

Pressemitteilung

3. Mai 2022

SPERRFRIST bis 3. Mai 2022 // 6 Uhr MESZ

A troubling decline in North Africa

The situation for the press in North Africa (excluding Egypt) has never been so troubling. Three countries present especially alarming conditions: Algeria (134th), where press freedom is drastically declining and the imprisonment of journalists is becoming routine; Morocco (135th) which is keeping three leading journalists in prison despite pressure to release them; and finally Libya (143rd) and Sudan (151st), where observers and our correspondents report that the free press has disappeared. In Algeria, the situation seriously deteriorated in 2021: many journalists have been imprisoned, prosecuted, or barred from traveling. As of late April, three of them were still behind bars. In addition, news sites have been blocked, and some publications critical of the government have been financially strangled.

In Morocco, press freedom has declined significantly, and few independent media outlets remain in operation. Three major criminal cases involving **Taoufik Bouachrine** in May 2018, and **Omar Radi** and **Souleiman Raissouni** in May 2020, who were arrested, prosecuted, and detained on spurious grounds, have increased pressure on the media. The situation is even more dire in Libya and Sudan, where the absence of a genuine government prevents the establishment of press freedom and acceptable working conditions for reporters. In addition, there have been attempts to control broadcast media outlets, and the military is omnipresent, especially in Sudan.

The situation is somewhat less worrisome in Mauritania (97th). There, a democratic interlude from 2005 to 2008 saw the de-criminalisation of press offences and a weakening of the repressive legal framework. Despite the government's assertion that it favours peaceful dialogue with the opposition, journalists find themselves in extremely precarious situations that encourage collusion, bias, and self-censorship. And in Tunisia (94th), freedom of the press and information are undeniable achievements of the new constitution, adopted in 2014. But serious concerns have arisen following the July 25 2021 power grab by President Kais Saied, who decreed a state of emergency.

Journalists risking their lives in the Middle East

There is still a long way to go before the Middle East becomes safe for journalists. In 2021, several were killed while working or deliberately murdered. In Lebanon (130th), journalist and political analyst **Lokman Slim** was found dead near his car. As a tough critic of Hezbollah, he knew there was a bounty on his head.

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Lebanon is in danger of sinking into a spiral of violence; online attacks and death threats against journalists are on the rise, and sometimes the threats become reality. Official inaction has forced many journalists into exile. The city of Aden, Yemen (169th) rivals Lebanon as a high-risk place for reporters. Three succumbed to their injuries sustained in explosions while on the job, and another, **Mahmoud Alotmei**, survived an assassination attempt by car bomb. But his wife **Rasha Abdallah Alharazy**, also a journalist, was with him and was killed.

As for Palestinian journalists, they once again paid a heavy price during conflicts in Jerusalem in May 2021 and again during the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip (170th), where two journalists were killed in bombings. Elsewhere in the region, Saudi Arabia (166th), which just succeeded in having Turkey (149th) transfer the Jamal Khashoggi case for trial in the kingdom's courts, is one of the world's worst prisons for journalists.

In Iran (178th) 2021 was another tough year for press freedom. The two main leaders accused of abuses and crimes committed against journalists for 30 years, Ebrahim Raisi and Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, became, respectively, president of the republic and head of the Iranian judicial system. The result: an increase in arbitrary arrests and convictions, and journalists imprisoned and denied medical care.