 and several times forced to change its

name (*SolDat*, *Juma Times*, *Ayna-Plus*) to keep going in the face of several judicial liquidations, like other publications.

Nazarbayev decreed amendments to the press law on 5 July, setting up a fund to pay libel damages (to which all media had to belong), providing for a three-year ban on working as a journalist for those with a media-outlet ordered closed and a ban on newspapers reusing or partly changing the name of a paper shut down by the authorities. Registration with the information ministry was tightened and re-registration made compulsory whenever a media-outlet changed its editor, address or the number of copies it printed, on pain of heavy fines.

French journalist Grégoire de Bourgues, 24, was murdered at his apartment in Almaty on 2 August. He had been in the country for three months writing an advertising feature for the government. Police said he was the victim of a botched robbery by three men who broke into his apartment and killed him before getting away with about €5,000, his mobile phone and laptop computer. Police arrested two suspects in late August and said a third man was being sought.

Reporters Without Borders went to Kazakhstan in September to investigate, met government officials and investigators and managed to win access for the family’s lawyers to the case files and permission to participate in the trial. The family lodged a legal complaint in France on 8 September and Reporters Without Borders was granted interested party status by the investigating judge.

## POLAND

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Area: 312,685 sq.km.  
Population: 38,600,000.  
Language: Polish.  
Head of state: Lech Kaczynski.

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The advent of the coalition government of the Law and Justice (PiS) and Self-Defence (Samobrona) parties and the League of Polish Families (LPR) in late 2005 aggravated relations between officials and the media, except for the religious media, which were supported and favoured by the government.

The ultra-conservative TV station *Trwam* was given a scoop on 2 February 2006 about the signing of an agreement between conservatives, the extreme right and populists. Only journalists from the media group of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk were given access, sparking outrage among other journalists.

Religion was also the reason behind a €125,000 fine imposed on the TV station *Polsat* by the state broadcasting council (KRRiT) on 22 March for "harming the reputation" of broadcaster Magda Buczek and offending the feelings of listeners and viewers of her programmes on Radio *Maryja* and *Trwam* after a *Polsat* talk-show guest imitated her voice and called her an "old maid."

### CRITICISM NOT TOLERATED

President Lech Kaczynski and his twin brother Jaroslaw, the prime minister, did not like being criticised and the Warsaw prosecutor took action in July against Peter Kohler, of the German daily *Tageszeitung*, for writing a satirical article a month earlier about the Kaczynski brothers headed "The new Polish yokels."

The government reacted furiously and officials likened *Tageszeitung* to the pro-Nazi German press and demanded that the German government condemn the article. The Polish foreign ministry said on 4 July it would not longer speak to the paper's Warsaw correspondent, Gabrielle Lesser, who received anonymous threatening phone calls. President Kaczynski called the article "vile" and "disgusting" on 7 July.

The editor of the monthly *Sukces* removed a page from 90,000 already-printed copies of the April issue for fear of reprisals about an article there in which a journalist in dispute with the

presidential press office (over an article she wrote in February) continued to state her case.

The deteriorating general situation included influential media-outlets inciting the public to racial and religious hatred. A commentator on *Radio Maryja* (with three million listeners), Stanislaw Michalkiewicz, said in March that "the Jews humiliated Poland internationally by demanding money" for property they left behind in Poland. Xenophobic and anti-Semitic remarks increased on the station without intervention by the KRRiT.

The KRRiT was radically reformed under a December 2005 law and its members reduced from nine to five, two of whom were named by President Kaczynski, who on 6 February appointed a new chairman, Elzbieta Malgorzata Kruk. The constitutional court ruled on 23 March that the appointments were illegal and that the KRRiT was too much under government control.

Editor Andrzej Marek, of the regional weekly *Wiesci Polickie*, won a four-year battle against a three-month suspended prison sentence for libel handed down in 2002 for an article a year earlier denouncing corruption of an official in the town of Police. Marek was ordered imprisoned on 16 January 2006 but the constitutional court stayed the order and freed him two days later.

But the court refused on 30 October to invalidate article 212 of the criminal code providing for up to a year in prison for defamation. The court recognised the importance of press freedom for democracy but said an individual's dignity and reputation was more important, even though the clause contravened article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

## ROMANIA

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*Area: 238,391 sq.km.  
Population: 21,710,000.  
Language: Romanian.  
Head of state: Traian Basescu.*

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Two journalists were investigated for “disclosing legally confidential material” and a website making fun of the foreign ministry website was shut down. This was offset by the start of a wide-ranging reform of the criminal code.

2006 began badly with prosecution of two journalists for allegedly revealing legally confidential material. Sebastian Oancea and Marian Garleanu, of the dailies *Ziua* and *Romania Libera*, were accused by the defence ministry on 20 February of “possessing and disclosing” a CD of pictures of Romanian troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, probably from an army source.

They were prosecuted even though the two papers decided not to print the pictures and on 7 February sent the photos to the national intelligence service. Garleanu was arrested on 16 February and held for two days. Both journalists face up to seven years in prison each. Four other journalists - Bogdan Comaroni, Doru Dragomir, Victor Roncea and Ovidiu Ohanesian - have been summoned to appear as witnesses in the case.

A website created by two foreign desk journalists on the daily paper *Ziua* parodying the foreign ministry website was shut down in June. The ministry asked the Internet service provider CHL to stop hosting the site and CHL agreed to, even though the ministry had no right to seek its closure. The provider also handed over information about the journalists, violating the law protecting personal data.

Encouraging progress was made in reforming the criminal code and parliament approved on 6 June the decriminalisation of defamation and insults, for which people can no longer be jailed. Justice minister Monica Macovei has begun a thorough reform of the code.

## RUSSIA

Area: 17,075,400 sq.km.  
Population: 143,200,000.  
Language: Russian.  
Head of state: Vladimir Putin.



Several journalists were murdered during the year, notably Anna Politkovskaya, as a result of spreading social violence and failure to punish the killers of journalists. More takeovers of media outlets continue to seriously threaten news diversity and freedom of expression.

Three journalists were murdered in 2006, bringing to 21 the number killed doing their job since President Vladimir Putin came to power in March 2000.

The killing of Anna Politkovskaya at her Moscow home on 7 October sparked international protests from governments, the European Union and NGOs. The courageous and world-renowned journalist worked for the paper *Novaya Gazeta*, and for many years had campaigned against the war in Chechnya and corruption and shrinking freedoms throughout the Russian Federation. Prosecutor-general Yuri Chaika personally took charge of the investigation of her death. Many leads were being examined amid general worry that the enquiry would come to nothing, like most killings of journalists in Russia.

The body of Yevgeny Gerasimenko, of the regional weekly *Saratovski Rasklad*, was found in his apartment by his mother on 26 July, with his head in a plastic bag and his body bearing marks of torture. Investigators ruled out a link with his job on 30 October and a Saratov court jailed a homeless man, Sergei Finogeyev, for 18 years for the murder. Gerasimenko had been looking into corruption among local businesspeople, so it is hoped that a link with his job was only excluded after thorough investigation. Ilia Zimin, of the station *NTV*, was found dead in his Moscow apartment on 26 February. He had been looking into hygiene in the capital's luxury restaurants, equipped with a hidden camera. The Moscow prosecutor has not yet established a link between this and his death.

These killings provoked new public demonstrations calling for an end to violence against journalists and respect for press freedom. Protests by hundreds of people on 21 June and 15 December

included slogans such as "Censorship today, prison tomorrow!" and "Down with one-party TV!" Public readings of the names of all journalists killed in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were also held.

### TAKEOVERS SHRINK NEWS DIVERSITY

The media subsidiary of the natural gas conglomerate Gazprom, which is very close to the Kremlin (its main shareholder), has gained control of many media outlets, including the daily paper *Kommersant*, one of the last bastions of the independent media, which was bought on 31 August by mining and metals magnate Alisher Usmanov, who also owns a Gazprom subsidiary. The firm said on 21 November it would buy the country's biggest daily paper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (2.1 million readers) in early 1997.

Pressure on the media in the provinces, where political and economic power is most narrowly concentrated, means that journalists' room for manoeuvre is even less than in Moscow. As well as the murder of Gerasimenko, at least five other provincial journalists were physically attacked and one (Elina Ersenoyeva) vanished in Chechnya, which remained a "black hole" for news, even though Putin said the rebellious province was "completely back under control of the Russian constitution."

The supreme court overturned on 9 November the acquittal of three men for the July 2004 shooting murder of US journalist Paul Klebnikov, editor of the Russian edition of *Forbes* magazine. The three - Fyodor Sadretidinov, Musa Vakhayev and Kazbek Dukuzov - had been cleared at the country's first assises trial on 10 January. They will now be retried by a Moscow court, which may open the case to the public for the first time.

## SPAIN



*Area: 505,990 sq.km.  
Population: 43,064,000.  
Language: Spanish.  
Head of government: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.*

The Catalan regional assembly's passing of a broadcasting law that includes threats to press freedom is a call for vigilance and a warning that membership of the European Union does not guarantee protection against the temptation to obstruct journalists. The threats to the media by the ETA still oblige several of them to work under protection.

The Catalan assembly passed a law on 29 December 2005 giving the regional broadcasting authority (CAC) undue quasi-legal powers (similar to those in Navarre and Andalusia) to regulate media content. It provides for heavy fines (between €90,000 and €300,000) and cancellation of operating licences (and thus closure of the media-outlet). Media must also comply with "the principle of truthful and verified news" and must not "obstruct government surveillance activity." These provisions contravene the much more liberal European Union press freedom laws.

Two major press freedom cases advanced in 2006. The seven-year prison sentence imposed in 2005 on Tayssir Allouni, of the pan-Arab satellite TV network *Al-Jazeera*, was confirmed by an appeal court on 1 June. He had been convicted on 26 September 2005 of "collaboration" with Al-Qaeda as part of a trial of 24 people accused of involvement in terrorist activities in Spain. The prosecution mentioned an interview he had had with Osama bin Laden in October 2001 when he was *Al-Jazeera's* bureau chief in Kabul. He also pointed to the many contacts he had with Islamic fundamentalists. Allouni was transferred to house arrest for humanitarian reasons on 3 October 2006 and was able to return to his family in Granada. *Al-*

*Jazeera* announced on 14 July it was opening a bureau in Spain.

The supreme court on 5 December ordered the reopening of the enquiry into the death of Spanish cameraman José Couso in Baghdad's Palestine Hotel after US army shelling on 8 April 2003. The enquiry had been formally closed on 10 March but the supreme court said Spanish courts were competent to handle the case, which could affect relations between the US and Spain. This means Spain could seek extradition of three US soldiers responsible for the shelling.

The state prosecutor said on 14 December that legal action against the Basque-language newspaper *Egunkaria* by a judge was unjustified because he had not proved the paper was an arm of the pro-independence ETA. The paper faces another legal actions.

Journalists who mention Basque terrorism and the ETA - put in the list of predators of press freedom by Reporters Without Borders - find it difficult to do their job. Despite the permanent ceasefire declared by the ETA on 22 March, several dozen journalists still have to work with protection because of ETA threats.

## SWITZERLAND

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*Area: 41,284 sq.km.*

*Population: 7,100,000.*

*Languages: German, French, Italian.*

*Head of state: Micheline Calmy-Rey.*

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Government prosecution of journalists on the newspaper *SonntagsBlick* caused surprise, despite precedents, and highlighted the need to decriminalise press offences in a country where there is genuine press freedom.

The newspaper *SonntagsBlick* reported on 8 January that the CIA had secret prisons in Europe and reprinted a fax from the Egyptian foreign ministry on the subject. The Swiss government was in the dock and chose to challenge the paper in court. Criminal and military investigations were launched to find the journalists' sources and *SonntagsBlick* editor Christoph Grenacher and two of his reporters, Sandro Brotz and Beat Jos, face up to five years in prison for refusing to reveal them.

Article 293 of the criminal code punishing "publication of secret official discussions" contradicts article 10 of the European Human Rights Convention and the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Switzerland on 25 April.

Among precedents for the government's willingness to prosecute journalists was the conviction of Martin Stoll for writing in the weekly *Sonntags-*

*Zeitung* in 1997 about Carlo Jagmetti, Swiss ambassador to the US.

Another was the case of Viktor Damman, legal columnist of the daily *Blick*, who was investigating a burglary of the Fraumünster post office in Zurich in September 1997 and an official of the public prosecutor's office agreed to fax him information about people arrested during the enquiry. None of the information was published but he was prosecuted for "instigating violation of official secrets" and fined €325 because the court said the list of people arrested was secret.

However, the European Court said the information could easily have been obtained elsewhere and that the journalist was punished to dissuade him from investigating, which could prevent the media doing its job of informing people and monitoring situations. It awarded him damages of €3,244.

## TAJIKISTAN

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Area: 143,100 sq.km.

Population: 6,300,000.

Language: Tajik.

Head of state: Imamali Rahmanov.

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“No country in the world comes up to all the standards of the OSCE,” was President Emomali Rakhmonov’s retort to critical OSCE observers after he won a third term of office at elections on 6 November 2006 with 76.4% of the vote. The run-up to the election weighed on press freedom throughout the year.

OSCE observers said the election had not met democratic standards, despite a decree in September that each candidate would be given 30 minutes on national TV (the country’s main source of news) and the president’s statement on 20 October that all candidates should have equal opportunities during the campaign. In reality, the five other candidates were only allowed between five and 15 minutes air-time each.

Two journalists were briefly arrested in the southern town of Qorghan-Teppa on 18 September after investigating forced labour by students in cotton fields. They were *Radio Free Europe* correspondent Nosir Mamurzoda, who is not allowed to broadcast in the country, and a reporter of the *Avesta* news agency. They were freed after being ordered not to investigate matters that “could destabilise the country.”

A dispute between the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* and the state broadcasting com-

mission *Tajiktelecom* dragged on during the year after a new law in September 2005 required media outlets to re-register with the authorities. The *BBC* had been told on 20 December 2005 that it must file the necessary documents before 10 January 2006 even though some of them would take six months to get. On the deadline, the relay of *BBC* programmes on FM (the only way to reach much of the population, in Dushanbe and northern town Khujand) was suspended. The justice ministry eventually allowed the *BBC* office in Dushanbe to reopen on 26 June. In July, the station applied for an FM operating licence to the state broadcasting commission, which refused it on 2 August on grounds that there was no agreement between Britain and Tajikistan.

Less than a month after the presidential election, several independent news websites were illegally shut down, including that of opposition figure Dodojon Atovulloyev, *Tajikistantimes.ru*, founded in March 2003 and one of the few criticising the government.

## TURKEY

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Area: 774,820 sq.km.

Population: 71,190,000.

Language: Turkish.

Head of government: Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

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Press freedom is still restricted by article 301 of the criminal code, which is frequently used against journalists, writers and intellectuals mentioning sensitive topics such as the Armenian massacres and the Kurdish question. Negotiations for Turkish membership of the European Union have focused on the need to change this situation and prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said publicly he wants dialogue about it.

At least 65 people, including many journalists and writers, have been prosecuted under article 301 of the new criminal code introduced on 1 June 2005. The article, headed "Denigration of Turkishness, the republic and state organs and institutions," provides for between six months and three years in prison for "anyone who openly denigrates the government, judicial institutions or military or police structures."

Scenes of violence accompanied the trials in 2006 of novelists Orhan Pamuk (who won the 2006 Nobel Prize for literature) and Elif Shafak, Armenian-origin journalist Hrant Dink and five columnists with the major dailies *Milliyet* and *Radikal* (Erol Katircioglu, Murat Belge, Haluk Sahin, Hasan Cemal and Smet Berkan). All were acquitted.

Turks are divided on the issue. The EU enlargement commission's report on 8 November said press freedom must improve and that "freedom of expression in line with European standards is not yet guaranteed by the present legal framework (...) Article 301 and other provisions of the Turkish penal code that restrict freedom of expression need to be brought in line with the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR)."

The strong campaign for and against about Turkish EU membership and the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to a writer being prosecuted for his work forced the prime minister to publicly declare support for amending article 301. Several journalists prosecuted under it said they would take their cases to the European Human Rights Court.

Among them was Dink, editor of the Armenian weekly *Agos*, who was given a six-month suspended prison sentence on 7 October 2005 for writing a series of articles about "Armenian identity."

He was prosecuted again on 18 July 2006 four days after an interview with Reuters news agency about his prison sentence for "insulting Turkishness" in which he used the word "genocide" about the Turkish massacres of Armenians in 1915. He faces a new prison sentence of three years.

### WORRYING DEVELOPMENTS

Amendments to the country's anti-terrorist law that were approved by parliament on 29 June also threatened freedom of expression by allowing imprisonment for printing news about "terrorist organisations" and raised fears of unjustified prosecution of journalists who dared to mention the subject. Rüstü Demirkaya, of the pro-Kurdish news agency *Diha*, was jailed on 14 June in the eastern town of Tunceli for "collaborating with the PKK/Kongra-Gel" after a former militant reportedly accused him of giving the PKK a laptop and 10 blank CDs and telling the party about an ongoing military operation. He faces up to 12 years in prison.

Three bomb attacks on the far-left daily paper *Cumhuriyet* on 5, 10 and 11 May caused much damage but no injuries and its journalists immediately resumed work. Ilyas Aktas, of the far-left fortnightly *Devrimci Demokrasi*, was shot and seriously wounded in the southeastern town of Diyarbakir on 30 March during a demonstration to honour 14 Kurdish rebels killed by the army a few days earlier. He died on 14 April.

Police were criticised for failing to help an injured journalist from the daily *Sabah*, Aliye Cetinkaya, during a protest in the town of Konya on 10 February against publication in Europe of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Demonstrators attacked her because she was not wearing a

## TURKEY

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headscarf, wore jeans and was chewing gum. She was insulted and stoned and shoes were thrown at her. Police stood by and colleagues had to take her from the scene.

But 2006 ended with the good news of the release of two journalists of the pro-Kurdish

news agency *Diha*, Evrim Dengiz and Nesrin Yazar, after nine months in prison for “undermining the unity of the state and territorial integrity.” They had been arrested while reporting on a demonstration in support of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who has been in prison since 1999.

# TURKMENISTAN



*Area: 488,100 sq.km.  
Population: 4,830,000.  
Language: Turkmen.  
Head of state: Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov.*

The regime's grip on the country and the independent media tightened further in 2006, with several journalists arrested, one killed in prison and their families hounded by the authorities. The death of President Saparmurad Nyazov on 21 December revived hopes of liberalisation in Central Asia's most repressive country.

Three journalists and human rights activists - Annakurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khajiev and Ogulsapar Muradova - who helped French TV station *France 2* make a travel programme about Turkmenistan were arrested on 16 and 18 June. They were accused of plotting against 'The Turkmenbashi' (Father of All Turkmens, as Nyazov called himself) and their detention announced by the president's *Ashgabat TV* station. The eventual charges against them were "illegal possession of arms and ammunition" and before their secret trial on 25 August, their families were not allowed to visit them. One witness who saw Amanklychev at the state security ministry said she was almost unrecognisable and was being brutally interrogated round the clock.

After a hasty trial during which the defence was not allowed to speak, Amanklychev and Khajiev were sentenced to seven years in prison and Muradova to 6 years. They said they would appeal and then no more was heard of them until the death of the 58-year-old Muradova was reported on 14 September. She had been the local correspondent for *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, had three children and probably died under torture in prison since her body had many bruises, traces of internal bleeding and a large open head wound. No official investigation of her death was made. All

three prisoners had reportedly been sent to Odovan Depe prison, where about 4,000 political prisoners are held.

The three journalists, who were also activists for the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, had helped make a French TV documentary called "Turkmenistan: Welcome to Nyazovland" that was broadcast in France on 28 September. Since their conviction, their friends and family have been persecuted, lost their jobs and been constantly watched.

Amanklychev and Khajiev were not among more than 10,000 prisoners amnestied on 16 October by Nyazov on the 15th anniversary of independence including eight of the 50 people jailed for "treason" after a November 2002 bid to assassinate the president. Three journalists among the 50 - Serdar Rakhimov, Batyr Berdyev and Ovezmurad Yazmuradov, who were sentenced to 25 years each - remained in prison and are being held in an unknown place.

Nyazov ironically inaugurated a "House of Free Creativity" in Ashgabat on 17 October 2006. The 10-storey, \$17 million building shaped like an open book and shining at night is for regime journalists and, like many other public works in the country, was built by the French firm Bouygues.

## UKRAINE

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Area: 603,700 sq.km.

Population: 46,481,000.

Language: Ukrainian.

Head of state: Viktor Yushchenko.

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Political instability plagued 2006 due to tension between pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko (elected after the 2004 "Orange Revolution") and his rival Viktor Yanukovich, who returned as prime minister after the breakup of the ruling coalition. The greater press freedom achieved in 2005 was reduced by physical attacks on journalists and failure to complete the trial of the killers of journalist Georgy Gongadze.

The home of Lilia Bujurova, editor of the weekly *Pervaya Krimskaya* and president of the Crimean Association of Independent Journalists, was set fire to in the Crimean capital of Simferopol in the early hours of 1 March 2006. She blamed the attack on her publication of a list of crime-linked candidates in the 26 March Crimean parliamentary elections.

Other journalists were threatened or physically attacked during the year. Volodymyr Katsman, editor of the paper *Stolichnye Novosti*, was badly beaten up in his apartment building on 8 April by two thugs with sticks and hospitalised with serious head and arm injuries. The paper received an envelope contained white powder and a note on 8 June. Someone claiming to be one of the attackers threatened his colleagues, especially investigative journalist Sherhy Kovtunenکو, warning that they would have no protection and that calling in police would not help. The official probe into Katsman's beating has made no progress and the paper has asked for police protection for the two journalists.

Margarita Zakora, editor of the weekly *Dzerzhynets* in Dniprodzerzhynsk, was hounded personally and by legal officials over several months. The paper, launched in January 2006, had become popular with a campaign against corruption among regional officials, who filed 19 almost-identical lawsuits against Zakora. Shots were fired at her apartment in June after the paper had criticised a businessman, Aleksander Spektor. After a second critical article, Spektor distributed pornographic leaflets about her and her 20-year-old daughter, including their addresses. Zakora asked for police and court protection but despite solid evidence of this harassment, no action was taken.

Vladimir Lutiev, editor of the weekly *Evpatoriskaya Nedelia*, was sentenced to eight years in prison on 12 July for alleged corruption after being held

since June 2005 when former Crimean MP Nikolai Kotliarevsky accused him of attempted murder. Lutiev had often criticised him in print for electoral fraud and corruption and Kotliarevsky is being prosecuted in two criminal cases. The court trying Lutiev refused to hear defence witnesses or evidence, according to his lawyer, Viktor Oveshkin, who said the journalist was being hounded by former local officials because he had accused them of corruption.

Five organisers and triggermen accused of killing Igor Alexandrov, head of the *TOR TV* station in the Slaviansk region of Donetsk, in 2001 were sentenced to between two and a half and 15 years in prison on 7 June by an appeal court in Lugansk after a two-month trial. The journalist had been beaten with a baseball bat on 3 July 2001 and died of head injuries four days later in hospital. In autumn 2003, the public prosecutor's office announced the killers had been identified and members of a criminal gang charged.

### IMPORTANT TRIALS

A court in Kiev resumed hearings on 14 September in the trial of the accused killers of journalist Georgy Gongadze, editor of *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, two days before the sixth anniversary of his disappearance. Neither his mother Lessia nor his widow Myroslava were present and the countless obstacles in the case increased fears that those really responsible would never be brought to justice. The "Melnichenko tapes" disclosed by the media indicated that the decision to get rid of Gongadze was made at the highest levels of government, but despite the change of regime and promises by President Yushchenko, who opened the trial to the public, the investigation has made no progress.

## UKRAINE

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Yushchenko said the day the trial resumed that Gongadze's name had become "a symbol of political change and freedom of expression" in Ukraine. But the constant problems with the case do not bear out this optimism and more and more people accuse prosecutor-general Oleksandr Medvedko of trying to slow down the investiga-

tion and influence its outcome. Gongadze's widow said in mid-August she would sue the prosecutors. Hearings since then have involved contradictory evidence on the two key questions of whether Gongadze was killed because of his journalistic work and whether his work threatened the then President Leonid Kuchma or one of his aides.

## UNITED KINGDOM

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Area: 242,910 sq.km.  
Population: 59,668,000.  
Language: English.  
Head of government: Tony Blair.

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Threats remain to journalists and press freedom in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK five years after the murder of the reporter Martin O'Hagan, for which no one has been punished.

The failure of the police investigation into the 2001 murder of *Sunday World* reporter Martin O'Hagan, and continuing deaths threats to several colleagues, makes Northern Ireland a hostile place for journalists investigating the crime gangs spawned by years of sectarian strife. The National Union of Journalists, to which O'Hagan belonged, submitted questions to police on the fifth anniversary of his murder in September, asking why the investigation had failed, despite official pledges to catch the killers.

In the O'Hagan case, a coroner's inquest was finally held on 19 December 2006, and its findings supported the police theory that he had been shot outside his home in Lurgan, County Armagh, because he was investigating loyalist paramilitaries involved in drug trafficking. A policeman told the inquest he believed that eight men questioned in the case - but not prosecuted for lack of evidence - had been behind the murder. The police are to review their stalled investigation this year and, separately, the police ombudsman is examining allegations that elements of the police colluded with and sought to protect police agents or informers inside the murder gang. The police have always denied this.

The apparent impunity for O'Hagan's killers did not help local press freedom and, despite the peace process, various groups are still threatening

investigative journalists. In all, about a dozen journalists and two newspaper groups in Northern Ireland are believed to be working under violent threat. The latest was another *Sunday World* reporter, who was advised by police in August to seek official protection under a UK government scheme to assist threatened people. However, government ministers later refused to protect him, saying he did not qualify because he was a journalist and "not employed in one of the occupations normally covered by the scheme".

The former British home secretary, Charles Clarke, said in April that a "pernicious and even dangerous poison" had entered the media's world view after the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Independent* carried articles attacking the government's civil liberties record. He accused the media of criticising democracies because of the lack of dictatorships to target, and of taking a simplistic approach to striking a balance between freedom and security.

The *BBC* was attacked in October by the opposition Conservatives who accused it of making propaganda for the Taliban in Afghanistan after the TV programme *Newsnight* carried an interview with one of its leaders. The *BBC* replied that reporting the views of the Taliban was part of its job. Surprisingly, the privately owned *Sky News*, which also screened an interview with a Taliban commander, was not criticised.

## UZBEKISTAN



Area: 447,400 sq.km.  
Population: 26,900,000.  
Language: Uzbek.  
Head of state: Islam Karimov.

The regime's broad crackdown since May 2005 has also targeted local and foreign media. Foreign journalists are seen as agitators and "terrorists" and Uzbek freelancers who work with them are prosecuted. Arrests, internment and blocked websites were routine for journalists in 2006.

Repression has become harsher since the 13 May 2005 uprising in the eastern town of Andijan, when about 800 people were killed, according to non-governmental organisations (187 according to the government). Offices of foreign media were closed and their staff forced to leave the country, including those of the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, the US media aid organisation *Internews* and *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*.

The government cancelled the accreditation of Obid Shabanov, correspondent of the German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* in the southern region of Bukhara, on 15 March 2006 and accused him of putting out inaccurate news in a 1 February programme on the station, when he reported that some 30 people had frozen to death in an unheated bus on its way to Moscow.

The government announced on 24 February that journalists working for foreign media that criticised official policies risked losing their accreditation for interfering in "internal affairs" or insulting the "dignity and reputation" of Uzbeks. The procedure for registering with the authorities was extended from 10 days to two months. Foreign and Uzbek journalists were forbidden to work with unaccredited Uzbek colleagues on pain of prosecution. Journalists were likened to terrorists and the decree said those who "called for the overthrow of the state or incited racial and religious hatred" would be deported.

Uzbek journalists were front-line targets of the crackdown. Six reporters on the government paper *Pravda Vostoka* were dismissed in July after the presidential office called them "politically unreliable." The journalists (Jamilya Aipova, Olga Fazylova and others) contributed the independent website *Tribune* ([www.tribune-uz.info](http://www.tribune-uz.info)). Two independent journalists, Ulugbek Khaidarov and Jamshid Karimov (the president's nephew), were also victims.

Karimov vanished on 12 September between his home and the hospital in Jizak where his mother was a patient. His family found out on 5 October that he had been interned in a mental hospital and would be held there for at least five months. Khaidarov was arrested on 14 September and falsely accused of "extortion and blackmail" after a woman approached him at a bus stop and stuffed some banknotes in his pocket that he quickly threw on the ground. Police arrested him a few seconds later. He was sentenced to six years in prison by a court in Jizak on 5 October before being freed without explanation a month later.

Sabirjon Yakubov, former correspondent for the independent paper *Hurriyat*, was freed on 4 April 2006 after charges against him of "undermining constitutional order" and "involvement with a extremist religious organisation" were dropped. He had been arrested in Tashkent on 11 April 2005 and been imprisoned in an intelligence services (SNB) detention centre.

Internet users were also targeted. All local service providers (ISPs) have been forced since November 2005 to use the state-controlled telecom operator *Uzbektelecom*, which enables the regime to compile blacklists. The website of independent journalist Sergei Ezhkov, *Uzmetronom.com*, was blocked in June 2006. He is one of the very few journalists openly critical of the regime.

Alo Khojayev, editor of the website *Tribune-uz*, decided to close it down in early July, as he and his family had been receiving threats since May 2005, when he posted online news about the Andijan uprising that contradicted the official version. The authorities refused to let him leave the country, even though he had hounded and efforts made to intimidate him, so he stopped working as a journalist.



# 2007 Annual Report

# MIDDLE EAST

# AND NORTH AFRICA

## THE GRAVEYARD OF FREEDOM

Media workers were once again this year the victims of the growing regional instability that has plagued the Middle East for decades. 65 journalists and media assistants were killed in Iraq during 2006, bringing to 146 the total killed since fighting began there in March 2003.

More than 90% were Iraqis, who have been in the front line facing the warring religious and clan militias since the departure of most foreign journalists. Their safety, as with the rest of the population, depends on general conditions in the country but their job helps to identify them and increases the risks they are exposed to. Many working for international news agencies now do so anonymously. They are targeted because they are employed by foreign media and thus considered "spies."

Other journalists are attacked because of the political slant of their media outlet. But the state-run media holds the record for the most journalists killed. Most of the staff of the daily paper *Al Sabah* and the TV station *Al-Iraqiya* - members of the Iraqi Media Network - received death threats and 24 of them have been killed since fighting began.

Kidnappings of journalists also increased in the region in 2006 and again most of them were in Iraq, with 17 seized, including seven who were executed.

Six journalists were kidnapped in the Palestinian Territories and used as bargaining chips. All were freed without harm but their captors were not prosecuted. Since Hamas took power in January, media workers have been victims of violent clashes between militants of Hamas and those of the Fatah movement of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Dozens have been attacked for working for media attached to one or other of the opposing factions. This is on top of the dangers of reporting on clashes between the Israeli army and the Palestinians. 17 media workers were wounded in shooting by the Israeli army in 2006.

## UNDER THE JACKBOOT OF DICTATORS

Despite repeated promises, the region's governments have not introduced greater democracy. Journalists are subject to the whim of monarchs and "life" presidents who keep tight control of the media. The Saudi regime is especially strict and journalists there who step out of line are dismissed with no reason given. Journalists and political activists in Syria, where the Baath Party set up a dictatorship in 1963, face arbitrary arrest and unfair trials. The coming to power in 2000 of President Bashar el-Assad has not improved the situation.

After 20 years ruling Tunisia, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had not loosened his grip on the media. Independent voices are closely watched and prevented from expressing themselves. In Libya, President Muammar Gaddafi continues to terrorise journalists and criticising him is regarded as treason and can lead straight to prison.

Most countries in the region also use restrictive press laws to control the media. Several promises to revise them made at the start of the decade have not been kept and journalists can still be sent to prison for press offences. Journalists have very little room for manoeuvre and self-censorship is the norm. Media workers in Egypt were dismayed at further restrictions placed on them in a revised press law passed in July 2006. Press offences were decriminalised in Kuwait during the year but many exceptions were made, such as undermining Islamic law and offending God, the Prophet and his aides, all of which carry prison sentences.

## THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

Reporting on religious matters is still tricky and journalists who discussed the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed that appeared in a Danish paper in September 2005 had to face unexpected consequences as the authorities yielded to Islamic protests. Journalists were thrown in prison in Jordan, Yemen and Algeria for reprinting all or some of the cartoons, mostly as part of reporting on the Muslim world's anger about them.

# 2007 Annual Report - Middle East and North Africa

## Introduction

Instead of calming the crowds protesting at Danish embassies in the region, Arab governments chose to censor the media as a way to curry favour with the Islamists. The episode created a regional precedent and “undermining Islam” became a major reason to prosecute journalists. In Iran, seven journalists were arrested after a satirical article appeared about the late Ayatollah Khomeini, while two in Morocco were prosecuted for printing jokes making fun of religion.

Hajar Smouni  
Head of Middle East and North Africa desk

# ALGERIA

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Area: 2,381,741 sq.km.  
Population: 32,854,000.  
Language: Arabic.  
Head of state: Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

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The authorities blew hot and cold towards the country's media in 2006. A presidential amnesty for journalists convicted of press offences and the release of several imprisoned journalists at the beginning of the year was not followed by a long-awaited reform of the press laws.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's 5 July amnesty for journalists convicted of "defamation" and "insulting state institutions" freed many journalists from legal harassment but repression of the media continued with further prosecutions and several editors still feared their papers would be shut down, as the daily *Le Matin* was in 2004. At least five journalists were arrested during the year.

The press laws still allow imprisonment, especially for "referring to the president in offensive, insulting or defamatory terms," and a new measure in February concerning implementation of the national peace and reconciliation charter provided for five years in jail plus fines for anyone who "uses the effects of a national tragedy to undermine" the state or "harm the reputation of its officials" or the country's international image. This wording can be interpreted in many ways.

## USING THE LAW TO HARASS THE MEDIA

The trials of journalists that began in 2006 showed very well how the regime uses the legal system against them and the initial verdicts were the start of a predictable process. Several journalists told Reporters Without Borders they had not been summoned to their own trial. The Algiers suburban court of Hussein-Dey sentenced the managing editor of the daily *Ech-Chourouk*, Ali Fadil, and journalist Naila Berrahal each to six months in prison and a fine of 20,000 dinars (€220) on 31 October for libelling Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The paper was also suspended for two months and ordered to pay 500,000 dinars (€5,500) in damages to Gaddafi.

A court in Jijel (360 km east of Algiers) sentenced Omar Belhouchet, managing editor of the daily *El Watan*, and columnist Chawki Amari to three months in prison in their absence on 25 December for libelling a senior civil servant in an article in June exposing corruption.

Journalists also discovered in 2006 the existence of legal complaints and convictions they had not known about. Arezki Ait-Larbi, correspondent in Algeria of the French dailies *Le Figaro* and *Ouest-France*, found out when his passport renewal application was refused that he had been given a six-month jail sentence in December 1997. A complaint had been filed by a former head of the justice ministry's sentences implementation department, whose indifference to the torture of prisoners in Lambese prison the journalist had criticised in an article.

Mohammed Benchicou, managing editor of *Le Matin*, was freed in June after completing the two-year prison sentence he received in June 2004 for violating the law on movement of assets after being arrested at Algiers airport with a cash voucher for a large sum in dinars. At the height of Bouteflika's reelection campaign, in February 2004, he had put out a pamphlet calling the president an "imposter." The same year, the paper's headquarters had been auctioned off to pay extra tax debts and the paper had to shut down after a state-owned printing firm also insisted on collecting its debts.

Algeria was also affected by the row in the Arab world over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed first printed in the Danish press. Kamal Bousaâd and Berkane Bouderbala, editors of the weeklies *Errissala* and *Essafir*, were each imprisoned for a month in February for reprinting them, after the communications ministry filed a complaint based on the criminal code's article 144b paragraph 2 allowing for between three and five years imprisonment for "anyone offending the Prophet or emissaries of God or belittling the doctrine and principles of Islam." Their case is continuing. The heads of the state-run TV stations *Canal Algérie* and *A3* were also dismissed for the same reason.

## BAHRAIN

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*Area: 710 sq.km.*

*Population: 727,000.*

*Language: Arabic.*

*Head of state: King Sheikh Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa.*

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**The monarchy's progress towards democracy has not included decriminalising press offences and the regime continues to control the media.**

The democratic reforms of Sheikh Hamad, a Sunni Muslim, since he came to power in 1999, quickly faded before the demands of the country's Shiite majority for a voice. Journalists are increasingly critical of the regime, but the press laws, which allow prison sentences from between six months and five years, prevent normal working conditions, so self-censorship is still the best way to keep one's job.

The supreme court banned the media on 4 October 2006 from mentioning in any way a scandal known as Bandargate, involving the royal family and some politicians, that led to the deportation of Sudanese-born British citizen Salah al-Bandar for

distributing a detailed report on electoral fraud. Hussein Mansour, of the daily paper *Al Mithak*, and Mohamed al-Othman, of the daily *Al Wasat*, received anonymous phone threats in October for writing about the scandal.

The government had said in April 2005 that all Internet websites dealing with Bahrain would have to register with the information ministry, but the new rule, which was criticised by Reporters Without Borders, has not been implemented. However, access to many sites and political blogs was barred in October 2006, a month before parliamentary elections. The regime also censored online publications that mentioned Bandargate.

## EGYPT



*Area: 1,001,450 sq.km.  
Population: 74,033,000.  
Language: Arabic.  
Head of state: Hosni Mubarak.*

President Mubarak's long-awaited 2006 press law reform turned out to be just a show. The media were quickly disillusioned by the many restrictions on their activities contained in the amendments to it. At least seven journalists were arrested during the year and dozens threatened or physically attacked.

Hopes had been raised by the prospect of a press law reform, but when President Hosni Mubarak presented the changes to parliament on 28 June, proposals by the national journalists' union, notably to decriminalise media offences, had been ignored. Many privately-owned media-outlets protested and staged strikes and sit-ins.

The lower house (the People's Assembly) approved the amendments to the criminal code on 10 July which contained 35 media offences carrying prison sentences. Only defamation of civil servants was decriminalised, though fines for this were doubled. Egyptian journalists can now be jailed for up to five years for "publishing false news," defaming the president or foreign heads of state or "undermining national institutions" such as parliament and the armed forces.

Several TV crews were harassed, threatened or beaten by police during the year. More than a dozen local and foreign journalists were attacked on 10 May by anti-riot police blocking demonstrators and media from entering a court where two reformist judges were being tried. A crew of the privately-owned satellite station *Dream TV* was banned on 3 December from covering a protest against a garbage collection tax increase in Cairo and their film was seized. A few days later, police prevented an *Al-Jazeera* TV crew from covering a sit-in by thousands of students

at Al-Azhar University in protest against the dismissal of the student union leader and two of his deputies.

The authorities were especially severe with *Al-Jazeera* journalists and the station's Cairo bureau chief, Hussein Abdel Ghani, was arrested on 27 April while reporting on explosions in southern Sinai and accused of putting out "inaccurate news harmful to the country's reputation." He was the only journalist hauled before a state security court even though the same news had already been put out by many local and foreign media-outlets.

He was freed after paying heavy bail but at the end of the year was still banned from leaving the country, a way for the authorities to pressure local journalists working for foreign media. State security police also went to the home of Summer Said, of the British news agency *Reuters*, on 9 September and threatened members of her family.

The regime also cracked down on Internet freedom and at least seven cyber-dissidents were jailed in 2006. A State Council administrative court endorsed in June an information and communications ministry decision allowing the authorities to block, suspend or shut down websites considered a threat to "national security." Blogger Kareem Amer was jailed on 6 November for posting criticism of Islam on his blog.

## IRAN

Area: 1,648,200 sq.km.  
Population: 69,515,000.  
Language: Persian.  
Head of state: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.



Dozens of journalists were arrested in 2006 for criticising the authorities and some were imprisoned in secret in difficult conditions without access to a lawyer. Fewer journalists are in jail but several are the targets of endless legal procedures and daily threats in the course of their work.

Since coming to power in August 2005, ultra-conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his team of mainly former leaders of the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence services have cracked down hard on journalists. In 2006, 38 journalists were arrested and a dozen media-outlets censored. Two were arrested in May in northern Iran after publication of a cartoon of a cockroach speaking Azeri. Four others were picked up soon afterwards for reporting on the anger of the country's Azeri minority.

Many journalists were also held in secret, without even basic rights. Shirko Jahani, who works for the Turkish news agency *Euphrates* in Mahabad (north-western Iran), was summoned on 27 November by the town prosecutor who immediately detained him for giving interviews about human rights in Kurdistan to foreign media. He began a hunger-strike in protest and refused to pay bail of 5 million tumen (€5,500). At the end of the year he was still in Mahabad prison.

Several media-outlets were physically attacked during the year. Government organisations and koranic schools ransacked and set fire to the offices of the weekly *Tamadone Hormozgan* in the southern town of Bandar Abbas in February after seven of its journalists were charged with "insulting Ayatollah Khomeini." Demonstrations were also staged by mullahs in the southern town of Busheir on 13 October in front of the offices of the weekly *Safir Dashtestan*, which had carried an article making fun of the country's "supreme guide," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Self-censorship is still the best way to survive for many media-outlets. The regime's leaders, social taboos, women's rights and regional ethnic demands are out-of-bounds topics. Self-censorship partly explains the fewer journalists sent to prison. Those jailed are often conditionally released

but cannot work freely because they could be imprisoned again at any moment for writing something that displeases the regime. Such legal pressures forced some to go abroad.

The government proposed a law in 2006 that would force media workers to register with the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance.

### ONE JOURNALIST MURDERED IN DISTURBING CIRCUMSTANCES

Ayfer Serçe, a Kurdish-origin Turkish journalist of the *Euphrates* news agency, was killed in late July by the Iranian army in Keleres, in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan. She first appeared to have died during an operation against Kurdish rebels but evidence received by Reporters Without Borders showed she had been killed on her way to the border after finishing her assignment. She had gone to the region in early July to investigate a spate of suicides by Kurdish women. The Iranian authorities refused to explain how she died or return her body to her family.

Three years after Iranian-Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi was arrested and murdered after photographing families of prisoners outside Teheran's Evin prison, her killers have still not been identified.

### AKBAR GANJI FREED AFTER SIX YEARS

Journalist Akbar Ganji, editor of the weekly *Rah-é-No* and contributor to several reformist dailies, was freed on 18 March after spending six years in prison for "undermining state security," "insulting the founder of the Islamic republic and its sacred values" and "making propaganda against the Islamic Republic." He had also been prosecuted for his revelations about the 1998 murders of intellectuals and opposition figures and his accusations

## IRAN



against top politicians such as Ali Fallahian and Hashemi Rafsanjani.

He had been kept in solitary confinement and staged a hunger-strike for more than two months in 2005 in a bid to win his release. After he was freed, he held a press conference at the Reporters Without Borders headquarters in Paris when he stressed that the human rights should figure in all discussions the rest of the world had with Iran. He warned that the economic interests involved could obscure this issue.

Repression of bloggers seems to have declined in 2006. Whereas around 20 were imprisoned in 2004, none is in jail at the moment. But Internet fil-

tering has stepped up and Iran today boasts of filtering 10 million "immoral" websites. Pornographic sites, political sites and those dealing with religion are usually the ones most targeted. But since the summer of 2006, the censors have concentrated on online publications dealing with women's rights. The authorities also recently decided to ban broadband connections. This could be explained by a concern not to overload the very poor-quality Iranian network, but it could also be motivated by a desire to prevent the downloading of Western cultural products such as films and songs.

## IRAQ



*Area: 438,320 sq.km.  
Population: 28,807,000.  
Languages: Arabic, Kurdish.  
Head of state: Jalal Talabani.*

More than 60 media workers were killed and a score of others kidnapped in 2006, making it the deadliest year since fighting began in the country in March 2003. The Iraqi authorities imposed restrictions on the media that could endanger news diversity.

Local and foreign media and 65 journalists and their assistants were killed in 2006. Two were foreigners - Paul Douglas, of the US network *CBS*, and his soundman James Brolan - and the rest Iraqis.

Local journalists living among the population have no special protection and are frontline targets. More and more of them are taking refuge in Western embassies in Baghdad or in neighbouring countries and applying for political asylum. Their work with the foreign (especially English-speaking) media exposes them to Iraqi armed groups that see them as spies.

### TARGETED ATTACKS INCREASE

Most of the journalists were killed in deliberate attacks. They were not safe anywhere and during the year were murdered as they drove vehicles or killed in front of their homes and even at their workplaces. A car-bomb exploded on 7 May in the garage of a Baghdad building housing the offices of the Iraqi newspaper *Al-Sabah*, killing a printing worker and injuring about 20 journalists. A cameraman of the Iraqi TV station *Al Charkiya* was killed on 13 November in front of his home in Mosul (about 400 km from Baghdad) by armed men in a car.

Media workers were also victims of the religious rivalries dividing the country and were major targets of gunmen from both sides, who accused them of belonging either to a Shiite or Sunni media outlet. Eleven staff of a new TV station, *Al Chaabiya*, were killed on 12 October when masked gunmen killed security guards at its studios and burst inside in search of journalists. They left after 20 minutes inside without being challenged.

### HOSTAGES AS BARGAINING-CHIPS

"Trading" in hostages increased in 2006, when 20 media workers were kidnapped (up from 14 in

2005) and seven of them executed. Freelance US journalist Jill Carroll was kidnapped on 7 January by gunmen in the Adel neighbourhood of Baghdad on her way to interview a Sunni politician. The body of her interpreter, Allan Enwiyah, who had been shot, was later found at the spot she was seized. She was released on 30 March after being held three months.

Meanwhile two Iraqi reporters - Rim Zeid and her colleague Marwan Khazaal, of *Al-Sumariya TV* - were seized by four armed men as they left a press conference on 1 February at the headquarters of the Islamic Party of Iraq in Baghdad's Yarmuk neighbourhood. Their fate was still unknown at the end of 2006.

### IRAQI JOURNALISTS PREVENTED FROM WORKING

Iraqi journalists faced restrictions and bans imposed during the year by the authorities. The government of prime minister Nuri al-Maliki regularly threatened to shut down media outlets it blamed for "inciting violence." TV stations were accused of "stirring up religious and ethnic passions" and banned from showing film of "blood and killings" that officials said "amplified the horror of the violence."

The interior ministry shut down Sunni TV stations *Al-Zawra* and *Salah-Eddin* on 5 November for broadcasting film of demonstrators waving pictures of former President Saddam Hussein and protesting against his death sentence. They had still not been allowed back on the air by the end of the year.

The authorities briefly banned the media from parliament and the international press centre in the Green Zone of Baghdad in November. Live transmission of parliament was suspended after a stormy debate there about sectarian violence. The interior ministry set up a monitoring unit to

## IRAQ

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ask journalists and media-outlets to print or broadcast corrections of "false news" and prosecute them if they refused. The measure also covers the pan-Arab satellite TV networks whose reporting of Iraq is closely watched. The Baghdad bureau of the Saudi TV station *Al-Arabiya* was shut down for a month for alleged "incitement to religious rivalry" and the Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* has still not been allowed to open a Baghdad office.

At least 30 journalists were arrested by Iraqi security forces during 2006 and four of them were still

being held without charge at the end of the year. Ahmad Ali Hamas al-Obaidi, of the radio station *Dar Al Salam*, which is linked to an Islamist party, was arrested at his Baghdad home on 5 August.

The US army arrested eight media workers during the same period and at year-end four of them were still being held without a stated reason. Local *Associated Press* reporter Bilal Hussein was arrested by US troops on 12 April on suspicion of having links with insurgents but was not formally accused of anything.

## ISRAEL

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*Area: 21,060 sq.km.  
Population: 6,725,000.  
Languages: Hebrew, Arabic.  
Head of government: Ehud Olmert.*

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The country's journalists enjoy a freedom not found elsewhere in the region, but though 2006 was one of the safest years for them since the start of the second Intifada in 2000, many problems remain.

Only 17 media workers were hurt during Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian Territories in 2006 and none killed. Reporters Without Borders went to Israel in December however to publicise the lack of openness in the Israeli army's enquiries into these incidents. A senior military spokesperson said most of them had been investigated but that evidence gathered was "insufficient to bring charges."

Several journalists were wounded while covering events in the Palestinian Territories and the fighting in Lebanon. Photographer Hamid al-Khur, of the Turkish news agency *Ihlas*, was shot three times by Israeli soldiers as he took pictures of clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli troops in Beit Lahiya, in northern Gaza, on 7 July.

A few days later, about 20 media workers were caught in gunfire when reporting on an Israeli incursion in the Gaza Strip. Cameraman Ibrahim Atla, of the Palestinian public TV station, was hit by shell fragments and suffered chest wounds, even though he was wearing a jacket marked "Media."

His assistant was also wounded along with a Japanese journalist, and a *Reuters* news agency vehicle was damaged.

Palestinian journalists faced many restrictions by the Israeli authorities, who considered them primarily as Palestinian citizens, and they were banned from travelling between Gaza and the West Bank for supposed security reasons. Israeli soldiers freely entered media offices and the homes of journalists in the Palestinian Territories looking for weapons and "illegal material."

Journalists of the pan-Arab satellite TV station *Al-Jazeera* were prevented several times from reporting on the war in Lebanon in mid-2006. Walid al-Omari, the station's Jerusalem bureau chief, was arrested on 17 and 18 July while reporting in the north of the country. An Israeli military vehicle opened fire on another *Al-Jazeera* crew, led by journalist Jevara al-Budeiri, during live coverage of an Israeli incursion into Nablus and a technician, Wael Tantous, was hit on the foot by rubber bullets.

## JORDAN

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Area: 89,210 sq.km.

Population: 5,703,000.

Language: Arabic.

Head of state: King Abdallah II.

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King Abdallah has pushed political liberalisation since he came to the throne in 1999, but the “war on terrorism” since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US still serves as an excuse for the authorities to delay the reforms, including that of the press law. Two journalists appeared in court in 2006 in the row over the Mohamed cartoons.

Local journalists are closely watched by the country's intelligence services and have to be members of the state-run Jordan Press Association. The king often says he favours decriminalisation of press offences, but journalists still face prison if they write things considered “harmful to the country's diplomatic relations” or to do with the king and the royal family. The limits are clear and few journalists dare to breach them, preferring self-censorship.

The printing of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed by the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005 sparked an angry reaction in Jordan, where parliament unanimously called in January 2006 for their authors to be punished for a “cowardly and reprehensible crime.” The king, whose legitimacy partly rests on his family's descent from Mohamed, said that any insult to the Prophet was an offence that could not be excused in the name of freedom of expression. Many media outlets around the world reprinted

the cartoons and distribution of the French dailies *France-Soir* and *Libération* and Spain's *El Pais* were banned in Jordan in February.

Two local journalists, Hisham al-Khalidi and Jihad Momani, editors of the weeklies *Shihan* and *Al-Mehwar*, were arrested twice in February to be questioned by a judge. *Shihan* reprinted three of the cartoons and called on Muslims worldwide to be “reasonable” and *Al-Mehwar* printed all 12 of them alongside an article about criticism of their publication. They were charged with offending religious feelings and given two-month prison sentences on 31 May.

The US army killing of Abu Mussab al-Zarkawi, head of the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda, led to protests in his native Jordan. The Amman bureau chief of the pan-Arab satellite TV station *Al-Jazeera*, Yasser Abu Hilala, was briefly arrested on 8 June while interviewing Al-Zarkawi's brother in law and was not allowed to complete the interview.

## KUWAIT

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*Area: 17,820 sq.km.*

*Population: 2,687,000.*

*Language: Arabic.*

*Head of state: Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.*

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**Parliament adopted a new press law designed to protect journalists' basic rights but they still avoid criticising the authorities for fear of reprisals.**

The country's parliament approved a new press law on 6 March 2006 that ended the government monopoly of issuing operating licences for the media and said that only a judge could order a journalist's imprisonment. But decriminalisation of press offences, announced as the key innovation, was watered down by many exceptions, such as undermining Islamic law and offending God, the Prophet and his aides. These offences are dealt with under criminal law, which still allows imprisonment for them.

Further restrictions on journalistic activity were added in vague language open to many interpretations and journalists are still liable to go to prison for actions considered to be "against national interests."

However, the new law allows political daily papers to be launched, something strongly forbidden under the old 1963 press law that limited the

press to five dailies. Media outlets can also file a complaint with an administrative court if the authorities refuse to grant them an operating licence.

Journalist Aziza al-Mufarig, of the daily *Al Watan*, was given a three-month suspended prison sentence and fined 1,000 dinars (€2,675) on 18 November by a Kuwait City court for an article denouncing a corrupt judge. She is appealing the conviction. The paper's editor, Sheikh Khalifa al-Sabah, was fined 150 dinars (€400).

Journalist Khaled al-Obeisan and the editor of the daily *Al Seyassah*, Ahmed al-Jarrallah, were arrested on 21 November and held a day for questioning after the paper ran an article describing Saddam Hussein as the lawful president of Iraq. They were charged with "inciting unrest" but freed after the communications minister withdrew his complaint.

## LEBANON

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*Area: 10,400 sq.km.*

*Population: 3,577,000.*

*Languages: Arabic, French.*

*Head of government: Fuad Siniora.*

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The Israeli attack on Hezbollah forces in Lebanon that began on 12 July 2006 resulted in many civilian victims. A journalist and a TV station technician were killed and 10 other media workers injured. Meanwhile no real progress was made in investigating the murder in 2005 of two journalists.

Israeli forces bombed Lebanese media installations during the fighting with the Hezbollah militia. An Israeli official told Reporters Without Borders in Jerusalem in December 2006 that "media affiliated to terrorist organisations" did not have the same rights as other media outlets because their staff took part in terrorist activities in the same way as someone who made missiles.

Israeli warplanes destroyed a transmission mast at Fatka, east of Beirut, on 22 July, temporarily putting the privately-owned *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC)* TV station off the air. A station technician, Sleiman Chidiac, was killed during the attack and two other employees injured. Israeli planes bombed an *LBC* installation in the northern town of Terbol the same day, cutting off broadcasts to some regions by *LBC* and privately-owned TV stations *Future TV* and *Al-Manar*.

The next day, press photographer Layal Nagib, 23, was killed when a missile exploded near her car in Cana while she was covering the Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon for several international news agencies.

The media have more freedom in Lebanon than in any other Arab country but still have to cope with political and judicial machinations. The investigation into the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri is getting nowhere and two journalists for the satellite station *New TV* were arrested on 19 December for entering the apartment of a witness in the case.

The pair - Firas Hatoum and Abdel-Azim Khayat - along with their driver Mohammed Barbar, were charged with theft under the criminal code (rather

than the press law) and were not allowed the rights journalists usually have, including appearance in court of their own free will. At the end of the year, the three men were still in prison at Roumieh, northeast of Beirut, awaiting trial. Offices of *Al-Manar*, the TV station operated by the Hezbollah, were struck by an Israeli missile in Beirut in July.

The UN Security Council authorised the UN international enquiry commission on the Hariri murder on 15 June to simply continue giving technical help to the Lebanese authorities in investigating other terrorist crimes committed since 1 October 2004, thus rejecting an appeal by Reporters Without Borders for the UN enquiry's own mandate to be expanded to include these crimes.

No significant progress was made in 2006 in Lebanese investigations of attacks on media workers in the previous year. An examining judge was finally named on 17 June to handle the case of the murder of Gebran Tueni, managing editor of the daily paper *An-Nahar*, more than six months earlier.

French anti-terrorist judge Jean-Louis Bruguière went to Beirut for the first time on 4 July to look into the death of Franco-Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir, who was killed by a car bomb on 2 June 2005. Meanwhile, *LBC* TV presenter May Chidiac, who was seriously wounded in another car bomb attack on 25 September 2005, returned to the air on 25 July 2006, but the bombers who caused her to have an arm and a leg amputated have still not been tried and punished.

## LIBYA



*Area: 1,759,540 sq.km.  
Population: 5,853,000.  
Language: Arabic.  
Head of state: Muammar al-Gaddafi.*

Despite Col. Muammar al-Gaddafi's recent pro-democracy pretensions, his regime still keeps a very tight rein on news. Local journalists have very little room for manoeuvre and self-censorship is the rule.

A Reporters Without Borders delegation visited Libya for the first time in September 2006 at the invitation of the country's journalists' union. The fact of the visit showed the regime's more relaxed attitude but the press freedom situation has hardly changed. The media are still government-controlled propaganda mouthpieces that put out "positive" news about the activities of the "brotherly leader," Col. Gaddafi. No independent media-outlet exists.

Three of the four main daily papers (*Al-Jamahiriya*, *Al-Shams* and *Al-Fajr al-Jadid*) are funded by the General Press Office (an arm of the information ministry) and the fourth, *Al-Zahf al-Akhdar*, belongs to the Movement of Revolutionary Committees, which is the regime's backbone. Only satellite TV stations, which have lured people away from state-run stations, lighten the grim picture.

Few journalists dare to venture beyond the limits set by the regime. Criticising Gaddafi is a taboo that can lead directly to prison because of the prevailing personality cult. The most the local media does is report minor corruption without ever implicating top officials. The plight of the Berber minority and anything to do with Gaddafi ("The Guide of the Revolution") and his family are never mentioned. The press law is very harsh and allows prison sentences of up to two years.

Libyans have free access to the Internet but their activity on it is closely monitored. Journalist Daif al-Ghazal and cyber-dissident Abdel Razak al-Mansouri were punished for criticising the regime online. Al-Mansouri was given an 18-month prison sentence in October 2005 officially for "unauthorised possession of a firearm" but in fact it was almost certainly because of what he wrote on the website [www.akhbar-libya.com](http://www.akhbar-libya.com). He was amnestied in March 2006 after a year in jail. The killers of Al-Ghazal, whose body was found on 1 June 2005 with many marks of torture, have still not been named. He had strongly criticised the regime and the Movement of Revolutionary Committees.

By the end of 2006, Reporters Without Borders still had no proof that Abdullah Ali al-Sanussi al-Darrat, who disappeared after he was jailed without charge or trial in 1973, was still alive.

The Reporters Without Borders mission noted that the Internet was no longer censored in Libya and with the release of Al-Mansouri, no cyber-dissidents remained in prison. In November, the organisation took the country off its list of "enemies of the Internet." However, a new cyber-dissident, Idrees Mohammed Boufayed, has since been imprisoned for posting material on opposition websites.

# MOROCCO

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Area: 446,550 sq.km. (excluding Western Sahara).

Population: 31,478,000.

Language: Arabic.

Head of state: King Mohammed VI.

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The hopes raised when Mohamed VI became king in 1999 have slowly disappeared and the country's journalists face prosecution that severely affects their work, even though taboo subjects are now fewer.

The future of Western Sahara is more openly discussed, and the rise of Islamism and (thanks to public hearings of the equity and reconciliation commission set up in 2004) past human rights violations by the authorities frequently make headlines. The boldest journalists investigate the role of the king and the royal family in running the country but this is the main reason journalists are prosecuted. The press law has a score of offences carrying prison sentences and journalists often have to pay very heavy fines and damages for offending the king, the monarchy, the nation, territorial integrity, God or Islam.

Apart from the release on 29 January 2006 of editor Anas Tadili, of the weekly *Akhbar al-Ousbouaa*, after 22 months in prison, press freedom had a very bad year. The Arab-language weekly *Nishan* was shut down on 21 December for "undermining Islam" and censorship, harassment and legal action against the independent media continued throughout the year. Foreign journalists reporting on human rights were barred on 24 October from going to Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara.

Two French-language publications were especially targeted by politically-inspired legal action. The Casablanca appeal court ordered the weekly *TelQuel* on 7 February to pay libel damages of 500,000 dirhams (€50,000) to the head of a community association. A few days later Abubakr Jamai, managing editor of *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, and journalist Fahd Iraqi were ordered to pay 3.1 million dirhams (€284,000) in damages for libelling

the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC) in an article criticising the impartiality of an ESISC study of the Western Sahara Polisario Front independence movement.

Two days before the verdict in the ESISC case, demonstrations (probably government-organised) were staged in front of the paper's offices after malicious rumours spread that the paper had reprinted the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed that first appeared in the Danish press in September 2005.

Security forces several times banned journalists from covering demonstrations or trials. Jamal Wahbi, of the weekly *Assahifa al-Maghribiya*, was arrested by detectives in Tetuan (300 km north of Rabat) on 7 November for photographing three prisoners who were suspected terrorists coming out of a court building in the city. He was questioned by the public prosecutor and various state security officials and his camera seized.

The correspondent of the pan-Arab satellite network *Al-Jazeera*, Hassan Fatih, was physically attacked by police while covering a sit-in by the families of political prisoners in Rabat on 15 June. He was taken to hospital with neck and shoulder injuries.

Morocco blocks access to websites close to the Polisario Front and to the online publication of the Islamist organisation Justice and Charity, which challenges the monarchy's legitimacy.

## PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

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*Area: 6,207 sq.km.*  
*Population: 3,889,000.*  
*Language: Arabic.*  
*Head of state: Mahmoud Abbas.*

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Since Hamas came to power in January 2006, journalists have faced the usual shooting from Israelis and, more recently, have been victims of fierce clashes between supporters of the Islamist Hamas and El Fatah, which supports President Mahmoud Abbas.

The August 2005 Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza raised hopes of better working conditions for journalists in the Palestinian Territories, but the split between Hamas and El Fatah set off a new wave of violence. The correspondent of the French daily *Liberation*, Didier François, was wounded on 17 December 2006 in shooting in Gaza, which was the centre of this fighting.

Dozens of Palestinian journalists, labelled either pro-Hamas or pro-Fatah, were physically attacked. Reporters from public media were attacked while covering Hamas events. The offices of the public news agency *Wafa* were ransacked in September and equipment destroyed. The agency was attacked several times during the year after faction leaders and Hamas prime minister Ismael Haniyeh accused it of putting out El Fatah propaganda.

About 100 armed members of Hamas' Ezzedin al Qassem Brigade stormed the TV transmission centre of the public *Palestine Broadcasting Corporation (PBC)* in Khan Yunis, in the southern

Gaza Strip, in June, fired at equipment and attacked staff. Media supporting smaller factions were also attacked, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)'s radio station *Sawt al Chaab*, whose studios were destroyed on 1 November and its only transmitter smashed.

Foreign journalists were also targeted. Six were kidnapped on 1 January and two Belgian reporters narrowly escaped being seized in Khan Yunis. All were freed after being held for between a few hours and several days. Two US journalists of *Fox News*, Steve Centanni and Olaf Wiig, were seized in Gaza on 14 August and held for two weeks by an unknown group which demanded the release within three days of all Muslims held by the United States.

The government failed to investigate these kidnappings but Reporters Without Borders considered that in most cases they were not political but the work of individuals or isolated groups seeking publicity or sometimes jobs.

## SAUDI ARABIA



*Area: 2,149,690 sq.km.  
Population: 24,573,000.  
Language: Arabic.  
Head of state: King Abdallah ibn Abdelaziz ibn al-Saud.*

The country remains one of world's biggest enemies of press freedom. Two journalists were dismissed in 2006 for going beyond the limits set by the dominant ultra-conservative religious authorities.

The Saudi regime maintains very tight control of all news and self-censorship is pervasive. Enterprising journalists pay dearly for the slightest criticism of the authorities or the policies of "brother Arab" countries. The tame local media content means most Saudis get their news and information from foreign TV stations and the Internet. But the Qatar-based satellite station *Al-Jazeera*, which is banned in Saudi Arabia, was not allowed to cover the annual pilgrimage to Mecca for the fourth year running in 2006.

Journalist Fawaz Turki, of the government daily *Arab News*, was dismissed in April for writing about the atrocities perpetrated by Indonesia, a Muslim country, during its 1975-99 occupation of East Timor. He had previously been warned for criticising Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in print.

The regime directly censored some journalists. The culture and information ministry told journalist Kinan ben Abdallah al-Ghamidi without explanation on 30 November that he could no longer write in the government daily *Al Watan*. He had

already been forced to resign as the paper's editor in 2002 after reporting that US troops were using the country's military bases.

The privately-owned daily *Shams* was closed for a month on 16 February and its editor, Battal Alkus, dismissed for reprinting some of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed first carried by a Danish paper in September 2005.

Unlike in China, where a blocked website is passed off as a technical problem, Saudi filters say openly that certain pages on a site have been censored by the authorities. Targets are mostly pornography, but also political opposition, Israeli publications and homosexuality.

Blogs are a problem for the censors, who tried in 2005 to completely bar access to the country's main blog-tool, blogger.com. They gave up after a few days and now just censure blogs they object to, such as "Saudi Eve," the diary of a young woman who discusses her love life and criticises government censorship, which was added to the blacklist in June 2006.

## SYRIA



Area: 185,180 sq.km.  
Population: 19,043,000.  
Language: Arabic.  
Head of state: Bashar el-Assad.

State control of the media and the ongoing state of emergency continues to be used as an excuse to arrest many media workers. Eight journalists and cyber-dissidents were imprisoned in 2006.

Arbitrary behaviour remains the norm in Syria. Journalists and political activists risk arrest at any time for any reason and are up against a whimsical and vengeful state apparatus which continually adds to the list of things banned or forbidden to be mentioned. Several journalists were arrested in 2006 for interviewing exiled regime opponents, taking part in conferences abroad and for criticising government policies. They were subjected to lengthy legal proceedings before the Damascus military court that, under a 1963 law, tries anyone considered to have undermined state security.

Freelance journalist Ali Abdallah, who wrote for the Emirates daily *Al-Khalij* and Lebanese dailies *An-Nahar* and *Assafir*, was given a six-month prison sentence for criticising in print the weakness of the country's economy. He was arrested on 23 March but not tried until five months later. The case was then passed to the state security high court and then to a Damascus court, which adjourned the case several times.

His son, Mohammed Abdallah, was also given the same sentence for contacting the pan-Arab satellite TV network *Al-Jazeera* to report his father's arrest. The two men were held in secret for a month and family and lawyers were not allowed to see them. They were also tortured during interrogation to get them to confess.

Michel Kilo, a leading pro-democracy figure for more than 30 years, was arrested on 14 May after signing the "Beirut-Damascus Damascus-Beirut" declaration by a group of Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals calling for better relations between the two countries. Several human rights activists were also arrested in May, including lawyer Anwar Bunni.

Kilo, who writes for several Lebanese publications, was charged with inciting "religious and racial divisions" and "insulting institutions and officials" and faces life imprisonment. His case is a good example of the manoeuvrings of the justice system, which is wholly part of the ruling Baath Party's repressive apparatus. An order by one judge to release him on bail was countered by another who charged him with new offences and at the end of the year he was still in Adra prison, near Damascus, awaiting trial.

Three people are in jail for criticising the regime, making Syria the biggest prison for cyber-dissidents in the Middle East. The three have been routinely mistreated and held in tough conditions. The government blocks access to Arab-language opposition websites and those dealing with the country's Kurdish minority.

# TUNISIA



*Area: 163,610 sq.km.*  
*Population: 10,102,000.*  
*Language: Arabic*  
*Head of state: Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.*

**Independent and pro-opposition journalists are prevented from working through government surveillance and harassment and their freedom of movement shrinks daily.**

The former editor of the weekly *Al Fajr*, Hamadi Jebali, was freed in February 2006 after 15 years in prison but is still under tight surveillance. State security agents posted on the roofs and verandas of his neighbours watch all his movements, spy on his private life and even disrupted the marriage of his daughter in November 2006.

Jebali was among 1,600 political prisoners pardoned by President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali on 25 February. He had been sentenced to 16 years imprisonment in 1992 for "belonging to an illegal organisation" and "intending to change the form of government."

Families fighting to ensure jailed journalists are not forgotten are under great pressure. Lawyer and human rights activist Mohammed Abbou has been in prison since March 2005 for writing an article criticising Ben Ali that was posted online. Since his wife Samia staged a hunger-strike on 13 August 2006 to demand his release, her movements have been watched by a horde of police stationed in front of the family home who sometimes bar visitors from entering. Two journalists, Slim Boukhdhir and Taoufik al-Ayachi, were roughed up when they arrived at the house to interview her on 16 August.

She was threatened by armed police in front of her children when she tried to return to the house on 26 October and fled in fright to the house of friends. She was physically attacked twice by groups of youths as police stood by when she was on the way to the prison in Kef (170 km from Tunis) where her husband is being held. Regime opponent Moncef Marzouki, journalist Slim Boukhdhir and lawyer Samir Ben Amar, who were with her, were also assaulted.

Foreign journalists going to Tunisia are not allowed to work freely. Algerian reporter Meddi Adlène was constantly followed in November by six plain-clothes police and others were posted outside his hotel. The secret police did not stop his interviews but their visible presence was aimed at intimidating the people he met. French journalist Léa Labaye, of the website *Bakchich.info*, was refused entry to the country on 16 September without explanation.

Tunisia also censored publications "offensive to Islam" after a Danish paper printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in September 2005. The 19 September issue of the French daily *Le Figaro*, carrying an article by French philosopher Robert Redeker headed "What should the free world do about Islamist intimidation?" was banned under a law protecting religion, which had also been used in February to confiscate an issue of the French daily *France Soir* that reprinted the cartoons.

In 2005, Tunisia had the honour of hosting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a big UN event about the Internet's future. Yet President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's Internet policies are among the most repressive in the world. All the Internet cafes are state-controlled. They filter web content and are under close police surveillance. It is, for example, impossible to access the Reporters Without Borders website from inside Tunisia. The security services also constantly harass independent bloggers and opposition website editors to ensure that self-censorship prevails. One cyber-dissident, Mohammed Abbou, has been imprisoned since March 2005 for criticising the president in an online newsletter.

## YEMEN

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Area: 527,970 sq.km.

Population: 20,975,000.

Language: Arabic.

Head of state: Ali Abdallah Saleh.

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The Mohamed cartoons printed in the international media angered the government, which targeted local papers that reproduced them, thus displaying its old authoritarian habits.

More than six months after a Danish newspaper printed 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed in September 2005, the independent weeklies *Al-Huriya*, *The Yemen Observer* and *Al Rai Al Aam* were shut down for three months for reprinting some or all of them as part of reporting on the different reactions to them in the Muslim world. Their editors were prosecuted under article 103 of the press law banning publication of anything "harming the Islamic faith or denigrating a monotheistic religion or humanitarian belief."

Mohammed Al Asaadi, editor of the *The Yemen Observer*, was arrested on 10 February 2006 and held for two weeks before being released on bail. He was fined 500,000 rials (€1,980) on 6 December.

Also arrested on 10 February were Abdel Halim Akram Sabra, editor of *Al-Huriya*, and his reporter Yahya al-Abed, who spent three weeks in prison before being freed on bail and then were each given suspended sentences of four months in prison and a month-long ban on working as journalists by a Sanaa court on 13 December. The paper was also given a one-month suspended order to shut down. Kamal Alufi, editor of *Al Rai Al Aam*, was sentenced to a year in prison on 25 November but remained free pending his appeal.

A French freelance journalist, Daniel Grandclément-Chaffy, was held for five days after being arrested on 12 October for "illegally entering the country" after accompanying a boatload of clandestine Somali immigrants that landed in the country, even though he had a valid entry visa.