



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 May 2013

English only

Human Rights Council

Twenty-third session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights,
civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Reporters Without Borders International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 May 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The world press in 2013: Dashed hopes

After the “Arab springs” and other protest movements that prompted many rises and falls in last year’s index, the 2013 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index marks a return to a more usual configuration.

The ranking of most countries is no longer attributable to dramatic political developments. This year’s index is a better reflection of the attitudes and intentions of governments towards media freedom in the medium or long term.

Although many criteria are considered, ranging from legislation to violence against journalists, democratic countries occupy the top of the index while dictatorial countries occupy the last three positions.

“The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders does not take direct account of the kind of political system but it is clear that in dictatorships, news providers and their families are exposed to ruthless reprisals, while in democracies news providers have to cope with the media’s economic crises and conflicts of interest. While their situation is not always comparable, we should pay tribute to all those who resist pressure whether it is aggressively focused or diffuse.” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general, Christophe Deloire, said.

Coinciding with the release of its 2013 Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders is for the first time publishing an annual global “indicator” of worldwide media freedom. This new analytic tool measures the overall level of freedom of information in the world and the performance of the world’s governments in their entirety as regards this key freedom.

In view of the emergence of new technologies and the interdependence of governments and peoples, the freedom to produce and circulate news and information needs to be evaluated at the planetary as well as national level. Today, in 2013, the media freedom “indicator” stands at 3395, a point of reference for the years to come.

The indicator can also be broken down by region and, by means of weighting based on the population of each region, can be used to produce a score from zero to 100 in which zero represents total respect for media freedom. This produces a score of 17.5 for Europe, 30.0 for the Americas, 34.3 for Africa, 42.2 for Asia-Pacific and 45.3 for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Despite the Arab springs, the Middle East and North Africa region comes last with 48.5.

The high number of journalists and netizens killed in the course of their work in 2012 (the deadliest year ever registered by Reporters Without Borders in its annual roundup), naturally had an a significant impact on the ranking of the countries where these murders took place, above all Somalia (175th, -11), Syria (176th, 0), Mexico (153rd, -4) and Pakistan (159th, -8).

There are big rises.

Malawi (75th, +71) registered the biggest leap in the index, almost returning to the position it held before the excesses at the end of the Mutharika administration. Ivory Coast (96th, +63), which is emerging from the post-electoral crisis between the supporters of Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, has also soared, attaining its best position since 2003.

Burma (151st, +18) continued the ascent begun in last year’s index. Previously, it had been in the bottom 15 every year since 2002 but now, thanks to the Burmese spring’s unprecedented reforms, it has reached its best-ever position. Afghanistan (128th, +22) also registered a significant rise thanks to the fact that no journalists are in prison. It is nonetheless facing many challenges, especially with the withdrawal of foreign troops.

And there are big falls.

Mali (99th, -74) registered the biggest fall in the index as a result of all the turmoil in 2012. The military coup in Bamako on 22 March and the north's takeover by armed Islamists and Tuareg separatists exposed the media in the north to censorship and violence. Tanzania (70th, -36) sank more than 30 places because, in the space of four months, a journalist was killed while covering a demonstration and another was murdered.

Buffeted by social and economic protests, the Sultanate of Oman (141st) sank 24 places, the biggest fall in the Middle East and North Africa in 2012.

Journalists in Israel (112th, -20) enjoy real freedom of expression despite the existence of military censorship but the country fell in the index because of the Israeli military's targeting of journalists in the Palestinian Territories.

In Asia, Japan (53rd, -31) has been affected by a lack of transparency and almost zero respect for access to information on subjects directly or indirectly related to Fukushima. This sharp fall should sound an alarm. Malaysia (145th, -23) has fallen to its lowest-ever position because access to information is becoming more and more limited. The same situation prevails in Cambodia (143rd, -26), where authoritarianism and censorship are on the increase. Macedonia (116th, -22) has also fallen more than 20 places following the arbitrary withdrawal of media licences and deterioration in the environment for journalists.

Some of the new governments in the Middle East and North Africa spawned by protest movements have turned on the journalists and netizens who covered these movements' demands and aspirations for more freedom. What with legal voids, arbitrary appointments of state media chiefs, physical attacks, trials and a lack of transparency, Tunisia (138th, -4) and Egypt (158th, +8) have remained at a deplorable level in the index and have highlighted the stumbling blocks that Libya (131st, +23) should avoid in order to maintain its transition to a free press.

The deadliest country for journalists in 2012 was Syria (176th, 0), where journalists and netizens are the victims of an information war waged by both the Assad government, which stops at nothing in order to crack down and impose a news blackout, and by opposition factions that are increasingly intolerant of dissent. In Bahrain (165th, +8) the repression let up slightly, while in Yemen (169th, +2) the prospects continue to be disturbing despite a change of government. Oman (141st, -24) fell sharply because of a wave of arrests of netizens.

Other countries hit by protests saw mixed results. Vietnam (172nd, 0) failed to recover the six places it lost in the previous index and remained in the bottom ten. Uganda (104th, +35) has recovered but not where it was before cracking down on protests in 2011. Azerbaijan (156th, +6) and Belarus (157th, +11) both fell last year after using violence to suppress opposition demonstrations and this year they just moved back towards their appalling former positions. Chile (60th, +20) is beginning to recover after falling from 33rd to 80th in last year's index.

Political instability often has a divisive effect on the media.

It makes it very difficult to produce independently-reported news and information. It places journalists in the eye of the storm.

In such situations, threats and physical attacks on journalists and staff purges are common.

Regional models are found wanting.

In almost all parts of the world, influential countries that are regarded as "regional models" have fallen in the index. Brazil (108th, -9), South America's economic engine, continued last year's fall because five journalists were killed in 2012 and because of persistent

problems affecting media pluralism. In Asia, India (140th, -9) is at its lowest since 2002 because of increasing impunity for violence against journalists and because Internet censorship continues to grow. China (173rd, +1) shows no sign of improving. Its prisons still hold many journalists and netizens, while increasingly unpopular Internet censorship continues to be a major obstacle to access to information.

In Eastern Europe, Russia (148th, -6) has fallen again since President Putin's return. The country also continues to be marked by unacceptable impunity for all those who have murdered or attacked journalists. Turkey (154th, -6) has again fallen in the index as a result of reprisals against those who express views critical of the authorities on the Kurdish issue.

South Africa (52nd, -10), is still a country where freedom of information is a reality. However, although it has a respectable ranking, it has been slipping steadily in the index and, for the first time, is no longer in the top 50. Investigative journalism is threatened by the Protection of State Information Bill.

Some democracies stall or go into reverse.

The situation is unchanged for much of the European Union but the European model is unravelling. In Italy (57th, +4), defamation has yet to be decriminalized and state agencies make dangerous use of gag laws. Hungary (56th, -16) is still paying the price of its repressive legislative reforms, which had a major impact on the way journalists work. Greece's dramatic fall (84th, -14) is even more disturbing its journalists are exposed to public condemnation and violence from both extremist groups and the police.

Japan (53rd, -31), as noted above, plummeted because of censorship of nuclear industry coverage and its failure to reform the "kisha club" system. This is an alarming fall for a country that usually has a good ranking. Argentina (54th, -7) fell amid growing tension between the government and certain privately-owned media about a new law regulating the broadcast media.
