



[www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)

# **PRESS FREEDOM IN 2004**

## **The deadliest year for a decade: 53 journalists killed**

Reporters Without Borders annual roundup

---

**International Secretariat**  
**5, rue Geoffroy-Marie, 75009 Paris, France**  
**Tel: (33) 1 4483-8484**  
**Fax: (33) 1 4523-1151**  
**[rsf@rsf.org](mailto:rsf@rsf.org)**  
**[www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org)**

5 January 2005

In 2004:

- 53 journalists and 15 media assistants were killed
- at least 907 journalists were arrested
- 1,146 were attacked or threatened
- and at least 622 media censored

In 2003:

- 40 journalists and 2 media assistants were killed
- at least 766 journalists were arrested
- 1,460 were attacked or threatened
- and at least 501 media censored

On 1 January 2005

107 journalists and 70 cyber-dissidents  
were in prison around the world

<b>2004</b>	Killed	Arrested	Attacked or threatened	Media censored
Africa	1	198	176	163
Americas	12	43	363	111
Asia	16	384	393	165
Europe and ex-Soviet Bloc	3	117	141	111
Maghreb and Middle East	21	165	73	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>1146</b>	<b>622</b>
in 2003	40	766	1460	501

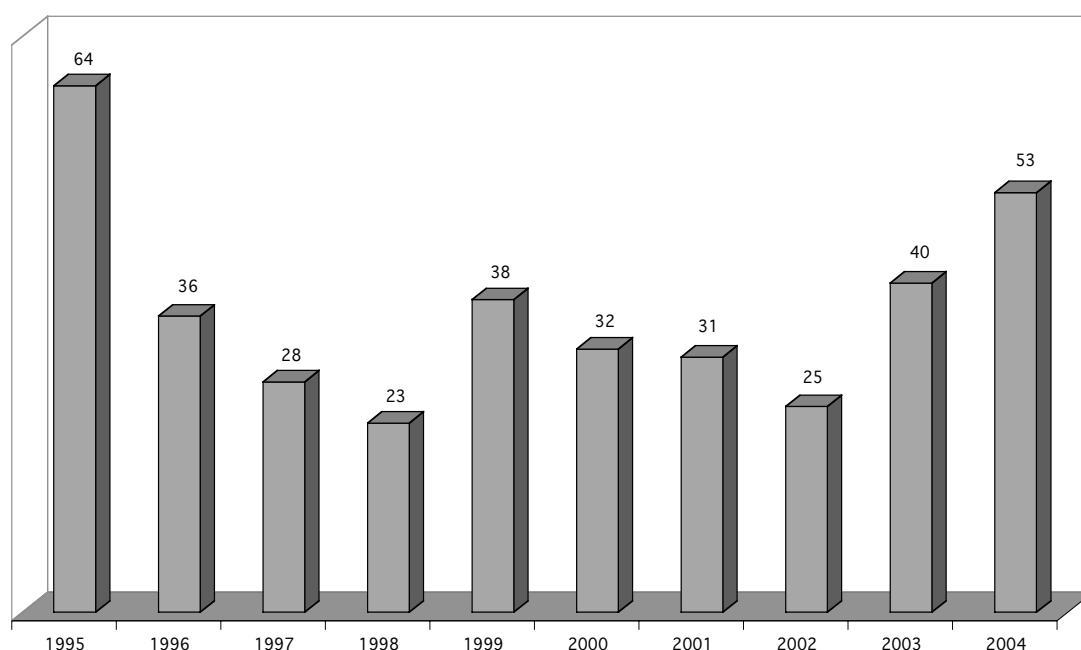
## The deadliest year for a decade

---

At least 53 journalists were killed in 2004 while doing their job or for expressing their opinions, the highest annual toll since 1995. Fifteen medias assistants (fixers,

media assistants were killed there during the year. Terrorist strikes and Iraqi guerrilla attacks were the main cause, but the US army was held responsible for the death of four of them. Ali al-Khatib and Ali Abdel Aziz, of the satellite TV station *Al-Arabiya*, were shot dead near a US checkpoint on 18 March. Ten days later,

Journalists killed



drivers, translators, technicians, security staff and others) were also killed.

For the second year running, **Iraq** was the world's most dangerous country for journalists. Nineteen reporters and 12

the US army admitted responsibility but said it was an accident. Assad Kadhim and Hussein Saleh, who worked for the TV station *Al-Iraqiya*, were killed on 19 April, also by US troops.

Country	Journalists killed in 2004
Bangladesh	4
Brazil	2
Colombia	1
Dominican Republic	1
Gambia	1
Haiti	1
India	1
Iraq	19
Mexico	3
Nepal	2
Nicaragua	2
Pakistan	1
Palestinian Authority	1
Peru	2
Philippines	6
Russia	2
Saudi Arabia	1
Serbia-Montenegro	1
Sri Lanka	2

Exposing corruption and reporting on organised crime was the next main reason for journalists being killed.

Journalists were murdered in Asia – especially in **The Philippines** (6) and **Bangladesh** (4) – just for investigating delicate matters such as corruption, drug-trafficking and gangsterism. The Philippine press ran a collective editorial in early December saying it would “remember 2004 as a year of infamy” and

that “with every murder of a journalist, or a judge, an environmentalist, an anti-corruption activist, a human rights worker, democracy dies a little.”

The murder in **Gambia** of journalist Deyda Hydera in December was a reminder that in Africa too journalists are killed.

## The new breed of kidnappers

---

At least a dozen local and foreign journalists were kidnapped in **Iraq** during the year by Islamist groups. One victim, Italian Enzo Baldoni (56), a freelance reporter for the Italian weekly *Diario*, was executed in late August by the “Islamic Army in Iraq.” He had been seized on 24 August on his way to the besieged holy city of Najaf. The kidnappers, in a video broadcast by the pan-Arab TV station *Al-Jazeera*, gave the Italian government 48 hours to pull its troops out of Iraq. Baldoni’s family and Italian opposition politicians accused the government of not doing all they could to save him.

Two French journalists, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, were freed on 21 December after four months in captivity. They had been kidnapped with their guide and interpreter, Mohammed al-Joundi, on their way to Najaf on 20 August. A few days later, the Islamic Army in Iraq claimed responsibility and demanded withdrawal of a new law in France banning children from wearing religious symbols in school. A huge diplomatic and media campaign was mounted for their release. Al-Joundi was found in Falluja on 11 November. Malbrunot (41) is a freelance for the French dailies *Le Figaro* and *Ouest-France* and for the radio station *RTL*, while Chesnot (38) works for *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* and *Radio France*.

Two cameramen are still missing – Frenchman Fred Nérac, working for the British TV station *ITN*, (since 22 March 2003) and Iraqi Isam Hadi Muhsin al-Shumary (since 15 August 2004).

French-Canadian journalist Guy-André Kieffer (54) has been missing in **Côte d'Ivoire** since 16 April, when he was seen for the last time in a shopping centre in the capital. Kieffer, married with two children, worked for the French-based *La Lettre du Continent* and several Ivorian newspapers. Michel Legré, brother-in-law of President Laurent Gbagbo’s wife Simone and the last person to see him before he vanished, was put under formal investigation for kidnapping by French examining magistrate Patrick Ramaël in October.

Four journalists have been kidnapped by Maoist rebels in **Nepal** and one, Dhana Rokka Magar, has been held since August 2002.

## Middle East paralysed by war in Iraq

---

The press freedom situation in the region remains very delicate. In **Syria** and **Saudi Arabia**, authorities continue to ruthlessly block the emergence of a free and independent media. Self-censorship is the rule there and a large number of topics cannot be mentioned. **Iran** routinely arrests and imprisons journalists and cyber-dissidents (about 30 were jailed during the year) and the legal system is controlled by hardliners still bent on destroying the opposition press. Political instability in the **Palestinian Occupied Territories** has also affected the media and a journalist was murdered and many others attacked in Gaza.

But fewer attacks on press freedom were recorded in **Israel** and **Lebanon**.

Press freedom is still not guaranteed in the Maghreb. More arrests in **Algeria** (22), continued legal hounding of the media in **Morocco** and very tight control of news in **Tunisia** are obstacles to true freedom of expression in this region.

## Asia still trailing behind

---

The countries with least press freedom in the world are in East Asia. **North Korea, Burma, China, Vietnam** and **Laos** are the region's worst offenders. North Korean journalists are forced to glorify dictator Kim Jong-il and dozens of them have been "re-educated" in camps because of often trivial "professional errors."

China (26 journalists imprisoned) and Burma (12) are the region's biggest prisons for the media. Despite the proliferation of new publications and broadcast media, the ruling Chinese Communist Party still brutally reminds journalists they are not free to say what they want. The foreign media present in China remains tightly controlled.

Journalists and cyber-dissidents were fiercely repressed in **The Maldives** during the year.

Physical violence against the media is still very common in the region, with daily attacks on journalists in **Nepal** and **Bangladesh** instigated by governments, political groups and gangsters. Such attacks in **India** and **Indonesia**, where they are fewer, have not stopped the growth of independent media.

## A mixed record in Europe

---

The countries of the European Union, including its ten new members, respect press freedom, but the situation is sharply different in some former Soviet republics and in Central Asia.

In **Russia**, the government's total control of nationwide TV stations was shown by flagrantly biased TV coverage of the school hostage tragedy in Beslan (North Ossetia). Many Russian and foreign journalists are prevented from working and censorship concerning Chechnya has spread to neighbouring republics. The *Agence France-Presse* correspondent in the region went missing and two journalists were killed, including in Moscow the editor of the Russian edition of the US magazine *Forbes*.

The October presidential elections in **Ukraine** saw many attacks on press freedom and pro-opposition journalists and some foreign media were censored. Physical attacks were very frequent during the year and the killers of journalists, including Georgy Gongadze, remained unpunished.

In **Belarus**, President Alexander Lukashenko tolerated no criticism and made every effort to systematically silence the few dissident voices. In the run-up to the 17 October referendum, a dozen independent newspapers were shut down or suspended by the information ministry on false bureaucratic pretexts. The investigation into the disappearance in 2000 of opposition journalist Dmitri Zavadski was closed despite the virtually certain involvement of the highest government officials.

The heavy prison sentence imposed on a journalist and human rights activist in **Uzbekistan** for “homosexuality” was an example of that regime’s brutal repression of the independent media. Such independence has been almost non-existent in **Azerbaijan** since the October 2003 presidential election. Journalists there no longer work in adequate conditions and during the year a pro-opposition journalist was jailed for five years.

Striking progress was made in **Turkey** with the passage of laws in readiness for the country’s membership of the European Union, but in practice these measures have not yet significantly improved press freedom.

## **Violence on the rise in the Americas**

---

Twelve journalists were killed in South and Central America during the year, up from seven in 2003. In **Mexico, Brazil** and **Peru**, the murder of journalists once more became a real concern.

Despite the release of four jailed journalists, including the well-known poet and dissident Raúl Rivero, at the end of the year, **Cuba** remained (after China) the world’s second biggest prison for journalists, with 22 detained. All local criticism of President Fidel Castro’s regime is considered a crime.

There is genuine news diversity in **Colombia**, but journalists pay for it with their lives and one was killed during the year. Exposing abuses by armed groups (paramilitaries and guerrillas) and corrupt

politicians is still more dangerous than elsewhere in the continent and about 50 journalists were threatened or physically attacked during the period.

Press freedom situation has improved in **Haiti** since the fall of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in January. But difficulties in the countryside and persistent and worrying problems in investigating the murders of journalists Jean Dominique and Brignol Lindor show there is some way to go.

North America has genuine press freedom, but problems with defending the secrecy of journalistic sources became an important issue in the media. In the **United States**, the government for the first time put a TV station (the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah *Al-Manar*) on its list of terrorist organisations, thus silencing its broadcasts in the country. While *Al-Manar* has unquestionably broadcast unacceptable anti-Semitic statements, the US government may have set a dangerous precedent by putting any kind of news media in the same category as a terrorist group.

## **Problems for the independent media in Africa**

---

Journalists in **Côte d'Ivoire**, in both Abidjan (the capital in the south) and Bouaké (the main town in the rebel-held north), take big risks each day in doing their jobs. Forty were threatened or physically attacked during the year, nine arrested and 12 media outlets censored or had their premises ransacked.

The situation is very bleak in **Eritrea**, where there is no longer any privately-owned media, freedom of expression or foreign correspondents. Fourteen journalists and editors have been imprisoned in secret places without trial.

Things are not much better in **Zimbabwe**, where repeated government attacks on the *Daily News* have reduced the independent press to a couple of privately-circulated weeklies. In preparation for general elections in 2005, the government has banned the main opposition party from the state-owned media.

Press freedom has improved in several countries and journalists in **Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia** and **South Africa** now enjoy freedoms close to those of their colleagues in Europe.

Impunity still reigns however in **Burkina Faso**, where nobody has been punished six years after the murder of journalist Norbert Zongo.