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Press freedom

20 October 2003

SECOND WORLD PRESS FREEDOM RANKING

Cuba second from last, just ahead of North Korea

United States and Israel singled out for actions beyond their borders

Reporters Without Borders today publishes its second world press freedom ranking. Like last year, the most catastrophic situation is to be found in Asia, with eight countries in the bottom ten: North Korea, Burma, Laos, China, Iran, Vietnam, Turkmenistan and Bhutan. Independent news media are either non-existent in these countries, or are constantly repressed by the authorities. Journalists there work in extremely difficult conditions, with no freedom and no security. A number of them are imprisoned in Burma, China and Iran.

Cuba is in 165th position, second from last. Twenty-six independent journalists were arrested in the spring of 2003 and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 14 to 27 years, making Cuba the world's biggest prison for journalists. They were accused of writing articles for publication abroad that played into the hands of "imperialist interests." Eritrea, in 162nd position, has the worst situation in Africa. Privately-owned news media have been banned there for the past two years and 14 journalists are being held in undisclosed locations.

To compile this ranking, Reporters Without Borders asked journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists to fill out a questionnaire evaluating respect for press freedom in a particular country. A total of 166 countries are included in the ranking (as against 139 last year). The other countries were left out because of a lack of reliable, well-supported data.

■ Wealth and press freedom don't always go together

As in 2002, the ranking shows that a country's respect for press freedom is not solely linked to its economic development. The top 50 include countries that are among the poorest in the world, such as Benin (29th position), Timor-Leste (30th) and Madagascar (46th).

Conversely, the 50 countries that respect press freedom least include such rich nations as Bahrain (117th) and Singapore (144th).

■ Special situation of the United States and Israel

The ranking distinguishes behaviour at home and abroad in the cases of the United States and Israel. They are ranked in 31st and 44th positions respectively as regards respect for freedom of expression on their own territory, but they fall to the 135th and 146th positions as regards behaviour beyond their borders.

The Israeli army's repeated abuses against journalists in the occupied territories and the US army's responsibility in the death of several reporters during the war in Iraq constitute unacceptable behaviour by two nations that never stop stressing their commitment to freedom of expression.

■ General deterioration in the Arab world

The war in Iraq played a major role in an increased crackdown on the press by the Arab regimes. Concerned about maintaining their image and facing public opinion largely opposed to the war, they stepped up control of the press and increased pressure on journalists, who are forced to use self-censorship.

Kuwait (102nd) replaced Lebanon (106th) as the Arab world's leader as regards respect for freedom of expression because of cases of censorship in Lebanon, together with abusive judicial proceedings and an attack on the television station *Futur TV*. Saudi Arabia (156th), Syria (155th), Libya (153rd) and Oman (152nd) used all the means at their disposal to prevent the emergence of a free and independent press.

In Morocco (131st), the hopes pinned on Mohammed VI when he became king in July 1999 have been dashed. Independent newspapers are still subject to constant harassment from the authorities. Ali Lmrabet, the publisher and editor of two satirical weeklies, was sentenced in June 2003 to three years in prison for "insulting the person of the king" because of articles and cartoons touching on taboo subjects.

▪ European Union gets good rankings, except Italy and Spain

Italy received a poor ranking (53rd) compared with the other European Union countries for the second year running. Silvio Berlusconi's conflict of interests as head of government and owner of a media empire is still unresolved. Furthermore, a draft law to reform radio and TV broadcasting, tailored to Berlusconi's interests, is likely to increase the threats to news diversity in Italy.

Spain's relatively low ranking (42nd) is due to difficulties for journalists in the Basque country. The terrorist organisation ETA has stepped up its threats against the news media, promising to target journalists whose coverage does not match its view of the situation. Furthermore, the necessary fight against terrorism has affected press freedom, with the forced closure as a "preventive measure" of the Basque newspaper *Egunkaria*, whose senior staff are suspected of collaborating with ETA.

France is ranked as low as 26th because of its archaic defamation legislation, the increasingly frequent challenges to the principle of confidentiality of sources and the repeated abusive detention of journalists by police.

▪ Former USSR still lags behind

The situation remains worrying in Russia (148th), Ukraine (132nd) and Belarus (151st). A truly independent press exists in Russia, but Russia's poor ranking is justified by the censorship of anything to do with the war in Chechnya, several murders and the recent abduction of the *Agence France-Presse* correspondent in Ingushetia. Russia continues to be one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists.

Press freedom is virtually non-existent in much of central Asia, especially Turkmenistan (158th) and Uzbekistan (154th). No criticism of the authorities is tolerated.

▪ Non-state violence

Several countries with a democratically-elected government and a free and independent press have poor rankings. This is most notably the case with Bangladesh (143rd), Colombia (147th) and Philippines (118th). Journalists in these countries are the victims of violence that comes not only from the state but also from political parties, criminal gangs or guerrilla groups. In other cases, such as Nepal (150th), the press is caught in the cross fire between security forces and rebels.

Such violence results in considerable self-censorship by the news media, which do not dare to broach such subjects as corruption, collusion between political leaders and organised crime, or sectarian clashes. At the same time, the authorities very often fail to respond to this violence with the appropriate measures, namely protection for journalists and the punishment of those responsible.

▪ News is the victim of war in Africa

Wars and serious political crises have inevitably had an impact on press freedom in Africa. The three countries that have fallen most in the ranking in the past 12 months are Côte d'Ivoire (137th), Liberia (132nd) and Guinea-Bissau (118th). Local and foreign journalists were exposed to the violence of the warring parties in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, while the military closed down news media in Guinea-Bissau.

■ World press freedom ranking

N°	Country	Note
1	Finland	0,50
-	Iceland	0,50
-	Netherlands	0,50
-	Norway	0,50
5	Denmark	1,00
-	Trinidad and Tobago	1,00
7	Belgium	1,17
8	Germany	1,33
9	Sweden	1,50
10	Canada	1,83
11	Latvia	2,25
12	Czech Republic	2,50
-	Estonia	2,50
-	Slovakia	2,50
-	Switzerland	2,50
16	Austria	2,75
17	Ireland	2,83
-	Lithuania	2,83
-	New Zealand	2,83
20	Slovenia	3,00
21	Hungary	3,33
-	Jamaica	3,33
-	South Africa	3,33
24	Costa Rica	3,83
25	Uruguay	4,00
26	France	4,17
27	United Kingdom	4,25
28	Portugal	5,17
29	Benin	5,25
30	Timor-Leste	5,50
31	Greece	6,00
-	United States of America (American territory)	6,00
33	Poland	6,17
34	Albania	6,50
-	Bulgaria	6,50
-	Nicaragua	6,50
37	Bosnia and Herzegovina	6,83
-	Chile	6,83
-	El Salvador	6,83

40	Paraguay	7,17
41	Mauritius	7,25
42	Ecuador	7,67
-	Spain	7,67
44	Israel (Israeli territory)	8,00
-	Japan	8,00
46	Madagascar	8,17
47	Cape Verde	8,25
48	Ghana	8,75
49	South Korea	9,17
50	Australia	9,25
51	Bolivia	9,67
-	Macedonia	9,67
53	Italy	9,75
-	Panama	9,75
55	Peru	10,25
56	Hong-Kong	11,00
-	Mali	11,00
-	Namibia	11,00
59	Fiji	11,50
-	Romania	11,50
61	Taiwan	12,00
62	Botswana	13,00
63	Congo	14,00
-	Mozambique	14,00
65	Honduras	14,17
66	Senegal	14,50
67	Argentina	15,17
68	Niger	15,75
69	Croatia	16,50
-	Tanzania	16,50
71	Brazil	16,75
72	Dominican Republic	17,00
73	Georgia	17,33
74	Mexico	17,67
75	Lesotho	17,75
76	Burkina Faso	18,00
77	Gambia	18,25
-	Mongolia	18,25
79	Comoros	18,50
-	Kenya	18,50
81	Cambodia	19,50
82	Thailand	19,67

83	Cyprus	20,83
84	Malawi	21,00
85	Serbia and Montenegro	21,33
86	Zambia	23,25
87	Sierra Leone	23,50
88	Chad	24,00
89	Sri Lanka	24,83
90	Armenia	25,17
91	Uganda	25,75
92	Burundi	26,25
93	Seychelles	26,75
94	Moldova	27,00
95	Togo	27,50
96	Venezuela	27,83
97	Angola	28,00
98	Cameroon	30,50
99	Guatemala	30,83
100	Haiti	31,00
101	Gabon	31,25
102	Kuwait	31,33
103	Nigeria	31,50
104	Kyrgyzstan	32,00
-	Malaysia	32,00
106	Lebanon	32,50
107	Central African Republic	32,75
108	Algeria	33,00
109	Guinea	33,17
110	Egypt	34,25
-	Indonesia	34,25
-	Rwanda	34,25
113	Azerbaijan	34,50
-	Tajikistan	34,50
115	Qatar	35,00
-	Turkey	35,00
117	Bahrain	35,17
118	Guinea-Bissau	35,25
-	Philippines	35,25
120	Djibouti	35,50
121	Mauritania	36,67
122	United Arab Emirates	37,00
-	Jordan	37,00
124	Ethiopia	37,50
-	Iraq	37,50

-	Swaziland	37,50
127	Democratic Republic of Congo	38,50
128	India	39,00
-	Pakistan	39,00
130	Palestinian Authority	39,25
131	Morocco	39,67
132	Liberia	40,00
-	Ukraine	40,00
134	Afghanistan	40,17
135	United States of America (in Iraq)	41,00
136	Yemen	41,83
137	Côte d'Ivoire	42,17
138	Kazakhstan	42,50
139	Equatorial Guinea	44,75
140	Somalia	45,00
141	Zimbabwe	45,50
142	Sudan	45,75
143	Bangladesh	46,50
144	Singapore	47,33
145	Maldives	47,50
146	Israel (Occupied Territories)	49,00
147	Colombia	49,17
148	Russia	49,50
149	Tunisia	50,83
150	Nepal	51,50
151	Belarus	52,00
152	Oman	57,75
153	Libya	60,00
154	Uzbekistan	61,50
155	Syria	67,50
156	Saudi Arabia	71,50
157	Bhutan	77,33
158	Turkmenistan	82,83
159	Vietnam	89,17
160	Iran	89,33
161	China	91,25
162	Eritrea	91,50
163	Laos	94,83
164	Burma	95,50
165	Cuba	97,83
166	North Korea	99,50

■ How the ranking was compiled

This ranking measures the state of press freedom in the world. It reflects the degree of freedom that journalists and news organisations enjoy in each country, and the efforts undertaken by the state to respect and ensure respect for this freedom.

It is a snapshot of the situation in a precise period. It only takes account of events between 1 September 2002 and 1 September 2003. It does not look at human rights violations in general, just press freedom violations.

To compile this ranking, Reporters Without Borders designed a questionnaire with 53 criteria for assessing the state of press freedom in each country. It includes every kind of violation directly affecting journalists (such as murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of issues, searches and harassment). It registers the degree of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for these press freedom violations. It takes account of the legal and judicial situation affecting the news media (such as the penalties for press offences, the existence of a state monopoly in certain areas and the existence of a regulatory body) and the behaviour of the authorities towards the state-owned news media and international press. It also takes account of the main obstacles to the free flow of information on the Internet.

Reporters Without Borders has taken account not only of abuses attributable to the state, but also those by armed militia, clandestine organisations or pressure groups that can pose a real threat to press freedom.

The questionnaire was sent to people who have a deep knowledge of the state of press freedom in a country or a number of countries: local journalists or foreign reporters based in a country, researchers, jurists, regional specialists and the researchers working for Reporters Without Borders' International Secretariat.

The countries that were ranked are those for which Reporters Without Borders received completed questionnaires from a number of independent sources. Others were not included because of a lack of reliable, well-supported input. In cases of ties, countries were ranked by alphabetical order.

Finally, in no case should this ranking be viewed as an indication of the quality of the press in the countries concerned. Reporters Without Borders defends press freedom, without taking a position on the quality of the editorial content of the news media. No account was taken of any breaches of professional ethics or codes of conduct.

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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, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.