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Journalists reporting on organised crime groups in Latin America and links between public officials and those groups remain the target of threats of violence, attacks and murders. Impunity prevails as investigations by law enforcement bodies and the judiciary fail. Verbal attacks by political leaders against critical reporters and media have only added to an already hostile environment.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the past six months have been marked by a number of setbacks in the area of press freedom, mainly due to autocratic regimes that do not hesitate to take repressive measures to prevent independent voices from making themselves heard. Bloggers throughout the region continue their relentless battle to spread news and information ignored or censored by the mainstream media.

Governments throughout Africa continue resorting to charges of defamation, sedition, and “disrupting public order” to intimidate and sanction independent and opposition media. Reporting on rebellions or criticizing the country’s leadership, administration or the army also lands many African journalists in prison. Despite efforts led by media and civil society organisations, free expression remains under threat.

Freedom of the press continues to be challenged in various parts of Europe and Central Asia. Death threats against or prosecution of journalists reporting on conflict zones, war crimes, and organised crime remain disturbingly common. Journalists have taken a high toll in an increasingly volatile political situation in the Caucasus, where four journalists were killed in August alone.

Asia has been the scene of increasing violence targeting journalists, whether they reported on corruption, conflicts or simply expressed dissenting views. Severe restrictions continue to impede the work of independent media and the free flow of information.

AMERICAS

Journalists killed: Mexico (2), Dominican Republic (1), Venezuela (1)
TOTAL = 4

Journalists reporting on organised crime groups in Latin America and links between public officials and those groups remain the target of threats of violence, attacks and murders. Impunity prevails as investigations by law enforcement bodies and the judiciary fail. Verbal attacks by political leaders against critical reporters and media have only added to an already hostile environment.

In the **United States**, California authorities agreed in November to undertake additional



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investigations into the August 2007 murder of Chauncey Bailey, editor of the weekly *The Oakland Post*. At the time of his murder Bailey was working on a story about the financial status of a bakery, Your Black Muslim Bakery, which had filed bankruptcy in October 2006. He had also reported on alleged statutory rape accusations against Yusuf Bey, the founder of the bakery. A 19-year-old handyman at a local bakery initially confessed to the murder, explaining he was angered by Bailey's negative coverage of the bakery and its staff. He later retracted. In a 25 October lengthy report, the Chauncey Bailey Project, a consortium of San Francisco Bay-area news organisations and journalists, outlined alleged police irregularities in the investigation.

In June, the publisher and editor of an Urdu-language newspaper in Houston, *Pakistan Times USA*, received telephone death threats, and thousands of copies of the free weekly were removed from dozens of locations in south-eastern Texas. The threats and theft of the papers came after *Pakistan Times USA* published an advertisement by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a sect deemed heretical by some Muslims. *Pakistan Times USA* is not the first Urdu-language paper or publication to be targeted in the United States. In May 2007, the publisher and editor of the *Urdu Times* as well as the editor-in-chief of the *Pakistan Post*, both based in New York, were each threatened.

On 28 October, companies including Yahoo, Google and Microsoft, and human rights groups including Human Rights First, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, and Human Rights in China launched the "Global Network Initiative: Protecting and Advancing Freedom of Expression and Privacy in the Information and Communication Technology Industry (GNI)." The initiative aims at guiding information and communications technology companies in protecting and advancing freedom of expression and privacy across the world when they encounter laws and policies that interfere with these fundamental human rights. 2007 Golden Pen laureate Shi Tao was jailed in late 2004 after the American search engine company Yahoo provided information to the Chinese authorities that led to his arrest. Shi is serving a 10-year sentence on charges of "leaking state secrets" for writing an e-mail about media restrictions in the run-up to the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 2004.

In **Mexico**, Miguel Angel Villagómez Valle, editor and founder of the daily newspaper *La Noticia de Michoacán*, was executed hours after being kidnapped on 9 October in the state of Michoacán. The newspaper is a small regional tabloid that regularly covers crime and politics. One month before his death, Villagómez mentioned receiving a threatening call on his mobile phone. On 13 November, José Armando Rodríguez Carreón, a senior crime reporter for the local daily *El Diario*, based in Ciudad Juárez on the border with the US, was shot at least eight times by an unidentified assailant. In the week prior his murder, Rodríguez had covered the murder of two police officers.

Mexico is one of the world's deadliest nations for journalists, with 23 killed since 2000, at least seven in direct reprisal for their work. Moreover, at least seven journalists, most of them investigating links between public officials and drug traffickers, have disappeared since 2005. The rise in disappearances suggests a significant shift in the dangers facing the Mexican press. All seven of the disappearances remain unresolved today. In this context, it has repeatedly been



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proposed to "federalize" crimes against journalists by making it a federal offence to inhibit the exercise of freedom of expression or of the press.

In **Cuba**, 26 journalists are still in jail. Most of them were arrested in March 2003 during a massive crackdown on the country's independent press and grassroots dissent, known as the "Black Spring." They were given prison sentences ranging from 14 to 27 years after sham trials. They are subject to ill treatment and appalling living conditions. Most of them have developed serious health problems for which they are regularly refused medical care. The journalists' families are watched and often harassed. Cuba remains the world's second-leading jailer of journalists, behind only China.

In the **Dominican Republic**, Normando Garcia Reyes, a cameraman and producer for the daily news programme *Detras de la Noticia* (Behind the News) on Teleunion, was shot to death in early August. Garcia Reyes had reportedly received a number of death threats, warning him that if he kept reporting on crime he was going to die. The journalist's car was set on fire eight months before the killing.

September has seen a rise of violent attacks and threats against journalists covering civil unrest in different regions of **Bolivia**. Antigovernment protests that left at least 18 people killed and dozens injured, erupted as opposition groups demanded a larger share in the country's gas profits, greater autonomy and also opposed a constitutional reform.

In late August, **Colombia's** President Alvaro Uribe called for a criminal investigation of Daniel Coronell, news director of TV network Canal Uno and columnist for the weekly magazine *Semana*, alleging that the journalist broke the law by not immediately disclosing a videotaped interview that reportedly links the administration to a bribery scandal. High-ranking officials allegedly offered bribes to former congresswoman Yidis Medina in exchange for her vote in favor of a constitutional amendment that allowed Uribe to seek re-election in 2006.

Journalists in **Venezuela** are subject to threats and violence in an environment that remains hostile to an independent and opposition press. In June, Pierre Fould Gerges, Vice President of the daily *Reporte Diaric de la Economia*, was shot to death. The murder occurred after months of death threats against the newspaper's staff, reportedly triggered by the daily's critical stand toward government corruption.

Chile's President Michelle Bachelet signed on 11 August the Law on Transparency of Public Functions and Access to Information of the State Administration. It establishes that every person has the right to request and receive information from any public institution, including public companies.

In July, the home of **Brazilian** journalist Jeso Carneiro was set in fire in the town of Santarém, Pará. Carneiro is the editor of the political section of the weekly newspaper *Gazeta de Santarém* and publishes a blog. Carneiro believes this attack to be related to his challenging reports on local politicians. In 2000, Carneiro's car was set on fire in the garage of his house and in 2002 the building of newspaper *Gazeta de Santarém* was also set on fire.



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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Journalists killed: Iraq (6)

TOTAL = 6

In the Middle East and North Africa, the past six months have been marked by a number of setbacks in the area of press freedom, mainly due to autocratic regimes that do not hesitate to take repressive measures to prevent independent voices from making themselves heard. Bloggers throughout the region continue their relentless battle to spread news and information ignored or censored by the mainstream media.

Despite a sharp decline in journalist killings in **Iraq** since the beginning of the year, the figures are still high with 6 journalists killed since June. The war in Iraq has been the deadliest armed conflict for the media since the Second World War, and according to international sources, no one has ever been convicted for the murder of a journalist in Iraq. Iraqi Interior Ministry and the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory in Iraq (JFO) have jointly created a hotline for journalists in danger in October, just a few weeks after the Ministry set up a special police unit to investigate murders of journalists in an effort to enhance the protection of journalists and put an end to impunity.

Journalists have often been targeted by religious leaders in **Saudi Arabia** for writing articles or broadcasting programmes viewed as 'blasphemous' and 'anti-Islamic.' In the latest case, a high-ranking Saudi religious leader, Sheikh Saleh al-Luhidan, issued a fatwa, on 12 September, calling for the murder of owners of Arabic satellite television stations that spread "depravity". The authorities continue to arrest and prosecute bloggers and to ban human rights websites. The blogger Roshdi Algadir was arrested on 4 November and reportedly beaten up and forced to sign an agreement to never again publish his work on the Internet. The reason behind the attack was a poem that Algadir had posted on his blog.

The press freedom situation in **Yemen** has deteriorated over the past six months. The Yemeni government is tightening its grip on the media by prosecuting journalists and banning a number of websites in an attempt to limit the free flow of information on controversial issues. Journalists are warned against reporting on "security issues" and government's actions against terrorists. Two outspoken critics of the government were sentenced to prison in the past six months. On 11 June, the Yemeni State Security Court sentenced Abdelkarim Al-Khaiwani, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Al-Shoura* to six years in prison. Al-Khaiwani was on trial for his coverage of the conflict in Sa'ada, a province that is allegedly a terrorist harbour. Al-Khaiwani was released on 25 September after a presidential pardon, which said his release was in the honour of the holy month of Ramadan.

A few months after the fierce clashes in **Lebanon** in early May, media professionals are still frequently targeted and threatened. Press accreditations issued by the Lebanese Information Ministry are still not respected in Hezbollah-controlled areas, where journalists must obtain



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permission from the party's press bureau. Three Brazilian journalists were arrested by the Hezbollah, while filming a war related story in a restaurant in the south Beirut district of Dahiyeh on 15 August, three days after French journalist David Hury was briefly detained by the Hezbollah. Beirut-based blogger Tariq Saleh, who was arrested with the Brazilians, said in his blog that the reporters had sought Hezbollah's permission to film in the area, but it was denied.

Syrian authorities continue to arrest, imprison and harass journalists and dissidents, who challenge the policies of President Bashar al-Asad, call for democratic reforms or advocate changes in Syria's relations with Lebanon. Twelve signatories of the Damascus Declaration, three of whom are journalists, were sentenced on 29 October to 30 months in prison for "publishing false information with the aim of harming the state", "membership in a secret organisation designed to destabilise the state" and "inciting ethnic and racial tensions." Signed in October 2005 by opposition representatives and leading members of the civil society, the Damascus Declaration is a call for change of government policies and for political freedoms, respect for ethnic and religious minorities, separation of powers and freedom of expression.

Media in the **Palestinian Territories** continue to be victims of the internal conflict between the Islamist party Hamas, controlling the Gaza Strip, and President Mahmoud Abbas' party, Fatah, in the West Bank. The Hamas leadership has announced on 13 October a new system of accreditation for all telecommunications companies, Internet service providers, broadcast media and news agencies, reinforcing control over media in the Gaza strip. Meanwhile, the Israeli Defence Ministry issued a ban that has prevented dozens of foreign journalists from entering the Gaza Strip since 6 November.

In North Africa, newspapers in **Algeria**, **Morocco** and **Egypt** have come under new attacks by the authorities in the past six months. In order to exercise pressure on media deemed too critical, the governments in these three countries do not hesitate to prosecute, arrest and hand massive fines which compromise the very existence of the targeted media enterprises, or simply ban them.

In **Algeria**, state pressures and censorship continue. Newspaper publishers and journalists find themselves before the courts on a weekly basis on charges of defamation and libel. In June, the government withdrew the press accreditation of the AFP bureau chief and the Reuters correspondent for allegedly reporting an exaggerated casualty tally from the Beni Amrani terrorist bombing attack on 8 June and fabricating reports of an attack at a bus stop in the town of Bouira the following day. In a separate case, the police have prevented the printing and distribution of prominent Algerian journalist Mohamed Benchicou's book, "The Free Man's Journal" ("Journal d'un homme libre"). The injunction has prevented Benchicou from presenting his book at the 13th International Book Fair in Algiers, held from 27 October to 5 November.

Moroccan Communications Ministry announced on 31 October a distribution ban on the international edition of the French weekly *L'Express* for "attacking Islam." Algerian and Tunisian authorities also decided to ban the same issue of *L'Express*.



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In **Egypt**, the government has continued its crackdown on the media. In early August, the Egyptian government introduced new regulations that require owners of Internet cafés to request personal information from users. It is feared that the obligation to provide personal details will deter people from surfing the web freely or participating candidly in online forums. In the course of October and November, the Egyptian security service has conducted an aggressive campaign against bloggers and Internet activists who are critical of the country's authoritarian regime, raiding the houses of several prominent bloggers, seizing their computers, arresting and prosecuting them.

Under President Ben Ali, **Tunisia** continues to be one of the most repressive countries in the Arab region, with no independent media and ruthless punishments of journalists and press freedom advocates. In September, security agents detained Slim Boukhdhir, an online writer, for two hours, demanding that he stops his work. Boukhdhir had just written an article urging Ben Ali to follow the advice of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and loosen the state's grip on the civil society. Authorities had harassed Boukhdhir in the past, jailing him for several months earlier in the year. In a separate case, the public prosecutor issued in October a court summons to Neziha Rejiba, editor of the online magazine *Kalima* and one of the country's most critical journalists. In an article for the weekly *Mouatinoun*, Rejiba accused the government of being behind the recent destruction of *Kalima*. Authorities also seized all copies of *Mouatinoun*.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Journalists killed: Democratic Republic of Congo (1), Somalia (1), Nigeria (1)
TOTAL = 3

Governments throughout Africa continue resorting to charges of defamation, sedition, and "disrupting public order" to intimidate and sanction independent and opposition media. Reporting on rebellions or criticizing the country's leadership, administration or the army also lands many African journalists in prison. Despite efforts led by media and civil society organisations, free expression remains under threat.

In **Senegal**, which was once a beacon for freedom of expression in West Africa, El Malick Seck, editor of the daily *24 Heures Chrono*, was sentenced on 12 September to three years in jail by a Dakar court for "activity liable to disrupt public order and cause serious political unrest", "disseminating false news", "public insult" and "illegal possession of government documents". *24 Heures Chrono* was suspended for three months. The charges related to an article published on 28 August that claimed that President Abdoulaye Wade and his son Karim were involved in money laundering. The private newspaper *L'As* was also targeted over the summer.

On 18 August, Fatou Jaw Manneh, a contributor to the All**Gambian**.net website, was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of "sedition" and publication of "false news intended to create public fear and alarm" for criticising President Yahya Jammeh. A former reporter for the privately-owned *Daily Observer*, she was tried for an article published in October 2005 in which she accused President Jammeh of "tearing our beloved country to shreds" and described



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him as “a bundle of terror.”

Gina Ama Blay, Chief Executive Officer of *The Daily Guide*, who represents the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of **Ghana** on the Board of WAN, received death threats on numerous occasions in July from someone claiming to be a soldier in the Ghana Armed Forces.

Moussa Kaka, the director of privately-owned Radio Saraounia and **Niger** correspondent of Radio France Internationale (RFI), was released on 7 October. He had been arrested in Niamey on 20 September 2007 on the charge of "complicity in a conspiracy against state authority." The public prosecutor claimed that his phone calls with one of the leaders of the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ), a Tuareg rebel group, were evidence that he was "conniving" with the rebels. Kaka was released on bail with the charges of "endangering the safety of the state for suspected links with the Tuareg-led rebels in the north of the country" still standing against him.

The use of sedition charges has intensified in **Nigeria** to intimidate and sanction journalists who report on alleged cases of high-level corruption and mismanagement. Another highly sensitive field of reporting is the Niger delta region, where the Nigerian army is fighting several armed groups. On 17 October, Jonathan Elendu, a US-based Nigerian blogger who regularly writes on corruption and the situation in the Niger delta, was taken into custody on arrival in Abuja to visit family. He was held without charge for 11 days by the Nigerian Secret Police who said Elendu was being investigated for “acts of sedition.”

The **Sudanese** private press continues to be subject to pre-print censorship (reestablished by the government in February 2008). In the course of November, Sudanese journalists and editors have amplified efforts to protest against censorship and arrests. On 4 November, between 150 and 300 journalists waged a hunger strike and demanded that free press legislation is implemented. However, on 17 November police reactions also intensified to unprecedented levels. Sixty-three journalists were arrested, held for hours and ordered to go to court at a later time for protesting against censorship in front of parliament.

In **Ethiopia**, Amare Aregawi, the editor-in-chief of both the English- and Amharic-language *Reporter* newspapers, was detained for six days in August before being released for publishing reports regarding an employment dispute at the Dashen Brewery, where management allegedly dismissed about 70 staff without following proper procedures.

Fourteen journalists, including Dawit Isaac, founder of the now-banned weekly *Setit*, remain behind bars in **Eritrea**, usually held incommunicado in secret jails. Eritrea is among Africa’s most repressive regimes toward the media and the largest journalist jailer.

In **Somalia**, Nasteh Dahir Farah, Vice President of the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), was gunned down on 7 June in a targeted assassination. Nasteh also worked for the BBC Somali Service and freelanced for Reuters News Agency. In 2007 alone, eight Somali journalists were killed because of their work, the second highest toll after Iraq.

In Somalia also, Canadian journalist Amanda Lindhout and Australian photojournalist



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Nigel Brennan were abducted on 23 August in KM13, a suburb west of Mogadishu. Somali photojournalist Abdifatah Mohammed Elmi, who was assisting the two journalists, was also abducted along with their driver, Mahad. On 24 August it became known that Lindhout, Brennan, Elmi and Mahad are being held by militia in Suqa Holaha, a north-eastern neighborhood of Mogadishu. The motive behind the kidnapping remains unknown. On 26 November, two foreign and two Somali journalists were kidnapped in the port city of Bossasso in Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland. The foreign reporters were in the region for a week to report stories on piracy. The local journalists were assisting them as fixer and interpreter.

A high level of economic and political pressure continues to endanger independent media outlets in **Gabon**. The National Communications Council remains instrumental in the government's arsenal to silence critical reporting.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, press freedom violations continue unabated. Radio Okapi journalist Didace Namujimbo was gunned down on 21 November at point-blank range for unknown motives. Radio Okapi, which is a joint project of the UN Mission in DRC and the Swiss Foundation Hironnelle, plays an important role in media efforts to combat the violence. However, this has also placed its journalists at risk. Namujimbo is the second journalist from the radio station to be killed in just over a year. In June 2007, Serge Maheshe was shot dead and the ensuing trial brought no justice to his murder. The killers of neither Namujimbo or Maheshe have been identified.

In the context of controversial by-elections in **Zambia**, which officially sworn President Rupiah Banda into office on 2 November, press freedom violations ranging from harassment, threats of legal suits and dismissals, threats to shut down media outlets, forbidding journalists from attending political rallies, and barring certain types of stories from being published or broadcast, were on the rise.

In June, the **Zimbabwean** government imposed a "luxury" tax on imported newspapers, magazines and periodicals, in a continuing effort to prevent independent newspapers from reaching the people of Zimbabwe. All foreign publications are now classed as luxury goods and therefore attract import duty at 40 percent. The tax appears to be particularly aimed at South African-based news sources, which have been extremely important to Zimbabweans. *The Zimbabwean*, a twice-weekly newspaper printed in South Africa for distribution in Zimbabwe, has been forced to pay almost USD 20,000 per week and is reducing its circulation from 200,000 copies to 60,000 as a result. In a separate development, the state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) group stopped in November the publication of its monthly magazine *Trends* and the weekly vernacular tabloid *Umthunywa* due to critical shortages of newsprint. The shortage has seriously affected other publications of the group including *The Herald*, *The Chronicle* and *The Sunday Mail*.

In **Lesotho**, a defunct weekly, *The Mirror*, its editor and the printing company were handed a M50 000 (5,700 EUR) fine on 29 September for defaming Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, for an article published in April 2001 which according to the court made "political insinuations that were highly defamatory." The court stated "there was no justification



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whatsoever for those allegations and the defendants negligently published them without bothering to establish their truthfulness.”

In **Swaziland**, the government has been using counter-terrorism laws, which were promulgated in May 2008, as a method to suppress opposition and controversial speech. Journalists have increasingly been targeted and the number of arrests has increased.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Journalists killed: Croatia (2), Russia (2), Georgia (3)
TOTAL = 7

Freedom of the press continues to be challenged in various parts of Europe and Central Asia. Death threats against or prosecution of journalists reporting on conflict zones, war crimes, and organised crime remain disturbingly common. Journalists have taken a high toll in an increasingly volatile political situation in the Caucasus, where four journalists were killed in August alone.

The **Council of Europe** adopted on 27 November the Convention on Access to Official Documents that was highly criticised during its drafting process. The decision to adopt the Convention overrode a resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 3 October, calling for the redrafting of the document. Over 250 civil society groups and international non governmental organisations had repeatedly warned about significant flaws in the draft treaty, including the narrow definition of “public authorities” that excludes the main functions of legislative and judicial bodies and the freedom granted to member States to enter reservations on any provision of the Convention.

Ivo Pukanic, owner and editorial director of the **Croatian** political weekly *Nacional*, and Niko Franjic, the marketing director, were both killed when a bomb planted beneath Pukanic's car exploded outside the paper's offices in downtown Zagreb, on 23 October 2008. *Nacional* often exposed cases of corruption, organised crime, and human rights abuses. Croatian authorities condemned the attack promising to move swiftly to pursue the murderers.

Journalists who report on the mafia in **Italy** continue to be victims of threats of violence and several are working under police protection. In October, Roberto Saviano, a journalist who denounced members of the Naples mafia in his groundbreaking novel “Gomorra”, received threats that the Camorra planned to murder him by Christmas. Saviano thus decided to leave Italy, after living under permanent police protection for the past two years already.

Regulations undermining the confidentiality of sources are being considered or already applied in several European countries. In **France**, journalists have faced judicial and police pressures over the confidentiality of their sources. The French Senate is due to debate a new bill on the protection of journalists' sources, which however includes a problematic provision that reporters may have to reveal their sources when "a pressing imperative requires it."



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The **Swedish** parliament approved on 18 June a controversial bill allowing all international emails and phone calls to be monitored in the name of national security. The vote had triggered the country's most heated political debate in years and sparked widespread protests from the public, media and business.

The High Court of Justice of the **United Kingdom** brought a decision on 26 June that requested freelance journalist and author Shiv Malik to hand out to the police the source material of his book “Leaving Al-Qaida: Inside the Mind of a British Jihadist.”

The **German** Bundesrat (Upper House of the Parliament) defeated on 28 November an anti-terrorism bill – the draft *Law on the Defense against the Dangers of International Terrorism* - that would have required journalists to reveal their research material and sources. A recent survey by Privacy International, a human rights watchdog group, on the effects of counter-terrorism legislation on freedom of the media in Europe which had been commissioned by the Council of Europe, reveals the threats from anti-terrorism laws to press freedom and protection of sources. The report finds that the laws have already seriously affected freedom of expression while providing little benefit in fighting terrorism and that governments seem to be using these laws for their own political purposes.

The **Spanish** newspaper *El Correo* was the target of a bomb attack on 8 June. The police attributed the attack to the Basque separatist group ETA. According to reports, a bomb exploded behind *El Correo's* printing press in the town of Zamudio. Fifty staff members were in the building at the time of explosion, but no one was hurt.

The attorneys of the **Slovenian** Prime Minister Janez Jansa have filed a request with the State prosecutor's office seeking the initiation of criminal charges against the author of a broadcast segment entitled “*The Truth about Patria*”, aired on 1 September by the Finnish public broadcaster *YLE*, which alleged that members of the Slovenian government, including the Prime Minister, accepted bribes from the Finnish defence contractor Patria.

Violent attacks against reporters and media professionals in **Bulgaria** have been on the rise. On 22 September, Ognian Stefanov, editor of the investigative website Frognews, was attacked and beaten up by four unidentified men as he left a restaurant in Sofia. He was admitted to the hospital with severe wounds and remained unconscious for three days.

Romania's upper chamber, the Senate, unanimously adopted on 26 June a bill obliging radio and television stations to transmit positive and negative news in an equal proportion. However, on 9 July, the Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional.

According to reports, several media professionals in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** received death threat letters in September following their coverage of the Queer Festival, which was held in Sarajevo and focused on the issues of identity, sexuality and human rights.

Following the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb wartime leader and



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International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indictee, on 21 July, journalists in **Serbia** were faced with another wave of threats and attacks during the protests by rightwing nationalist organisations. Among other incidents, members of the ultranationalist movements *Obraz* and *1389* forced their way into the offices of the BETA news agency in Belgrade on 30 August and demanded the coverage of their ongoing protests against the arrest of Karadzic.

The media environment in **Turkey** has seriously deteriorated in recent months with hundreds of blogs and web sites banned and the largest media group being directly attacked by the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who repeatedly accused Aydin Dogan, owner of Dogan Media Group, of abusing his newspapers to defame him. Erdogan has called his political supporters "not to take these newspapers to their homes." In November, the accreditation of six senior journalists who reported on the activities of the Prime Minister was revoked, apparently for raising questions.

Ahead of the September parliamentary elections in **Belarus**, a new restrictive media law was adopted by the Parliament and signed by President Alexander Lukashenko, allowing authorities to increasingly pressure independent media and limit press freedom. On 9 September, Iuje District Court ruled that an edition of the non-registered *Svaboda* newspaper was "extremist" and destroyed its 5,000 copies. It was announced in late November that the opposition newspapers *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Vola* would resume publication in Belarus after years of banning. Government restrictions on the use of state printing plants in 2004 and 2005 forced many opposition papers to print outside Belarus. The announcement follows the 13 October decision of the Council of the European Union to partially lift the sanctions against Belarus.

In **Russia**, media professionals are facing an increasingly hostile environment. Journalists are regularly prosecuted and sentenced under restrictive media legislation and the Criminal Code; opposition newspapers are seized; Internet sites are blocked and their editors charged with libel and defamation offences. The trial of four men who have been charged with helping organise the October 2006 murder of Anna Politkovskaya has begun on 17 November at the Moscow District Military Court.

The Kirov District Court in the central Russian Republic of Bashkortostan in July 2008 sentenced Viktor Shmakov, Editor-in-Chief of the independent newspaper *Provintsialnye Vesti* and contributing writer Airat Dilmukhametov to a suspended two-year prison term. The two were convicted of violating the Constitution of the Russian Federation and breaking laws on media and extremism. The publication of their newspaper has been suspended.

In the **North Caucasus**, media still face a high level of political pressure, repressive laws, administrative harassment, direct threats and defamation charges. While major combat operations against separatist forces in Chechnya have ceased, Ingushetia, Dagestan and other nearby provinces remain plagued by shoot-outs between Russian security services and local groups.

Two unidentified men killed, on 4 September, Telman Alishayev, host of the programme "Peace to Your Home," broadcast by *TV-Chirkei* in Makhachkala, the regional capital of the



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southern Russian republic of **Dagestan**. In 2006, Alishayev produced a documentary film titled "Ordinary Wahhabism," which criticised the conservative Sunni Islam sect and its recent spread in Dagestan.

A vocal critic of the Kremlin's policies in the Caucasus, Magomed Yevloyev, died from a bullet wound to the head while in police custody on 31 August. Yevloyev founded and ran the website *Ingushetiya.ru*, a major source of information in **Ingushetia** and in the region. The website had openly criticised the Ingush president, who often threatened to shut it down. Authorities had launched more than a dozen lawsuits against *Ingushetiya.ru* in the past year. On 6 June, a district court in Moscow ordered its closure for alleged extremism. Earlier in August, *Ingushetiya.ru*'s Editor-in-Chief Roza Malsagova fled Russia, after enduring harassment, threats, and beatings by Ingush authorities. She is seeking political asylum in Western Europe.

The Supreme Court of **Azerbaijan** on 4 September upheld the decision of the Appellate Court that convicted Eynulla Fatullayev, editor-in-chief of the independent *Realni Azerbaijan* and *Gundelik Azerbaijan* newspapers, to eight and a half years in jail under charges of terrorism, inciting ethnic hatred and tax evasion. Fatullayev is subject to pressure and harassment in prison, in particular after it was announced at the end of September that the European Court of Human Rights accepted Fatullayev's case for consideration. Another imprisoned journalist, Sakit Zahidov, is subject to harassment and is denied appropriate medical care. The October presidential elections in Azerbaijan saw hardly any coverage of the campaign in the state media, except for President Ilham Aliyev, who was running for re-election.

Three journalists were killed and many more wounded during the August fighting between Russian, **Georgian**, and local forces in the disputed region of South Ossetia. Alexander Klimchuk, who was covering the conflict for the Russian news agency *Itar-Tass*, and Grigol Chikhladze, who was on assignment for *Russian Newsweek*, were killed on 10 August. On 12 August, RTL Nieuws Dutch cameraman Stan Storimans was killed in the city of Gory. Due to the difficulties in accessing the region, the free flow of information was obstructed and it proved difficult to verify reports on the conflict and civilian casualties. Early in the conflict, the Georgian government banned the transmission of Russian television in Georgia due to the alleged use of propaganda to justify the conflict. The interruption and censorship of websites were reported on both sides.

Armenian journalist Edik Baghdasarian, editor of the Yerevan-based online newsmagazine *Hetq*, was attacked by three unidentified men on 17 November outside his office. Armenia's authorities denounced the attack on Baghdasarian and pledged to investigate it.

In **Uzbekistan**, independent journalists are harassed and threatened, while restrictions on foreign reporters and their local correspondents have increased. A district court in Uzbekistan's autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan on 10 October sentenced human rights defender and independent journalist Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov to 10 years in prison on charges of drug possession with intent to sell, even after his blood test results revealed no sign of drug use. Abdurakhmanov's imprisonment came at the time when the Council of the European Union partially lifted the sanctions against Uzbekistan despite its tarnished human rights record.



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In **Turkmenistan**, Radio Free Europe (RFE) contributor Sazak Durdymuradov was released in July from the psychiatric hospital to which he was admitted against his will after being arrested by the secret police on 20 June. Durdymuradov was reportedly beaten, tortured and pressured to sign a letter saying he agreed to stop reporting for RFE.

ASIA

Journalists killed: Afghanistan (1), Cambodia (1), India (4), Pakistan (4), Philippines (5), Sri Lanka (1), Thailand (4)
TOTAL = 20

Asia has been the scene of increasing violence targeting journalists, whether they reported on corruption, conflicts or simply expressed dissenting views. Severe restrictions continue to impede the work of independent media and the free flow of information.

The **Chinese** authorities failed to live up to the press freedom commitments made as part of Beijing's bid to be the host city of the 2008 Games. Foreign reporters were not able to work freely, numerous websites related to news, human rights and pro-Tibet groups were blocked in the Olympic Main Press Centre, despite temporary relaxed media regulations allowing foreign reporters to travel without prior permission and to make a free choice of people to interview. These rules were extended beyond the expiry date, on 17 October, signaling a less restrictive climate for the foreign press in China. On the other hand, unprotected by those regulations, Chinese journalists remain under a constant watch from the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese government that strictly censors reporting on issues such as the tainted milk scandal and the financial crisis. Additionally, China's General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) issued a new set of guidelines on 7 November, stating that only journalists carrying GAPP cards will be considered legitimate professionals. In the past six months, several Chinese journalists have been arrested and sentenced to prison.

In **Burma**, the authorities continue to impose harsh restrictions on the media, censor all dissenting voices and excessively limit access to Internet, thus isolating the country from the rest of the world. The Military Government's Censorship office has recently sent to all Burmese media a directive spelling out 10 rules for editors and the sanctions including imprisonment, confiscation and suspension of publishing rights, for failing to respect the rules. According to international press reports, courts have sentenced at least 100 people in Burma since early November. In the latest development, Maung Thura, blogger and human rights activist, was sentenced to 45 years in prison on 21 November, on charges of violating the Electronics Act, namely for helping survivors and videotaping the damage after Cyclone Nargis in May. The day after his arrest, state-controlled media published warnings against sending video footage of relief work to foreign news agencies. In two similar cases, blogger Nay Phon Latt was sentenced to 20 years in prison and leading Burmese musician Win Maw was sentenced to six years imprisonment for "sending false news abroad." On 23 September, WAN 2001 Golden Pen of Freedom laureate U Win Tin, who was imprisoned since July 1989, was released from prison.



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In **Vietnam**, the government continues to harass, arrest and prosecute journalists, writers and bloggers, silencing critical voices and investigative reporting. Nguyen Viet Chien, a reporter for the Vietnamese daily newspaper *Thanh Nien*, who wrote major articles on high-level government corruption, was sentenced on 15 October by the Hanoi People's Court to two years in prison after being found guilty of "abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state." In the same court case, Nguyen Van Hai, a reporter with the daily *Tuoi Tre*, was given a two-year re-education sentence. The government revoked the credentials of seven journalists who were reporting on the case and on the legal defence of the two journalists.

The **Cambodian** journalist Khim Sambo was shot to death in July, as he was riding on a motorbike together with his son, who also died in the attack. Sambo often wrote about corruption and nepotism in the ruling Cambodia People's Party. Several local outlets reported that that national police chief Hok Lundy could have been involved in the murder of Sambo and that the police were covering up the crime. Press freedom in Cambodia remains fragile and media reports on government corruption, political affairs and land grabbing resulted in several attacks on journalists. Pressures on media were particularly evident during the July parliamentary elections with the majority of media coverage heavily dominated by the ruling CPP.

Journalists in the **Philippines** were violently targeted over the past months for reports deemed unfavourable. Four journalists were murdered since June: radio journalist Leonilo Mila of Radyo Natin (Our Radio) was shot to death on 2 December; radio journalist Aristeo Padrigao, also reporter at Radyo Natin, was shot on 17 November; radio DXMD anchor Dennis Cuesta was shot several times and died in the hospital on 9 August; Martin Roxas, programme director of the radio station DYVR, was shot to death on 7 August; journalist Robert Sison, reporter for the weekly *Regional Bulletin*, was shot killed on 1 July. It is believed that all attacks were related to the victims' investigative reports on corruption, crime and local governance. Journalists were also frequently targeted in the firefights between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippines government forces that resumed in August.

Violence stemming from political instability in **Afghanistan** continues to jeopardize the local and international press. In early June, Abdul Samad Rohani, a journalist with the BBC, was abducted and killed. Rohani had previously received threatening phone calls accusing him of supporting the Kabul government and boycotting news put out by the Taliban. Pressures on freedom of expression by the judiciary continue. On 21 October, a Kabul appeal court quashed the death sentence imposed on student Parwez Kambakhsh by a lower court in Mazar-i-Sharif in January, but upheld his conviction for printing and distributing blasphemous articles and sentenced him to 20 years in jail. In a similar case, a former journalist and a publisher, Ahmed Ghous Zalmai and Mullah Qari Mushtaq were both sentenced on 11 September to 20 years in prison for publishing a Dari translation of the Koran without its Arabic script.

The increasing violence against journalists in **Pakistan**, particularly in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region and in the tribal areas controlled by the Taliban, resulted in the murder of four journalists and left many more injured since June. Mohammad Azim Leghari, reporter at the newspaper *Halchal* and the Sindh-language television station Dharti TV, was gunned down



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on 15 August; Abdul Aziz Shaheen, who worked for the local Urdu-language daily *Azadi*, was among at least 25 people killed in the air strike on 29 August, while being held by a local Taliban group; Abdul Razzak Johra, a reporter with the Royal TV network, was reportedly murdered by local drug dealers on 3 November; Qari Mohammad Shoaib, a reporter for the daily newspapers *Azadi* and *Khabar Kar*, was shot dead in Mingora on 8 November. Many journalists from the tribal areas of Pakistan have fled and settled in other parts of the country in fear of attacks and retaliation from the Taliban.

The increasing number of journalists attacked and murdered has put **India** on the map of dangerous environments for media professionals. Three journalists were killed in November only. Vikas Ranjan, a reporter with the Hindi daily *Hindustan*, was killed on 25 November. According to local sources, Ranjan had faced frequent threats for his investigative reporting. The killing came just days after a correspondent for the Assamese language daily *Amar Asom*, Jagajit Saikia, was shot to death by a group of armed men as he left the office in India's northeastern state of Assam. Saikia frequently wrote about rivalries among the armed groups fighting over the control of Kokrajhar and neighboring districts. Konsam Rishikanta, a young trainee journalist employed by the *Imphal Free Press*, a privately owned English-language daily, was killed on 17 November in Imphal, the capital of the northeastern state of Manipur. Journalists in Manipur and other northern provinces in India are often targeted by both the security forces and armed separatists. In an earlier incident, security forces have shot to death cameraman Javed Ahmed Mir on 13 August, while he was covering protests and violence in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Indian authorities have imposed heavy restrictions on media workers in these two curfew-bound northern Indian states. Local TV stations are being censored and a curfew is preventing newspapers to print and distribute their daily editions.

Journalists seeking to report independently on the ongoing conflict between government forces and Tamil separatists in **Sri Lanka** have been restricted from accessing conflict zones. They are repeatedly threatened and attacked by all parties in the conflict. One journalist was killed in a bomb blast in Anuradhapura and another was critically injured in a shooting in Batticaloa since June. Media regulations issued on 10 October by the Sri Lankan Government provide for a number of contingencies under which broadcasting licences can be cancelled, including seven different grounds related to broadcast content. Authorities have continued to publicly denounce media and use the judiciary, police and military in order to silence the critics.

The clashes between pro and anti-government demonstrators in early September were used by the government as an excuse for tightening its grip over independent media in **Thailand**. Journalists reporting on corruption and conflicts are frequently attacked and four journalists were killed in the second half of 2008. A reporter with the daily newspaper *Matichon*, Chaiyanurat Athiwat, was found dead in his house on 1 August. Influential officials in the Nakorn Sri Thammarat province were "dissatisfied" with his reporting on local corruption issues, according to local reports. Chalee Boonsawat, a reporter with the country's largest daily *Thai Rath*, was killed on 21 August, while covering an explosion incident in southern Thailand. Jaruek Rangcharoen, who reported on corruption for the *Matichon* newspaper was shot in the head several times on 27 September in the province of Suphan Buri, in central Thailand. Wallop Bounsampop, editor, Den Siam, was killed on 5 October.