

**PREDATORS OF PRESS FREEDOM AFRICA**

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**Eritrea**

**1 - Issaias Afeworki**

**President**

Eritrea has the distinction of being Africa's youngest republic and at the same governed by its most ruthless dictator. A former rebel chief and hero of Eritrea's war of liberation, he makes no bones about his totalitarian tendencies. He believes a price must be paid for Eritrea's independence. Basic freedoms were officially "suspended" in 2001 after ruling party dissidents started pressing for more democracy. Any hint of opposition is seen as a threat to "national security." The privately-owned media no longer exist. There are just state media whose content is worthy of the Soviet era. Ruled with an iron hand by a small ultra-nationalist clique centred on Afeworki, this Red Sea country has been transformed in just a few years into a vast open prison, Africa's biggest prison for the media. Around 30 journalists are currently held in its 314 prison camps and detention centres. Four of them have died as a result of the extremely cruel conditions in these prisons. Others have just disappeared. But when President Afeworki is asked about the imprisoned journalists, as he was by *Al Jazeera* in May 2008, he replies: "There were never any. There aren't any. You have been misinformed."

**Gambia**

**2 - Yahya Jammeh**

**President**

A self-proclaimed healer who says he has found cures to AIDS, obesity and erectile dysfunction, Yahya Jammeh has all the qualities of an unpredictable, violent and deranged dictator. He has vowed to cut off the heads of all homosexuals in order to clean up Gambian society. And he has declared himself ready to kill anyone trying to destabilise the country, above all human rights activists and other trouble-makers. "If you are affiliated with any human rights group, be rest assured that your security and personal safety would not be guaranteed by my government," he threatened in a September 2009 televised address. "We are ready to kill saboteurs." Some think the dictator is steadily succumbing to paranoia, as the jailing of 10 of his aides for an alleged coup attempt seemed to suggest. The unsolved murder of Deyda Hydera, *AFP* correspondent and editor of the tri-weekly *The Point*, who was shot dead on a street in 2004, continues to fuel tension between the regime and the independent media. The Gambia Press Union dared to address an open letter to the president in 2009 urging him to recognise the government's involvement in this murder. The response? Six journalists got two-year jail sentences on defamation and sedition charges. And were pardoned after a month in prison, because Jammeh is sometimes capable of leniency. He usually does not bother with charges when locking up journalists. Chief Ebrima Manneh, a reporter for the *Daily Observer*, was arrested without charge in 2006 and then disappeared. He probably died in prison in 2008.

## **Equatorial Guinea**

### **3 - Teodoro Obiang Nguema**

#### **President**

The years pass but nothing changes in the “Kuwait of Africa,” the fiefdom of a leader described by the national radio station as the “God of Equatorial Guinea.” President Obiang Nguema was reelected at the end of 2009 with 96.7 per cent of the votes in polling that many international media including the Spanish daily *El País* were prevented from covering. The president maintains absolute control over this small oil state in the Gulf of Guinea. The privately-owned press is limited to a few small newspapers. The country has no journalists’ union or press freedom organisation. The stranglehold which the president and his family maintain over the economy is accompanied by an overwhelming personality cult. The international media have just one correspondent in the capital, who is closely watched. The authorities nonetheless continue to insist that the lack of media pluralism is due to poverty and that the high percentages the president gets in every election are “the result of acceptance of his policies.”

## **Nigeria**

### **4 - Ogbonna Onovo**

#### **Inspector General of Police**

Nigeria’s journalists were the victims of 58 cases of abuse of authority and violence in 2009 and around 20 in the first quarter of 2010 alone. A magnificent record. The police were not responsible for all of these cases, just most of them. Nigeria is one of the world’s most violent countries for journalists and the national police, led by Ogbonna Onovo, are largely to blame. The police enjoy complete impunity in Nigeria, even when their abuses are well documented. The abuses often occur when reporters go to cover operations by police who decide they do not want witnesses. The verbal threats, beatings, unwarranted searches and confiscation of equipment are not the result of any official policy or use that politicians make of the police. They are just the acts of an ignorant and thuggish force that does its job with a great deal of enthusiasm. Behind all this, one person bears the ultimate responsibility: Ogbonna Onovo, who as Inspector General of Police is now at summit of a distinguished career. Onovo has received many awards and honours, including Officer for the Order of the Niger for his “incredible accomplishments.” Reporters Without Borders now bestows one more title on him: “Predator of Press Freedom.”

## **Rwanda**

### **5 - Paul Kagame**

#### **President**

Thanks to a thin face, slight build, intellectual’s glasses and conservative suits, Paul Kagame looks more like a modern politician than the former guerrilla chief and war lord who played a murky role in his country’s recent history. President since 2000, he has used the reconciliation process launched in the wake of the 1994 genocide to bolster his authority and neutralise the opposition. Kagame does not tolerate embarrassing questions at news conferences, often denigrates journalists and brands outspoken media as “Radio Mille Collines.” Every year several Rwandan journalists decide to go into exile because they find the atmosphere unbearable in their home country. This does not worry President Kagame, who refers to journalists as “mercenaries” and “bums”. Local retransmission of the *BBC* was banned last year because of a programme about the genocide that strayed from the official line. The authorities constantly harass two newspapers, *Umuwugizi* and *Umuseso* (the regime’s bugbear) and prosecute their editors because of their reporting. Both were closed for six months in the run-up to the 2010 presidential

election. Defamation, invasion of privacy and insulting the president are the charges preferred by the information ministry and the High Media Council, its (not very independent) regulatory authority. As a cherry on the cake, anyone thinking of launching a new newspaper, radio station or TV station is now required to show an exorbitant amount of start-up capital (41,000 euros for a newspaper, for example) in order to obtain a permit. It is a good way of discouraging media diversity.

## **Somalia**

### **6 - Islamist militias**

#### **Al-Shabaab, Hizb-Al-Islam**

There is no sign of any respite for Somalia after 20 years of war. Islamist insurgents, previously united against Ethiopia's troops and now embroiled in internal rivalry and conflicts, have contributed to the chaos by waging a war of harassment against the fragile transitional government. The bearers of a strict version of Islam, they ban cinema, video games and radio music. Al-Shabaab (The Youth) has emerged as the biggest and best organised of these groups. It wages a campaign of terror and targeted murders against leading members of Somali civil society who are, it says, guilty of serving the interests of the "Crusaders" of the West. Dozens of teachers, academics and politicians have been killed. Regarded almost by definition as enemies, journalists have also been killed. Nine of them were caught in crossfire or were directly targeted by the various militia factions in 2009. *Radio Shabelle* paid a heavy price, losing its director, Mukhtar Mohamed Hirabe, and three of its reporters in the space of a few months. Other *Radio Shabelle* employees fled the country. Al-Shabaab controls a large part of the country, has its own prisons, carries out arrests and executes sentences. In May 2008, the group tried to murder Bisharo Mohammed Waays, the last woman to openly work as a journalist in the northern autonomous territory of Puntland, who has an independent stance and does not wear a headscarf when she appears on TV.

## **Swaziland**

### **7 - Mswati III**

#### **King**

With an HIV/AIDS prevalence of about 40 per cent, a soaring poverty rate and no viable economy, foreign investors have thrown in the sponge. Swaziland is self-destructing and if there is single person to blame it is clearly King Mswati III. Lacking vision and management abilities, this absolute monarch abuses his regal powers. No rivals are tolerated. Political parties are banned, and what would good they be in a country that has never had democratic elections? The state-owned media only carry reports that have been checked and approved by the information minister. Independent journalists find it extremely hard to get access to official information. Self-censorship is standard practice and criticising the king is inconceivable. The authorities often remind journalists how to behave. In November 2008, the justice minister warned that journalists who criticised the government could find themselves "accused of supporting terrorism and arrested." A journalist working for the *Times of Swaziland*, the only privately-owned newspaper, had to apologise publicly to the king in January 2009 after writing a series of irreverent articles.

**Zimbabwe**  
**8 - Robert Mugabe**  
**President**

It is true that President Mugabe said in March 2010 that the Zimbabwe Media Council, a new entity tasked with issuing licences to newspapers, should create a space for the media. But no one is fooled. In practice, Mugabe is dragging his feet, sabotaging the national unity government, ensuring that the independent press cannot express itself freely and, through his aides, maintaining a strict control over the state media. Mugabe stepped the pressure on the media after his government's electoral setbacks in 2008. Editors were placed under electronic surveillance to check their loyalty to the party, while opposition activists were abducted and tried for "terrorist plots" in grotesque trials. Despite being hailed as a "liberator" when he came to power in the 1980s, Mugabe has no problem with the arbitrary arrests and harassment to which most of the country's journalists are exposed. In 2002, he was the architect of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the sole aim of which was to finish off the privately-owned press, above all *The Daily News*, then the country's most widely-read daily. Mugabe is to blame for the fact that Zimbabweans nowadays have no independent dailies or radio stations.

**AMERICAS**

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**Colombia**  
**9 - "Black Eagles"**  
**Paramilitary group**

The extreme right-wing militias called the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), which were created to help the army fight the extreme left-wing guerrillas, are far from being disarmed. According to official figures, a major programme for dismantling the AUC from 2003 to 2006 resulted in the demobilisation of 30,000 of its fighters in exchange for a broad amnesty. Most of them have turned to contract killing and drug trafficking, but between 5,000 and 8,000 reportedly regrouped in about 20 bands that resumed paramilitary activities in 12 departments. The most feared of these armed groups, the "Black Eagles," continues to impose a reign of terror, killing journalists or forcing them to censor themselves or flee the country. This armed group has been responsible for many cases of intimidation and violence against the press in the Caribbean coastal region since late 2006. Death threats received by journalists, in many cases after they had been criticised by President Alvaro Uribe's government, are often signed "the Black Eagles."

**Colombia**  
**10 - FARC**  
**Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia**

A guerrilla group founded in 1964, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) reportedly controls about 30 per cent of the country's territory. Now reduced to about 8,000 fighters, the organisation has long given more priority to criminal activities than ideological struggle. It lost two of its historic leaders in 2008 – Raúl Reyes, who was killed by the army in Ecuadorean territory on 1 March, and Manuel Marulanda, also known as "Tirofijo" (Sure-Shot), who died a few weeks later, apparently of natural causes. Specialising in racketeering, drug trafficking and kidnapping (45 people were executed in 2006 because ransom was not paid), the

FARC also tries to control or influence the news media. It has kidnapped about 50 journalists since 1997 and makes it almost impossible for the media to work in guerrilla-controlled areas. Although now considerably reduced in strength the FARC has also carried out several sabotage campaigns against the transmitters of radio and TV stations considered hostile.

## **Cuba**

### **11 - Raúl Castro**

#### **President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers**

Fidel Castro passed the reins of power to his younger brother Raúl, the defence minister, five days after falling ill on 26 July 2006 and undergoing a major operation. Formally confirmed as President of the Council of State on 24 February 2008, Raúl has behaved little better than his brother as regards human rights, despite a few cautious hints of a possible opening. The so-called transition period saw continued harassment of independent journalists including police brutality, summonses and searches by State Security (the political police) and detention for short periods. Nineteen of the journalists arrested during the March 2003 “Black Spring” continue to serve jail terms ranging from 14 to 27 years in appalling conditions. A 20th journalist has been held without trial since 2005. Five others have been imprisoned since Raúl took over. With a total of 25 journalists detained, Cuba is one of the world’s biggest prisons for the media, just behind China and Iran.

## **Mexico**

### **12 - Sinaloa, Gulf and Juárez cartels**

Half a dozen cartels have fought each other relentlessly since the late 1990s for control of drug trafficking in the areas bordering the United States. The traffickers do not hesitate to corrupt politicians in order to impose their law. Far from being limited to the coastal and border states, the situation got much worse when a federal offensive was launched against the cartels immediately after President Felipe Calderón’s installation in December 2006. The police and army have also played a major role in violations of human rights and free expression. Sixty-two journalists have been murdered since 2000. Ten others have disappeared since 2003. More than half of them had been covering stories linked to drug trafficking. None of the instigators of these murders and disappearances has ever been arrested or tried. Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries for the media in South America.

## **ASIA**

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### **Afghanistan, Pakistan**

#### **13 - Mullah Mohammad Omar**

##### **Taliban chief**

Mullah Omar, who likes to call himself “Commander of the Believers” and “Servant of Islam,” has led the Afghan Taliban since 1994. Nowadays he has a lot of support in Pakistan as well. Cloaking himself in mystery and refusing to be photographed or filmed, Mullah Omar is nonetheless aware of the importance of the media war. His spokesmen try to be quoted in the media as much as possible and his thugs threaten local reporters who do not relay his propaganda. The Taliban controlling many areas of Afghanistan often kidnap journalists for

ransom. The threats to journalists reinforce the Taliban's sway over the population and create news black holes in the south and east of Afghanistan and in western Pakistan.

When he ruled the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, Mullah Omar successively banned music, television, the Internet and all form of criticism. The only radio broadcaster just carried religious programmes. The undisputed chief of the "students of theology," he swore by the strict application of the Sharia alone. Nowadays he supports the terror policies of his allies in the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan (TTP), which have resulted in more than 3,200 deaths there since September 2007. It was the Taliban who organised a suicide bombing at the Peshawar Press Club and the murders of at least five Pakistani journalists since the start of 2009.

## **Burma**

### **14 - Than Shwe**

#### **Head of the military government**

The head of the military government since 1992, Gen. Than Shwe has decided to hold elections at the end of 2010 in the belief that he can impose a sort of "directed democracy." But he is refusing to loosen his grip on the media and Internet, which are closely controlled by the Press Scrutiny Board. To prevent any expression of dissent during the elections, he has had compliant judges impose long jail sentences on dozens of journalists, bloggers and human rights activists. The comedian and blogger Zarganar was sentenced to 59 years in prison for mocking the general. The notoriously paranoid Than Shwe then had most of the prisoners of conscience moved to insalubrious jails far from their homes. The general, who began his military career in psychological warfare, can rely on the army to impose order through fear. His henchmen continue to hunt down journalists suspected of sending information and video footage abroad that show the disastrous state of the country. Hla Hla Win, a young video reporter for *Democratic Voice of Burma*, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for doing a report in a monastery. And Than Shwe has loathed the Internet ever since images of the sumptuous marriage of one of his daughters were posted online, causing outrage. Now holed up in the new capital, Naypyidaw, Than Shwe is rarely heard by his compatriots but the government press publishes his militaristic speeches full of hate towards the democratic opposition and, above all, Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

## **China**

### **15 - Hu Jintao**

#### **President**

President of the People's Republic and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Hu Jintao ensures implementation of his "harmonious society" programme by getting the police, including the cyber-police, and the propaganda department to prevent any free press emerging. Even if he publicly professes support for press freedom, this conservative communist often restricts the freedom of the liberal press and dissidents. He gave orders, for example, for those who signed the pro-democracy Charter 08 to be hunted down. Its main architect, the intellectual Liu Xiaobo, was sentenced to 11 years in prison and more than 100 signatories were harassed. Tibet, where Hu Jintao was head of the CCP in the 1980s, can only be accessed by the foreign press with a special permit, which is very hard to get. The president sent the toughest elements of the Communist Party there to suppress the unrest that erupted in March 2008. Since then, more than 50 Tibetans have been arrested for circulating photos, video or reports about the situation in the province. Hu Jintao also ordered a ruthless crackdown on the Uyghurs in Xinjiang

who revolted in July 2009. The Internet was disconnected for several months while the official press was deployed against the “separatists.” Hu Jintao’s determination to control the media cost the lives of infants who fell ill after consuming baby formula that was contaminated with melamine because, ahead of the Olympics, the authorities had forbidden the media to cover such stories. And he continues to refuse to release the “Olympic prisoners” – dissidents such as Hu Jia who were arrested in 2008 for demanding more democracy and who are still being held in appalling conditions.

**North Korea**  
**16 - Kim Jong-il**  
**Secretary-General of the Workers Party**

The tyrant of Pyongyang has appeared less often in public since suffering a stroke in 2008 and is preparing one of his sons to succeed him. To that end, he and his family continue to maintain North Koreans in a terrifying isolation. The totalitarian regime he has headed since the death in 1994 of his father, Kim Il-sung, the “Eternal President,” has of late been waging a campaign against “illegal” use of the few mobile phones. In a way that is unique in the world, the North Korean media are used primarily for a personality cult of Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung, who are praised as “socialist heroes.” The paranoid and luxury-loving “Dear Leader” banned the media from discussing the famine that killed millions of North Koreans during the 1990s. Each day his activities begin the TV news broadcasts and are front-page stories in the newspapers. The misspelling of his name suffices to send the culprit to one of the ideological re-education camps. In 2008, he ordered the security forces to prevent foreign videos, magazines, telephones, computers and CDs from entering the country from China. Several people have been executed for using mobile phones without permission. Others have been sent to the concentration camps where at least 150,000 people are held in terrible conditions, in some cases just for listening to a radio station based abroad. One of these camps is thought to hold the military officer who managed to send a video of a public execution to Japan in 2006. Kim Jong-il has another obsession – the international and Korean-exile radio stations that broadcast programmes targeted at the North Korean population. The Pyongyang media are often told to threaten these stations while the police try to track down those who surreptitiously listen to them.

**Laos**  
**17 - Choummaly Sayasone**  
**President**

A former defence minister and president since 2006, Choummaly Sayasone continues to block the emergence of a privately-owned press and can count on the loyalty of those who run the state media, including the ruling People’s Revolutionary Party mouthpiece, the newspaper *Paxaxon* (People), which defines itself as “a revolutionary publication produced by and for the people”. The activities of the president and top party leaders are always the lead stories in the state media, which are the only media permitted in Laos. The president has issued orders that, when referring to him, journalists should only use reports put out by the official news agency, Khaosan Pathet Lao. The authorities do not, however, censor the Internet. When thousands of members of the Hmong minority were forcibly repatriated from Thailand, the security forces prevented several foreign journalists from visiting the “camps” that were set up to receive them. The president has refused to pardon two Hmongs who have been in prison since 2003 for working as guides for two European reporters.

## **Nepal**

### **18 - Nepalese armed groups**

In the south and east of the country, especially the Terai lowlands, armed groups terrorise journalists, above all the correspondents of the national media. Members of Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) and Madhesi Tiger Nepal (MTN), two groups that claim to defend the Terai population's interests, post lists of "wanted" journalists together with offers of rewards. They are suspected of being responsible for several physical attacks and murders of journalists, including the March 2010 murder of Arun Singhaniya, the owner of an influential newspaper and radio station. A death threat was made against a journalist in Birgunj by a JTMM militant around the same time. More than 80 cases of physical attacks or death threats were reported in the south in 2009. The constant threats from armed groups force the Terai-based media to censor themselves to avoid being targets. Militants often intercept press vehicles in order to destroy the newspapers they are carrying. Several tens of thousands of copies of the daily *Kantipur* were torched by these armed groups in 2009. Although they are supposed to have laid down their arms, the Maoists also continue to target the local press in some regions. The journalist Teeka Bista was found unconscious in a ravine in December 2009 after she wrote a story implicating Maoist activists in a political opponent's death. The Maoists are in a position of strength and enjoy as much impunity as the security forces. Two people suspected of involvement in the 2007 murder of journalist Birendra Shah were promoted within the Maoist Party in 2007.

## **Philippines**

### **19 - Private militias**

It was men in uniform who carried out the world's biggest-ever massacre of journalists. Thirty reporters who were accompanying the convoy of a political opponent of the governor of Maguindanao province, on the southern island of Mindanao, were shot dead at point-blank range on 23 November 2009, by members of a militia that takes its orders from one of the governor's sons. The militiamen raped and tortured some of the victims before burying them in mass graves. The governor, the patriarch of the Ampatuan clan, is an ally of President Gloria Arroyo. Police officers, soldiers or militiamen have been implicated in most of the hundred or so murders of journalists since democracy was restored in 1986. Employed by corrupt politicians or hired as contract killers, they usually target local radio presenters who have upset the people they are working for. The same modus operandi is nearly always used: two masked men on a motorcycle gun the journalist down as he is leaving his place of work. For a few thousand dollars, they eliminate the person who has been too outspoken. The cycle of violence has never ended because the culture of impunity is so strong, especially on Mindanao. Sometimes the hit-men are arrested and convicted. This is what happened to Guillermo Wapile, a policeman who was convicted of the 2002 murder of journalist Edgar Damalerio. But neither the people who hired him nor the fellow police officers who tried to cover up for him were arrested. The private militias of Mindanao island have made it one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists.

## **Sri Lanka**

### **20 - Gotabhaya Rajapakse Defence minister**

The president's younger brother and defence minister, Gotabhaya Rajapakse is openly hostile to the media and has not stopped targeting Sri Lankan and foreign journalists although the civil war



ended in May 2009. Whenever a journalist is murdered or kidnapped, he publicly questions the victim's credibility. Asked about cartoonist Prageeth Eknaligoda after he went missing in January 2010, the defence minister replied: "Eknaligoda had himself disappeared (...) We don't even know who this Eknaligoda is, what he had done." He also insulted the memory of the *Sunday Leader's* editor, Lasantha Wickrematunge, after he was murdered a year earlier. After the defeat of the Tamil rebels, the president and his brother rounded on their new enemy, opposition candidate Gen. Sarath Fonseka, and had him jailed. They also ordered the arrest of Ruwan Weerakoon, a journalist who supported Fonseka. All the media who had criticised the president and his brother during the election campaigns were subject to reprisals. Two editors were arrested, five news websites were closed and several reporters were harassed. All of that in January 2010 alone. Egged on by Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the government press attacks civil society. Dozens of state media employees were fired, suspended or threatened for protesting against the government's control of their editorial policies during the election campaigns. The two main state TV stations dedicated 96.7 per cent of the air time during their news and current affairs programmes to reports supporting the president. The holder of a US passport, the defence minister has publicly regretted that Sri Lanka abolished prison sentences for press offences. To address this "mistake," he has pressured for the restoration of the Press Council, which also had the power to impose jail sentences on journalists.

## **Vietnam**

### **21 - Nong Duc Manh**

#### **Communist Party general secretary**

The leader of the conservatives, Nong Duc Manh is waging an offensive against the liberal press, bloggers and dissident writers in preparation for the Communist Party of Vietnam's next congress at the start of 2011. He had about 100 years in jail terms given out to critics in unfair trials in the space of just a few months. The Communist Party's head since 2001, he waited until the last moment to have the Catholic priest Nguyen Van Ly freed on humanitarian grounds in March 2010 after Ly suffered two strokes in his cell. Father Ly was serving an eight-year jail sentence for launching the clandestine magazine *Tu do Ngôn luan* (Free Expression). The editors of *To Quoc*, another dissident publication that has been denied a licence, are being harassed by the political police or by thugs in their pay. On orders from Manh, the police are focussing much of their offensive on writers and bloggers who have criticised a bauxite mining project involving a Chinese company. Twenty journalists and netizens are currently detained in Vietnam. At total of 33 years in jail sentence were passed in a single day, 20 January 2010, on dissidents, including the younger blogger Nguyen Tien Trung and the well-known human rights lawyer Le Cong Dinh. The heir of a one-party system left by Ho Chi Minh, it is Manh who holds real power, not the prime minister or the president, and it is Manh who orders censorship and arrests in defiance of the international community's recommendations.

## **EUROPE**

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### **Azerbaijan**

#### **22 - Ilham Aliiev**

#### **President**

Ilham Aliiev was carefully prepared for the job of president of this oil-rich country – one courted by many foreign governments – by his father, Heydar Aliiev, its ruler since 1969. He headed the ruling party's candidate list in the 1999 parliamentary elections and, after his father suffered a

heart attack live on TV in April 2003, he was appointed prime minister. Finally, as his father's health continued to fail, he was named as the party's candidate for the October 2003 presidential election, which he won. Initially seen as an amiable man unsuited to the harsh realities of politics, he proved himself to be a worthy heir of his father by cracking down hard on his opponents and targeting newspapers that support the opposition or criticise the widespread corruption. It is now common for journalists to be the targets of physical attacks or sentenced to long jail terms. Eynulla Fatullayev, the editor of the weekly *Realny Azerbaijan* and the daily *Gundelik Azerbaijan*, was sentenced to two years in prison in the spring of 2007 on a charge "insulting the Azerbaijani people" and then eight and a half years in prison in the autumn of the same year on charges of threatening terrorism and tax evasion. He is now facing an additional three years in prison on a trumped-up charge of having of 220 mg of heroin among his belongings in his cell. Two young bloggers, Adnan Hadjizadeh and Emin Milli, who were arrested on 8 July 2009, were sentenced to 24 and 30 months in prison respectively on similarly trumped-up charges. Their crime? Belonging to opposition movements and expressing their views online. Reelected in October 2008 with 89 per cent of the vote, Aliiev reinforced his control of the country's destiny even more in 2009 by abolishing any limit on the number of terms he can serve. The latest development of note has been the adoption of amendments to the press law imposing additional curbs on journalists, including draconian limitations on the ability to take photos.

## **Belarus**

### **23 - Alexander Lukashenko President**

The former state farm manager's record since being elected president in 1994 is grim. His re-election with more than 80 per cent of the vote in March 2006 illustrated the strength of his grip on the country. The independent press has been virtually eradicated. The state's monopoly of printing and distribution facilities makes it easy for the authorities to crush any sign of defiance by journalists. Sometimes their only option is to go underground, returning to Soviet-era "samizdats" (forbidden material copied and distributed clandestinely). Monitoring of legislative elections in September 2008 highlighted the extent to which control of the media blocked the opposition and thwarted the possibilities of political debate. Citing the example of China's Internet controls, a state-run daily reported that the president was determined "to put an end to online anarchy." This fuelled fears that the authorities would crack down on the Internet, a space of unparalleled freedom. In response to international pressure, there have been some limited concessions such as the reincorporation of a few banned publications into the official distribution network. But the government continues to maintain a very high level of control over news and information and foreign news media are still hard put to obtain press accreditation, which forces them to operate illegally. All of this in a country bordering the European Union.

## **Spain**

### **24 - ETA Terrorist organisation**

Euskadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom), the Basque armed separatist group that is better known by the acronym ETA, has constantly targeted journalists, both in France as in Spain, since its creation in 1959. ETA's media victims include José María Portell, murdered in 1978, José Javier Uranga, wounded in a shooting in 1980, José Luis Lopez de la Calle, murdered in 2000, and Gorka Landaburu, who sustained severe face and hand injuries when he opened a parcel-bomb in 2001. Several dozen Spanish journalists are still forced to have bodyguards

because of ETA death threats. ETA exploded a powerful car-bomb outside the Bilbao headquarters of the Basque public TV station *EITB* in Bilbao on 31 December 2008, causing considerable damage but no injuries. In a 21 January 2009 press release, ETA accused journalists of distorting the facts with the support of “political commissars and editors” and accused *EITB* of practising “political apartheid” and “complying with orders from Spain.” In a barely veiled threat, the release added: “We are not going to tell journalists how to do their work. We are making a clear appeal to those in charge of *EITB* to work in a responsible manner.”

## **Italy**

### **25 - Organised crime**

Italian shop-keepers, businessmen and judges are not the only victims of organised crime networks such as Cosa Nostra, the Camorra, the 'Ndrangheta, and the Sacra Corona Unita. Journalists and writers also find themselves in the line of fire as soon as they try to cover the Italian mafia. One of them is Roberto Saviano, author of the book *Gomorra*, who is forced to live under permanent police protection. In all, some 10 journalists work under police protection. There have been hundreds of cases of threats, anonymous letters, vandalised tyres, and torched cars. Every journalist writing about these criminal groups has been watched at one time or another. Lirio Abbate, 38, correspondent in Palermo, Sicily, for the news agency *Ansa*, and author of *I Complici* (The Accomplices), also lives under permanent police protection. This is also the case, since March 2008, for Rosaria Capacchione, a 48-year-old journalist working for more than 20 years for the leading Naples daily *Il Mattino*, who covers the Camorra and who, like Roberto Saviano, is being hunted by the Casalesi clan. And their work, with all the risks that accompany it, gets no support from Prime Minister Silvia Berlusconi. In November 2009, he said he wanted to “strangle” writers and filmmakers who give Italy a bad image by focusing on the mafia.

## **Kazakhstan**

### **26 - Nursultan Nazarbayev**

#### **President**

“We are in favour of freedom of expression inasmuch as a society in transition can allow it,” President Nazarbayev said after being reelected in 2005. Although Kazakhstan became the first former Soviet state to take on the annual rotating presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, Nazarbayev has done nothing to justify being relieved of his status as a Predator of Press Freedom. Any insult to his reputation and dignity has been made punishable by a prison term and he has amended the law to tighten registration of media outlets and make it easier to shut down papers. Journalists employed by newspapers that have been closed down are banned from working for three years. The Internet is no longer spared. A law was adopted in 2009 giving blogs, chat rooms and other websites the same legal status as the news media, a not insignificant move as press offences are punishable by imprisonment in Kazakhstan. A series of prosecutions and physical attacks on journalists marked the start of 2010. One of the first victims was Igor Lara, who was very badly beaten for writing about a 19-day strike by 10,000 oil-workers in the southwestern town of Zhanaozen and about other problems in the oil-industry, which is vital for Kazakhstan. The president clearly was not pleased. Internal power struggles continue to take their toll on the media. The country's most popular blog platform, for example, was closed in 2008 after the president's disgraced former son-in-law used it to launch his own online newspaper.

**Uzbekistan**  
**27 - Islam Karimov**  
**President**

President Karimov celebrated his 20th year in office in 2009 after being reelected in 2007 with 88 per cent of the votes. He had steadily reinforced his authority over the years, constructing an implacable regime that has reduced the opposition press to silence by such ruthless methods as disappearance, forcible confinement to psychiatric hospitals and arbitrary imprisonment. Journalists can pay dearly for investigative reporting with charges of terrorism or extremism and trial on trumped-up charges. Ten journalists are currently in prison. Karimov said in 1999 he was "prepared to blow off the heads of 200 people, to sacrifice their lives, in order to preserve peace and tranquillity." Ubiquitous in the state media, which credits him with all the country's "successes," Karimov tolerates no attempts to cover the country's social and economic realities. Under-development or the condition of women, for example, are incompatible with the image of modernity that the regime wants to project. "Insulting the Uzbek people" are among the charges brought in separate cases against photographer Umida Akhmedova and radio show host Khayrullo Khamidov for shining a light on social problems. It has been impossible for the foreign media to work in Kazakhstan since 2005. President Karimov recently criticised the media for not being aggressive enough. "Additional conditions must be created for better media coverage of domestic and international politics," he said. It was just for show. Karimov's repressive apparatus continues to work flat out.

**Russia**  
**28 - Vladimir Putin**  
**Prime Minister**

President from 2000 to 2008 and now prime minister for the past two years, Vladimir Putin continues to make his influence felt in the Kremlin. Strong leadership from the top in all areas of society has been his guiding principle in the reconstruction of a strong state after the years of confusion and dilution of authority under Boris Yeltsin. The press has not been spared. "Control" is the key word for this former KGB officer: control of the state, control of the economic and political forces, control of geopolitical strategic interests and control of the media. The national TV stations now speak with a single voice. Independent journalists and human rights activists are exposed to considerable danger, especially in the North Caucasus. Five journalists were murdered in 2009. Twenty-two have been murdered since 2000. President Medvedev has recognised the existence of political murders for the first time. The Nashi (Ours), a young patriotic guard created by the Kremlin in 2005 at the behest of Putin and others who lament Russia's imperial decline, sues newspapers critical of the Soviet past or the current government when it is not staging actual manhunts. As well as manipulating groups and institutions, Putin has promoted a climate of pumped-up national pride that encourages the persecution of dissidents and freethinkers and fosters a level of impunity that is steadily undermining the rule of law.

**Russian Federation's Republic of Chechnya**  
**29 - Ramzan Kadyrov**  
**President**

Often referred to as "Putin's guard dog," Ramzan Kadyrov shares the Russian prime minister's taste for crude language and strong action. President and undisputed chief of this Russian republic in the North Caucasus since April 2007, he has restored a semblance of calm after the

devastation of two wars. A high price has been paid for this superficial stability, the introduction of a lawless regime. Anyone questioning the policies of this “Hero of Russia” (an award he received from Putin in 2004) is exposed to deadly reprisals. Two fierce critics of the handling of the “Chechen issue,” reporter Anna Politkovskaya and human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, were both gunned down – Politkovskaya in Moscow in October 2006 and Estemirova in Chechnya in July 2009. When human rights activists blamed him for their deaths, Kadyrov was dismissive: “That’s bullshit, that’s just gossip,” he said. The Chechen media toe the line. Those that survive in this hostile environment know the rules of the game, the first of which is to never criticise the policies of the president, whose photo is displayed everywhere. Kadyrov said this about terrorism: “My method is simple. Those who disrupt the people’s peace must be dealt with harshly, cruelly even.” And on the press, he added: “The press must be in the service of the Chechen people’s unity.” In practice, journalists interpret this as meaning they must praise his every action and the people’s devotion to him. To ensure absolute loyalty, Kadyrov uses not only fear but also the money flowing in abundance from the Kremlin to Grozny. New newspapers have been created with Chechen government funding to create the impression that the republic’s media are flourishing and vibrant. But they all just repeat the same refrain ad infinitum. As for foreign journalists, it goes without saying that Kadyrov accuses them of distorting reality and not reporting what is really happening in Chechnya.

## **Turkmenistan**

### **30 - Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov President**

In his three years as president, Berdymukhamedov has done nothing to suggest that improving freedom of expression is one of his priorities, despite statements of intent and reforms breaking with the weirder aspects of the legacy left by his predecessor, President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov, whom he served as both health minister and personal dentist. He has opened up the economy but the state’s absolute control of the press remains untouched and he criticises the media more often than he supports them. The opening of a handful of Internet cafés, in which access is monitored and content is filtered, fails to compensate for the tight grip that the government maintains on the editorial policies of all the media. Even the Russian TV stations that can be received in Turkmenistan are censored before being relayed to local viewers. The exact number of imprisoned journalists and human rights activists is not known and none has benefited from the president’s amnesties for detainees. It is depressing to see that Turkmenistan continues to be one of the world’s most repressive states and its population is as isolated as ever.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

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### **Saudi Arabia**

#### **31 - Abdallah ibn Al-Saud King**

“Custodian of the two holy mosques,” prime minister and Saudi Arabia’s sixth king, Abdallah ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud acceded to the throne in August 2005. Under his command, the regime has swung between repression and openness. He has had political activists and journalists arrested but he also staged the country’s first municipal elections. The Saud family’s hold on the state and the supremacy of its Wahabi ideology require total control over news and information. No laws protect freedom of expression so journalists dare not criticise the regime and self-censorship is

the rule. Regional unrest and the fight against terrorism continue to be used to justify curbing basic freedoms. Visiting foreign journalists are always accompanied by government officials who report back on what they do. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most repressive countries as regards the Internet. The government created a special commission in March 2007 with the job of filtering the Internet in order to "protect Saudi society" from terrorism, fraud, pornography, defamation and the "violation of religious values." More than 400,000 websites are currently blocked. Far from trying to hide what they are doing, the Saudi authorities defend their censorship decisions. This control of the Internet is indicative of the determination to maintain social order.

## **Iran**

### **32 - Ali Khamenei**

#### **Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic**

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has guided the country since the death of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989. He has been consolidating his predecessor's ultraconservative policies for more than 20 years, controlling all of the country's main political institutions. As Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei has been responsible for the continuing crackdown on journalists since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection on 12 June 2009. His virulent and inflammatory criticism of media with international links has fuelled the rage of the government and its allies towards journalists. It was with his explicit agreement that the judicial system staged Stalinist-style mass trials in August 2009 and January 2010. It is the Revolutionary Guards, controlled by Khamenei, who nowadays run Section 240 of Evin prison, a special section in which the names of the detainees, like those held in Section 209 (controlled by the interior ministry) do not appear in the prison register. These detainees are held incommunicado in flagrant violation of international law. Reporters Without Borders accuses Khamenei of crimes against humanity.

## **Iran**

### **33 - Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**

#### **President**

Already the Middle East's biggest prison for the media, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the five biggest in the world since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection on 12 June 2009. Ahmadinejad and his government embarked on a heavy-handed crackdown on journalists and netizens in which more than 100 journalists were arrested and nearly 50 were forced to flee abroad. Fourteen newspapers were closed and thousands of web pages were blocked. As president, Ahmadinejad was responsible for this crackdown, which he orchestrated with the Revolutionary Guards. For the first time since the 1979 revolution, the government introduced a system by which print media content is systematically verified by the security services before publication. Together with his government, above all in close cooperation with the intelligence ministry and the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance, which were placed under his direct responsibility, Ahmadinejad drew up the list of journalists who were to be arbitrarily arrested. It was also Ahmadinejad who determined the charges and authorised the system of filmed forced confessions. The government still refuses to put an end to the state monopoly on broadcast media and still prohibits private ownership of satellite dishes. Foreign media are closely watched and their local correspondents can have their accreditation withdrawn at any time. International organisations very rarely manage to obtain permission to visit Iran.

## **Israel**

### **34 - Israel Defence Forces**

The IDF was again responsible for abuses of authority and acts of violence against journalists in the Palestinian Territories in 2009. The Israeli authorities denied the international media access to the Gaza Strip “for safety reasons” during Operation Cast Lead, the military offensive that ran from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009. This was a serious press freedom violation. The Israeli forces targeted several buildings housing news media during the offensive. In all, six journalists were killed during Operation Cast Lead, two of them while working, and around 15 others were wounded. Two Palestinian journalists based in Jerusalem, Khodr Shaheen, the correspondent of the Iranian Arabic-language TV station *Al-Alam*, and his assistant, Mohammed Sarhan, were charged during Operation Cast Lead with “divulging secret information” and “transmitting information to the enemy in wartime.” Their two-month jail sentences and additional suspended sentences of six months in prison were eventually quashed by the Israeli supreme court. The Israeli security forces tend to behave arbitrarily towards Palestinian journalists and media workers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At least 33 Palestinian journalists were physically attacked and injured by Israeli soldiers during 2009 and another 25 have been since the start of 2010. Israeli soldiers implicated in these abuses are rarely prosecuted.

## **Libya**

### **35 - Muammar Gaddafi**

#### **Head of State and Guide of the Revolution**

Since launching his “Green Revolution” in 1969, Muammar Gaddafi has distanced himself from his original socialist ideals. The ending of Libya’s diplomatic isolation has had a significant impact on the economy but not on press freedom. Journalists are only very slowly benefiting from the easing of political tension. They still have no room for manoeuvre and their main job is to relay Gaddafi’s propaganda. His personality cult is visible everywhere in the streets and in the official media. Non-governmental media were permitted in Libya in 2007 for the first time since Gaddafi took power but were controlled by Al-Ghad, a company owned by one of his sons, Seif al-Islam Gaddafi. This tentative evolution was reversed from mid-2009 onwards, when these media were all either nationalised or, in the case of the newspapers, were banned from being printed. Although permission was given in February 2009 to import 90 Arab and international publications after a 25-year ban, media diversity continues to be a mirage. The foreign media are closely watched and foreign reporters find it hard to get visas to visit Libya.

## **Syria**

### **36 - Bashar al-Assad**

#### **President**

Reelected with more than 97 per cent of the vote in 2007, when he was the sole presidential candidate, Assad has refused to make any compromises since succeeding his father as president in July 2000 and has maintained the state of emergency that has been in effect since 1963. Long awaited democratic reforms such as a law permitting the creation of political parties and amendments to the press law have not materialised. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of media, but not in their diversity. Syria’s return to the international scene in 2008 has not really changed things. A number of journalists were arrested or were summoned for questioning in the second half of 2009. Many of them were questioned about articles that were said to be an “attack on the nation” or a threat to “state security.” The office of the Syrian Centre

for Media and Free Expression was closed in September 2009 and placed under seal. At least four journalists were arrested but few dared to talk about it, even on condition of anonymity. The Internet is far from being spared by the censors. More than 200 websites are currently inaccessible. In 2005, the information ministry undertook to incorporate the Internet into an overhauled version of the press law. A 2007 law forces Internet café managers to keep a record of all the comments their clients post on chat forums. A Reporters Without Borders delegation was denied access to Syria in September 2008. The information minister said: "They will never get a visa."

**Palestinian Territories**  
**37 - Executive Force**  
**Armed wing of Hamas**

Journalists have been paying dearly for the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian Territories ever since Hamas seized power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The media are now very divided. The Hamas government has made it clear since June 2007 that it wants to control the media in Gaza, threatening media freedom. After the Gaza branch of the Union of Palestinian Journalists was disbanded, Hamas established a new system of accreditation for all telecommunications and Internet companies as well as broadcast media and news agencies based in the Gaza Strip. Hamas also enforced a 1996 law under which disseminating news that threatens "national unity" is punishable by imprisonment. During and after the Israeli military's Operation Cast Lead, the Hamas government's security forces obstructed journalists, denying them access to certain parts of the Gaza Strip. Some journalists were put under a lot of pressure not to report anything reflecting badly on Hamas. Intimidation, physical violence and arbitrary arrest and detention by members of the Executive Force, the armed wing of Hamas, have become commonplace. More than 20 journalists were arrested during 2009 by the Hamas interior ministry's security services and questioned about their links with Fatah and the "government in Ramallah." Such coercive measures force Palestinian journalists to censor themselves and help to delay the return of foreign reporters who pulled out of the Gaza Strip when British journalist Alan Johnston was kidnapped in March 2007. The lack of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas on the holding of presidential and legislative elections in 2010 suggests that this situation will continue.

**Palestinian Territories**  
**38 - The Palestinian Authority's security forces**

Journalists with links to Hamas, the Islamist party controlling the Gaza Strip, are often the victims of arbitrary arrest in the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority's security forces under the control of President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah. Both Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza often arrest journalists linked to the other faction as a way of settling political scores. Around 40 journalists, most of them working for the Hamas-funded television station *Al-Aqsa*, were arrested during 2009 in the West Bank by the police or the intelligence services and questioned about their work, their media's sources of funding, and their links with Hamas government officials. Tareq Abu Zayd, *Al-Aqsa's* correspondent in the northern city of Nablus, was sentenced to 18 months in prison on 16 February 2010 in connection with his work as a journalist for the TV station.



## **Tunisia**

### **39 - Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali**

#### **President**

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali has kept both Tunisia and its media under tight control since becoming president in 1987. He promised in 2004, at the start of his fourth term, to “promote media diversity by expanding areas for discussion, encouraging private initiatives in the media and improving working conditions for journalists.” But the promise was not kept and his reelection in October 2009 for a fifth term has led to a further loss of freedom. Although the regime is sometimes described as a “soft” dictatorship, journalists and human rights activists are the target of constant bureaucratic harassment, police violence and surveillance by the intelligence services. On 24 October 2009, on the eve of his reelection, Ben Ali warned his detractors: “The law will be applied against anyone making accusations or expressing doubts about the integrity of the electoral process without producing hard evidence.” The regime’s thugs were not slow to carry out his threats. At least 10 independent journalists were the victims of unprecedented reprisals. The authorities do not hesitate fabricate charges in order jail troublemakers. Control of the Internet has been stepped up considerably and visiting foreign journalists are constantly accompanied by an official from the Tunisian Agency for External Communication. The regime has become almost obsessive about control of news and information but, as an ally of the west in its fight against terrorism, Ben Ali is treated very leniently by international organisations.

## **YEMEN**

### **40 - Ali Abdallah Saleh**

#### **President**

Ali Abdallah Saleh had ruled the Arab Republic of [North] Yemen since 1978 before becoming president of the unified Yemen in 1990. The authorities reinforced their already tight control over the media in 2009 in order to impose a news blackout on military offensives taking place in the north and the south of the country. At the same time, vague and subjective concepts in the 1990 press law such as attacking “national security,” threatening “national unity” or undermining “the country’s foreign relations” are used to gag journalists. Since May 2009 many journalists and netizens have been arrested, or in some cases kidnapped, and then sentenced to long jail terms accompanied by an archaic ban on writing. Eight independent newspapers are currently subject to a printing ban for “separatism.” The Internet has not been forgotten. And the authorities have created a special court for press offences, which forms the cornerstone of their repressive system.