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PRESS FREEDOM

20 October 2005

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WORLDWIDE PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2005

No progress in Iraq, still the world's most dangerous country, or in Iran, the region's biggest prison for journalists

Western democracies slip back, with the US falling more than 20 places

North Korea once again comes bottom of the Reporters Without Borders fourth annual World Press Freedom Index, released today. It is closely followed in the 167-country list by Eritrea (166th) and Turkmenistan (165th), which are other "black holes" for news where the privately-owned media is not allowed and freedom of expression does not exist.

Journalists there simply relay government propaganda. Anyone out of step is harshly dealt with. A word too many, a commentary that deviates from the official line or a wrongly-spelled name and the author may be thrown in prison or draw the wrath of those in power. Harassment, psychological pressure, intimidation and round-the-clock surveillance are routine.

East Asia (Burma 163rd, China 159th, Vietnam 158th, Laos 155th), Central Asia (Turkmenistan 165th, Uzbekistan 155th, Afghanistan 125th, Kazakhstan 119th) and the Middle East (Iran 164th, Iraq 157th, Saudi Arabia 154th, Syria 145th) are where journalists have the toughest time and where government repression or armed groups prevent the media operating freely.

The situation in Iraq (157th) deteriorated further during the year as the safety of journalists became more precarious. At least 24 journalists and media assistants have been killed so far this year, making it the mostly deadly conflict for the media since World War II. A total of 72 media workers have been killed since the fighting began in March 2003.

But more and more African and Latin American countries (Benin 25th, Namibia 25th, El Salvador 28th, Cape Verde 29th, Mauritius 34th, Mali 37th, Costa Rica 41st and Bolivia 45th) are getting very good rankings.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world, as well as the right to inform the public and to be informed, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reporters Without Borders has nine national sections (in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.

Western democracies slip back

Some Western democracies slipped down the Index. The United States (44th) fell more than 20 places, mainly because of the imprisonment of *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller and legal moves undermining the privacy of journalistic sources. Canada (21st) also dropped several places due to decisions that weakened the privacy of sources and sometimes turned journalists into “court auxiliaries.” France (30th) also slipped, largely because of searches of media offices, interrogations of journalists and introduction of new press offences.

At the top of the Index once again are northern European countries Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands, where robust press freedom is firmly established. The top 10 countries are all European. New Zealand (12th), Trinidad and Tobago (12th), Benin (25th) and South Korea (34th) are the highest-ranked countries in other continents.

Press freedom, economic development and independence

Countries that have recently won their independence or have recovered it are very observant of press freedom and give the lie to the insistence of many authoritarian leaders that democracy takes decades to establish itself. Nine states that have had independence (or recovered it within the past 15 years) are among the top 60 countries – Slovenia (9th), Estonia (11th), Latvia (16th), Lithuania (21st), Namibia (25th), Bosnia-Herzegovina (33rd), Macedonia (43rd), Croatia (56th) and East Timor (58th).

The Index also contradicts the frequent argument by leaders of poor and repressive countries that economic development is a vital precondition for democracy and respect for human rights. The top of the Index is heavily dominated by rich countries, but several very poor ones (with a per capita GDP of less than \$1,000 in 2003) are among the top 60, such as Benin (25th), Mali (37th), Bolivia (45th), Mozambique (49th), Mongolia (53rd), Niger (57th) and East Timor (58th).

Little improvement in Middle East

Few of the region’s countries rank high in the Index. Israel (47th) does best but it slipped several places this year because of the army’s mistreatment of journalists in the Occupied Territories. This kind of violence decreased sharply during the year and is no longer dealt with

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in a separate section as in previous years. The expulsion of a French journalist in July also contributed to Israel's downgrading.

However, lawlessness continues in Gaza and journalists have become targets. Four were kidnapped during the year and the Palestinian Authority (132nd) seemed powerless to prevent the situation worsening.

Prison, killings and threats

Iran (164th) once again has the region's worst record of press freedom, with seven journalists in prison and four others provisionally free and in danger of being returned to jail at any moment. Akbar Ganji is still being held in solitary confinement despite a more than 60-day hunger-strike, an international campaign and several official promises to free him. Cyber-dissident Mojtaba Saminejad has been in jail since October 2004, serving a two-year sentence.

In Algeria (129th), President Abdelaziz Bouteflika is still trying to cow the privately-owned press. Editor Mohamed Benchicou has been in prison for nearly a year and a half and several other journalists have been given prison sentences for press offences. The situation is very difficult in the provinces, where journalists are still hounded and threatened.

Lebanon (108th) is traditionally the region's top-ranking country on the Index but it dropped more than 50 places in two years because of the murder of journalist Samir Kassir in June. An attack that seriously mutilated journalist May Chidiac in mid-September boded ill for the future. Journalists have become targets since the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February and are paying the price of the poor security situation. For the first time for years, several fled the country fearing for their lives.

The US army (United States in Iraq, 137th) also violated press freedom, as it did in 2003 and 2004. Six journalists were jailed in Abu Ghraib prison without explanation and not allowed to receive visits from their lawyers, families or employers. Four journalists were killed by US army gunfire between September 2004 and September 2005.

Lack of independent media

A free and independent press still does not exist in Syria (145th), Saudi Arabia (154th) and Libya (162nd) and their inhabitants have no other source of news except the official media, which just puts out regime propaganda.

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Conditions in Egypt (143rd) deteriorated sharply, with attacks on several journalists and with President Hosni Mubarak failing to keep his promise, made in 2004, to decriminalise press offences.

The authorities in Tunisia (147th) have tightened their grip on journalistic activity and President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's promises to allow more press freedom have proved empty. Bureaucratic censorship is still used to block new independent media outlets being set up and the national journalists' union, with more than 150 members, was prevented from holding its first general assembly in September. Emergence of a free press remains a dream in the country that will host the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society from 16 to 18 November.

Reporters Without Borders compiled this Index of 167 countries by asking its partner organizations (14 freedom of expression groups from around the world) and its network of 130 correspondents, as well as journalists, researchers, legal experts and human rights activists, to answer 50 questions designed to assess a country's level of press freedom. Some countries are not mentioned for lack of information about them.

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Reporters Without Borders

World press freedom ranking 2005

N°	Country	Note
1	Denmark	0,50
-	Finland	0,50
-	Iceland	0,50
-	Ireland	0,50
-	Netherlands	0,50
-	Norway	0,50
-	Switzerland	0,50
8	Slovakia	0,75
9	Czech Republic	1,00
-	Slovenia	1,00
11	Estonia	1,50
12	Hungary	2,00
-	New Zealand	2,00
-	Sweden	2,00
-	Trinidad and Tobago	2,00
16	Austria	2,50
-	Latvia	2,50
18	Belgium	4,00
-	Germany	4,00
-	Greece	4,00
21	Canada	4,50
-	Lithuania	4,50
23	Portugal	4,83
24	United Kingdom	5,17
25	Benin	5,50
-	Cyprus	5,50
-	Namibia	5,50
28	El Salvador	5,75
29	Cape Verde	6,00
30	France	6,25
31	Australia	6,50
-	South Africa	6,50
33	Bosnia and Herzegovina	7,00
34	Jamaica	7,50
-	Mauritius	7,50
-	South Korea	7,50
37	Japan	8,00
-	Mali	8,00
39	Hong-Kong	8,25
40	Spain	8,33
41	Costa Rica	8,50
42	Italy	8,67
43	Macedonia	8,75
44	United States of America (American territory)	9,50
45	Bolivia	9,67
46	Uruguay	9,75
47	Israel	10,00
48	Bulgaria	10,25
49	Mozambique	10,50

50	Chile	11,75
51	Dominican Republic	12,25
-	Taiwan	12,25
53	Cyprus (North)	12,50
-	Mongolia	12,50
-	Poland	12,50
56	Croatia	12,83
57	Niger	13,00
58	Timor-Leste	13,50
59	Argentina	13,67
60	Botswana	14,00
-	Fiji	14,00
62	Albania	14,17
63	Brazil	14,50
-	Tonga	14,50
65	Serbia and Montenegro	14,83
66	Ghana	15,00
-	Panama	15,00
68	Nicaragua	15,25
69	Paraguay	15,50
70	Romania	16,17
71	Congo	17,00
-	Guinea-Bissau	17,00
-	Seychelles	17,00
74	Moldova	17,50
-	Tanzania	17,50
76	Angola	18,00
-	Honduras	18,00
78	Burkina Faso	19,00
-	Senegal	19,00
80	Uganda	19,25
81	Lesotho	19,50
82	Central African Republic	19,75
83	Cameroon	20,50
-	Liberia	20,50
85	Kuwait	21,25
86	Guatemala	21,50
87	Ecuador	21,75
88	Comoros	22,00
89	Malawi	22,75
90	Burundi	23,00
-	Cambodia	23,00
-	Qatar	23,00
-	Venezuela	23,00
-	Zambia	23,00
95	Togo	23,75
96	Jordan	24,00
97	Madagascar	24,50
98	Turkey	25,00
99	Georgia	25,17
100	Kosovo	25,75
-	United Arab Emirates	25,75
102	Armenia	26,00

-	Gabon	26,00
-	Guinea	26,00
-	Indonesia	26,00
106	India	27,00
107	Thailand	28,00
108	Lebanon	28,25
109	Chad	30,00
-	Kenya	30,00
111	Kyrgyzstan	32,00
112	Ukraine	32,50
113	Malaysia	33,00
-	Tajikistan	33,00
115	Sri Lanka	33,25
116	Peru	33,33
117	Haiti	33,50
118	Swaziland	35,00
119	Kazakhstan	36,17
-	Morocco	36,17
121	Djibouti	37,00
122	Rwanda	38,00
123	Bahrein	38,75
-	Nigeria	38,75
125	Afghanistan	39,17
126	Sierra Leone	39,50
127	Mauritania	40,00
128	Colombia	40,17
129	Algeria	40,33
130	Gambia	41,00
131	Ethiopia	42,00
132	Palestinian Authority	42,50
133	Equatorial Guinea	44,00
-	Sudan	44,00
135	Mexico	45,50
136	Yemen	46,25
137	United States of America (in Iraq)	48,50
138	Russia	48,67
139	Philippines	50,00
140	Singapore	50,67
141	Azerbaijan	51,00
142	Bhutan	51,50
143	Egypt	52,00
144	Côte d'Ivoire	52,25
145	Syria	55,00
146	Democratic Republic of Congo	57,33
147	Tunisia	57,50
148	Maldives	58,50
149	Somalia	59,00
150	Pakistan	60,75
151	Bangladesh	61,25
152	Belarus	61,33
153	Zimbabwe	64,25
154	Saudi Arabia	66,00
155	Laos	66,50

-	Uzbekistan	66,50
157	Iraq	67,00
158	Vietnam	73,25
159	China	83,00
160	Nepal	86,75
161	Cuba	87,00
162	Libya	88,75
163	Burma	88,83
164	Iran	89,17
165	Turkmenistan	93,50
166	Eritrea	99,75
167	North Korea	109,00