



## Profiles of other nominated journalists

In the 1<sup>st</sup> category of the Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France Prize 2003

*This prize, awarded by international judges, rewards a journalist who, through their professional work, stance, or attitude, best demonstrates their commitment to freedom of information.*



**Ricardo  
González**

**CUBA**

**Ricardo González**, 52, a former state TV scriptwriter, was arrested at his home on 18 March 2003. Since 1995, he has been one of the most active members of the independent media. He became the Reporters Without Borders correspondent in Cuba in 1998, providing information to the organisation about attacks on press freedom there.

He and his friend Raúl Rivero founded the Manuel Márquez Sterling Association in May 2001 to train independent journalists, who are often self-taught. This upset the authorities, which did their best to discredit them on the pretext they were not real journalists "since they did not have diplomas".

In December 2002, González finally overstepped the mark by starting up a bi-monthly magazine *De Cuba* with his colleagues from the Manuel Márquez Sterling Association. It was the first time that independent journalists, who had until then simply sent articles abroad for publication, had tried to break the ruling Communist Party's news monopoly.

This was more than President Fidel Castro could tolerate. González was tried with Rivero on 4 April 2003 and sentenced to 20 years in prison for "undermining the independence and integrity of the state". "The trial was a farce. Everything was decided in advance," commented Rivero's wife. Among the eight prosecution witnesses were neighbours and two known dissident journalists, who were revealed as state security agents who had infiltrated the opposition.

At the end of April, González was transferred to the "Kilo 8" prison in Camaguey, more than 500 kms from Havana. Despite being held in very harsh conditions, he does not complain. "They've jailed me with my optimism", he told his wife, Alida Vizo Bello, who is also a journalist. An optimism one hopes will endure, because 20 years is a long time...



Ludu Daw Amar

## BIRMANIE

Burmese journalist Ludu Daw Amar has never compromised her convictions in a half-century of journalism. "I don't give up easily, because I cannot stand injustice," she explains simply. Successive military juntas have burned, censored then in 1967 banned her popular *LuDu Newspaper*. For almost 35 years now, she has been forced to publish her writing in other magazines. But her outspoken stance on the situation in Burma has led the official censor to butcher the articles of one of Burma's most famous journalists.

Now 88, Ludu Daw Amar, who is also a writer, recently spoke to the magazine *Irrawaddy* about the plight of Burmese journalists: "We cannot write anything freely. There is no freedom of the press and the censor's office is very restrictive." To avoid seeing her articles and editorials distorted, she writes on Burmese culture and society. But even then she is still censored. A recent article about the Aids epidemic in Burma was banned.

From Mandalay, Burma's cultural capital, she never stops speaking out against the banning of her newspaper. "After 20 years as publisher of a newspaper I was forced to give up the position, (...) but as soon as a social problem or an important news item attracts my attention, I cannot stop myself writing".

Despite her age, she continues to impress visitors with the force of her arguments and her vigorous defence of freedom of expression. She gives unguarded interviews to international radio stations in Burma. Her on-air response to the arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and the massacre of democratic activists by the army last May triggered the fury of the censors. In July and August 2003, most of her articles were banned. Her family has also paid the price of her struggle against dictatorship. Her husband, the journalist Ludu U Hla, and two of his sons have spent several years in prison.



Gao Qinrong

## CHINE

Criticising the political line of the Party is a dangerous exercise in China. Gao Qinrong has good reason to know it. In 1999, the journalist, who worked for the official press, was convicted on the basis of false evidence to 13 years in jail for "corruption", "fraud" and "pimping". Convinced he was doing the right thing, he investigated the failure of an irrigation project in Shanxi Province, south west of Beijing.

The local authorities had boasted that the construction of 60,000 water tanks in six months had been "a victory over nature in this arid land". But Qinrong had discovered during his investigation that the tanks were not connected to any water supply and that there were not even any pipes to deliver the water to the fields. In an article published in the 27 May 1998 edition of *Neibu Cankao Xiaoxi*, a newspaper reserved for Communist Party officials, Qinrong said that the project's sole function had been to reflect credit on to certain local leaders at the expense of the farmers. After his conviction, Qinrong wrote a letter to the Chinese Communist Party leadership in which he said:

"The fight against corruption was launched by the Communist Party Central Committee. As a party member and journalist, I believed it to be my duty to report on the sufferings of the people."

Now 48, Qinrong has become morally and physically exhausted by his incarceration. "He has become weak and his hair has fallen out. He is no longer able to write because his hands shake too much. His heartbeat is much too fast," says his wife Duan Maoying. "Everyone is afraid to do anything to help him because there is so much pressure from the top," she has told foreign journalists based in Beijing. She said she had petitioned President Jiang Zemin, the prime minister, the supreme court, the party central disciplinary committee and the local and national press. An influential magazine has called for the case to be reopened but the local leaders continue to ensure that their critic remains behind bars.

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