



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Twenty-second 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, 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.

[11 January 2013]

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

## News providers decimated in 2012

These are the worst set of figures since Reporters Without Borders began producing annual statistics in 1995:

- 88 journalists killed (+33%)
- 79 journalists arrested
- 1993 journalists threatened or physically attacked (+2%)
- 38 journalists kidnapped
- 73 journalists fled their country
- 6 media assistants killed
- 47 netizens and citizen-journalists killed (+840%)
- 144 bloggers and netizens arrested

The reasons for the unprecedented number of journalists killed in 2012 are essentially due to war in Syria, chaos in Somalia and Taliban violence in Pakistan. The impunity enjoyed by those responsible for violations of human rights, in particular, the right to freedom of information, encourages the continuation of these violations.

The victims were all sorts of news providers, with citizen-journalists and netizens the hardest hit (47 killed in 2012 against 5 in 2011). These men and women act as reporters, photographers and video-journalists, without their activities there would be complete news blackout in some regions of the world.

To compile these figures, Reporters Without Borders used detailed information gathered in the course of its rigorous monitoring of violations of freedom of information throughout the year. The victims were journalists or netizens killed because of their role in collecting and disseminating news and information. RWB did not include cases of journalists and netizens targeted solely because of their political or social activism, or for reasons unrelated to the provision of news and information. RWB continues to investigate cases in which it has so far been unable to ascertain causes and contexts in order to make a final decision.

In Syria at least 17 journalists, 44 citizen-journalists and 4 media assistants were killed in 2012, they were targeted by both sides of the conflict, as unwanted witnesses by the government and as spies by armed opposition groups increasingly intolerant of criticism.

In Somalia, 18 journalists were killed in the deadliest year yet for media personnel. The second half of September was particularly bloody with seven journalists killed, two of them in the space of 24 hours. Those responsible for the violence are either armed militias such as Al-Shebaab or local government officials who want to silence news outlets. Somali journalists are subjected to the most appalling constraints in both the capital Mogadishu and in the rest of the country. The lack of a stable government, endemic violence and generalized impunity all contribute to this grim toll.

In Pakistan, a journalist is killed every month. For the second year running, 10 journalists and 1 media assistant were murdered. Endemic violence in Baluchistan and Taliban reprisals make the country a minefield for news providers. It was the world's deadliest country for the media from 2009 to 2011.

Organized crime and corruption are responsible for the murder of 6 journalists in Mexico where violence has grown exponentially during the federal offensive against the drug cartels of the past six years

In Brazil 5 journalists killed behind the scenes. Drug traffickers operating across the Paraguayan border seem to have had a direct hand in the deaths of two of the five journalists murdered in connection with their work in Brazil in 2012. Both had covered

drug cases. Two of the other victims were blogging journalists, who often find that the least criticism of local officials can expose them to danger.

### **The world's biggest prisons for journalists**

There have never been as many journalists in prison. A total of 193 journalists and at least 130 netizens are currently jailed because of their role in the provision of news and information.

Reporters Without Borders recently concluded several months of investigations into Turkey's imprisoned journalists. Of the 70 journalists currently in prison, it managed to establish that at least 42 of them are being held in connection with their work of gathering and disseminating news and information. Many other cases are still being investigated. 4 media assistants are also detained. These numbers are without precedent since the end of the military rule. Limited legislative reforms have barely slowed the pace of arrests, searches and trials to which journalists are subjected, usually on the grounds of combating terrorism. Based on repressive laws, judicial practices are dominated by security concerns and show little respect for freedom of information and the right to due process. Although the climate is now more intimidating, the Turkish media continue to thrive and exhibit a great deal of diversity.

In China, with 30 journalists and 69 netizens in prison, there is no progress. The number of detained journalists has been fairly constant for years. Most of the hundred or so journalists and netizens currently held are serving long sentences in harsh conditions on charges of subversion or divulging state secrets. Those who arrest journalists are often local officials concerned about the bad publicity that can result from reports about corruption or nepotism.

At least 28 journalists are jailed in the hell of Eritrea's prisons. They have been cut off from the rest of the world since the major roundups in September 2001 and the closure of all of the privately-owned media. None of the 28 journalists currently in prison had the right to a trial or access to a lawyer and few have ever been allowed family visits. Prison conditions include solitary confinement and torture. At least seven journalists have died or committed suicide while held incommunicado, forgotten or ignored by the outside world. Eritrea is one of the planet's few remaining totalitarian dictatorships is ranked last in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

26 journalists and 17 netizens are jailed in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Media freedom deteriorated considerably in 2009 following the protests against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election. Ever since then, the government has continued jailing news providers who crossed its red lines. The state of health of some of the detainees is worrying and the families of detainees and those who were released are frequently subjected to threats, harassment and reprisals if they dare talk to the media.

News providers are not only being killed in Syria, at least 21 journalists and 18 netizens are held in Syrian cells. Many are also arrested and torture is systematic.

### **On the positive side: Fewer arrests and abductions**

The world registered a slight fall in arrests, abductions and news media ransacking, except in Asia and the Americas, where they continue to increase for those covering demonstrations and protests.

Arrests and physical attacks have fallen sharply in Libya and Egypt. Libya had 7 arrests in 2012, down from 28 in 2011 and Egypt 33 arrests and 63 attacks in 2012, down from 116 arrests and 104 attacks in 2011.

However, following its shorter and more peaceful 2011 revolution, Tunisia, registered a sharp increase.

In Oman, the authorities arrested around 30 bloggers in a bid to stop protests inspired by the Arab Spring.

In Latin America, Cuba has stepped up its harassment of dissident bloggers and journalists. Peru continues to rank first in physical attacks, maintaining its average of around 100 a year. The biggest increases were registered in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. In Argentina, the increase was due to growing polarization; in Brazil, to electoral tension and violence; and in Mexico, to a high level of violence compounded by political disturbances resulting from the presidential election. Colombia registered a fall in the number of physical attacks, but it was not sufficient to modify its status as one of the region's most violent countries.

India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal are among the Asian countries that have registered increases of such violations.

With an undeclared coup d'état in Maldives and the silencing of the media in Sri Lanka, the Indian subcontinent is the Asian region where the situation deteriorated most in 2012.

The Chinese Communist Party Congress was accompanied by an increase in arrests, attacks and censorship. Many media are trying to free themselves of the Propaganda Department and local officials' control, but the Communist Party, constantly finding new censorship methods, refuses to loosen its grip on this "strategic" sector.

In Africa, 2012 saw new violations in Mali, especially in the north (13 arrests, 8 cases of threats or attacks, 2 abductions and at least 4 news media censored). Abuses and cases of censorship are growing steadily in Nigeria, the DRC, Sudan and Somalia. A relative calm returned in Uganda, Malawi and Angola where the authorities had cracked down on protests in 2011.

A relative calm has also returned to Belarus, where the number of arrests fell to the more usual but still worrying level of 31 after the unprecedented protests and crackdown of 2011.

Sustained by a culture of impunity, physical attacks against journalists increased in Ukraine.

In Turkey, arrests doubled as a result of tensions surrounding the issue of the Kurdish minority. Endemic violence also accounts for the still high number of journalists being forced to flee abroad: 73 in 2012 compared with 77 in 2011.

As a result of its bloody conflict, Syria replaced Iran in 2012 as the biggest source of news providers fleeing into exile.

Finally, more than 10 journalists fled Somalia in the month of September alone.

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