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# PREDATORS

OF THE PRESS FREEDOM 2012

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## Africa

### Egypt - Supreme Council of the Armed Forces

After the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the year was marked by a crackdown by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces involving human rights violations, in particular of freedom of news and information.

Regarded by Egyptians as sacrosanct, the armed forces nonetheless still use the same old methods of censorship and intimidation. The SCAF takeover after Mubarak's departure served only to further enshrine the position of the military. The Council has not only perpetuated Hosni Mubarak's ways of controlling information, but has strengthened them further.

Numerous journalists and bloggers seeking to expose the abuses committed by certain elements of the Army and the military police during the pro-democratic uprising have been prosecuted before military courts, and some have been jailed for several months. The SCAF has affirmed that it will show "no tolerance for insults [against itself]."

Since the legislative elections last November, Reporters Without Borders has noted no further increase in abuses. However, vigilance is still required since power has not yet been handed over to civilians.

The blogger Maikel Nabil Sanad was the first prisoner of conscience of the post-Mubarak era. He was arrested in March last year and sentenced in April to a three-year prison term for having published a report on his blog questioning the alleged neutrality of the army during the demonstrations in January and February 2011. He was pardoned on 12 January this year, the day before the first anniversary of the revolution.

Another target was the blogger Asmaa Mahfouz, a recipient of the Sakharov Prize who was threatened with trial by military court for insulting the SCAF.

During the riots in Cairo's Maspero district on 9 and 10 October last year, the army stormed the head offices of the television stations *Al-Hurra* and *Channel January 25* located nearby while they were reporting on the disturbances. The troops halted the broadcasts and threatened journalists. It also temporarily cut off the electricity, telephones lines and Internet connection in the offices of the newspaper *Al-Shoroq*. The blogger and activist Alaa Abdel Fattah was detained for nearly two months for refusing to respond to allegations of incitement to violence, vandalism and theft of a weapon during the Maspero protests.

During the week before the parliamentary election on 28 November last year, demonstrators calling for the resignation of the SCAF clashed with security forces, mainly in the streets around Tahrir Square. Media workers were again attacked between 16 and 18 December.

As a result of more than 700 complaints from a group calling itself "Young Men and Women for an Honourable Egypt" against 12 well-known figures, the public prosecutor decided on 7 March to refer the cases to military courts. Among the 12 were two journalists from the station *ON TV*, Rim Magued and Yosri Fouda, activists such as the bloggers Nawara Nagem and Wael Ghoneim, as well as the writer Alaa Al-Aswani. They could face charges of attempting to overthrow the state and damaging the reputation of the armed forces.

State media also launched a smear campaign against US-subsidized Egyptian NGOs that criticized the Supreme Council. The campaign poses a threat to many national human rights organizations.

### **Eritrea - Issaias Afeworki**

#### **President**

Freed from Ethiopian domination in 1991 and enslaved again in 2001 by Issaias Afeworki's authoritarian lunacy, Eritrea is governed by Africa's most ruthless dictator, whose state of health is the cause of rumour and speculation. 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" more than 10 years ago, 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 jail for the media. Around 30 journalists are currently being held in prisons, undergrounds cells or metal containers.

Four of them have died as a result of the extremely cruel conditions or committed suicide. Others have just disappeared. And others flee the country illegally, at risk to their lives. 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 - 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 troublemakers. "If you are affiliated with any human rights group, 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." No one takes his threats lightly.

The unsolved murder of Deyda Hydara, *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. Jammeh insisted yet again in March 2011 that he was not involved in Hydara's death and at the same time he warned that he would not "sacrifice the interests, the peace and stability and well-being of the Gambian people at the altar of freedom of expression."

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 - 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 Teodoro Obiang Nguema was re-elected 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.

Equatorial Guinea’s hosting of the 17th African Union summit in June 2011 and the Africa cup of Nations soccer tournament in January this year were window dressing by the government and did not open the door to progress on basic freedoms.

The privately-owned press is limited to a few small newspapers. The country has no journalists’ union or press freedom organization. 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.”

The national radio and TV broadcaster *RTVGE* obeys the orders of the information ministry. The state broadcaster has not been allowed to mention the unrest and revolutions that have shaken the Arab world since the start of 2011 and the coup in Mali in March this year has also been subjected to censorship.

## Nigeria - Boko Haram

### Islamist Group

The Boko Haram Islamist militia, responsible for bombings and suicide attacks on, among others, the United Nations, churches and police stations, has also made the media a target. It was behind two car bomb attacks on newspaper offices in Abuja and Kaduna in April this year.

Formed in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of the northeastern state of Borno, the group Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad (“People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad”), known as Boko Haram (“Western education is a sin”), preaches a rigorous and radical form of Islam. Its goal is the application of sharia throughout the country. It accuses the media of bias in its reporting of the group’s conflict with the Nigerian government.

Its spokesman Abul Qaqa said: “We have repeatedly cautioned reporters and media houses to be professional and objective in their reports. This is a war between us and the government of

Nigeria. Unfortunately, the media have not been objective and fair in their reports of the ongoing war; they chose to take sides.”

The group claimed responsibility for the killing of Zakariya Isa, a reporter and cameraman for the state-owned *Nigeria Television Authority* (NTA), shot dead outside his home in Maiduguri last October on his way home after attending a mosque.

The group accused Isa of spying on it on behalf of Nigerian security forces, an allegation dismissed by his colleagues and the intelligence service.

In January this year, Enenche Godwin Akogwu, a correspondent for *Channels TV*, was shot dead while he was trying to interview victims of a series of deadly suicide bombings by Boko Haram in the northern city of Kano. The group is suspected to have killed him to prevent him from filing his report.

### **Rwanda - Paul Kagame** President

With his thin face, tall figure, intellectual's glasses and conservative suits, Paul Kagame looks more like a modern, Internet-savvy politician than a former guerrilla chief and war lord, who seized power in the wake of the 1994 genocide and has since used a reconciliation process to bolster his authority and neutralize the opposition.

President since 2000 and re-elected in 2010, 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 these journalists as “mercenaries” and “bums.”

Two women journalists were given sentences of 7 and 17 years in prison in early 2011 for criticizing the president. A year later the sentences were reduced to three years and four years respectively.

Umuwugizi deputy editor Jean-Léonard Rugambage was murdered in Kigali in June 2010, probably for investigating the intelligence services and, in particular, their attempt to murder an exiled general. *Umuwugizi* and another newspaper, *Umuseso*, have long been two of the regime's biggest bugbears.

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. To cap it all, 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 - Abdulkadir Hussein Mohamed „Jahweyn“**

### **Minister of information, posts and telecommunications in the transitional federal government (TFG)**

Somalia's permanent state of conflict creates a highly dangerous atmosphere for reporters and their work is made even more risky, even impossible, by the intolerance of Islamist militias towards freedom of information. The federal transitional government does nothing to support the work of news organizations.

As minister of information, posts and telecommunications, Abdulkadir Hussein Mohamed, known as "Jahweyn", is the one who orchestrates the threats and pressure suffered by the press. He also forces radio stations to pay taxes that are not required by law or under official regulations. In late March last year, the manager and news director of the private station *Radio Shabelle* were arrested by the National Security Agency on Jahweyn's orders. The two men were deprived of food and allowed no visitors before being released after 48 hours.

The cause of their detention was a report questioning the competence of the head of the transitional government, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Journalists that criticize the actions of the government and its leaders are not welcome at official press conferences and are accused by the minister and his staff of "disseminating lies".

In January this year, the information ministry blamed the murder of Hassan Osman Abdi, director of the *Shabelle Media Network*, on the Al-Shabaab Islamist militia but many in the Mogadishu media community doubt this version of events. Shortly before he was gunned down, the *Shabelle Media Network* highlighted cases of corruption in the transitional government.

## **Somalia - Al-Shabaab**

### **Armed Islamist militia**

There is no sign of any respite for Somalia after more than 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 since 2009 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 organized of these groups. It wages a campaign of terror, bomb attacks 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.

The victims include journalists, who are regarded almost by definition as enemies. Twenty-nine of them have been killed since 2007, either caught in crossfire or directly targeted by the various militia factions. *Radio Shabelle* has paid a particularly heavy price, losing three directors and four of its reporters.

Other *Radio Shabelle* employees fled the country. Al-Shabaab withdrew from Mogadishu in summer of 2011 but still controls a large area of the country, has its own prisons, carries out arrests and executes sentences. The militia also issues directives to journalists about how to cover

the news and, in 2010, seized control of about 10 radio stations, which now broadcast its political and religious propaganda.

### **Swaziland- 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 a single person to blame it is clearly King Mswati III. Lacking vision and management abilities, Africa's last absolute monarch abuses his royal powers. He collects wives – he has 13 – and has amassed great wealth while the people struggle to survive. Political parties are banned, elections a charade in which only pro-government candidates take part.

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 hard to imagine.

The authorities often remind journalists how to behave, warning those who criticize the government that they could find themselves “accused of supporting terrorism and arrested.” The government forced two journalists, Mfomfo Nkambule of the Times of Swaziland (the only privately-owned newspaper) and Mario Masuku of the Times Sunday, to stop writing their columns in 2009.

Against this background, there is growing anger and protests have been organized via social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Demonstrations in April last year and this year calling for the king's abdication were ruthless put down. Several local and foreign journalists covering them were arrested.

### **Zimbabwe - Robert Mugabe**

#### **President**

It is thanks to its president that Zimbabwe's privately-owned print media are constantly harassed and that the state-owned *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation* (ZBC) has a monopoly of radio and TV broadcasting. Robert Mugabe blocks everything, prevents the national unity government from functioning properly, makes sure the independent media are unable to express themselves freely and, with the help of his closest aides, keeps the state media under tight control. Mugabe stepped up 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. In 2012, “the old man” was preparing for the next elections – for which a date has yet to be set – by continuing to curtail free speech. While foreign news organizations are not welcome, the harassment of local journalists continues.



## Americas

### Cuba - 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 civil liberties, and the harassment of independent journalists and bloggers has never stopped. It includes police brutality, summonses and searches by State Security (the political police) and detention for short periods.

The page has nonetheless been turned on the “Black Spring” crackdown of March 2003. From July 2010 to March 2011, the regime freed a total of 52 dissidents jailed during the crackdown, a third of who had been running or working for small independent news agencies before their arrest. Most of them had to agree to forced exile in exchange for their release.

### Honduras - Miguel Facussé Barjum

#### Businessman and landowner

An uncle of former President Carlos Flores Facussé (1998-2002), agro-industrialist Miguel Facussé Barjum is a member of one of the powerful oligarchic families that control Honduras' wealth. He heads Dinant, a company specializing in producing and marketing palm oil, and was one of the leading supporters of the June 2009 coup that toppled President Manuel Zelaya and paved the way for a still-continuing crackdown on opposition and grass-roots media. Its targets include small radio stations that defend the interests of local communities and often challenge those of big landowners such as Facussé.

Facussé has a private militia that can count on support from the police and army to impose his will. A total of 26 journalists have been killed in Honduras in the past decade, 19 of them since the 2009 coup.

### Colombia - 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 having been disarmed. According to official figures, a major programme for dismantling the AUC from 2003 to 2006 resulted in the demobilization 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. They target journalists who criticize the so-called “democratic security” policies launched by President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010), which are still in force. Their victims also include local and community journalists working in areas where clashes continue.

## Mexico - Sinaloa, Gulf und 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 bribe politicians in order to impose their law and their presence is far from being limited to the coastal and border states. The situation has got much worse since 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. Since 2000, 80 journalists have been murdered and 14 others have disappeared. More than half of them had been covering stories linked to drug trafficking. None of the people behind these murders and disappearances has ever been arrested or tried. Mexico is one of the western hemisphere's most dangerous countries for the media.

## Asia

### Burma - Thein Sein President

Elected by parliament on 4 February 2011 as the country's eighth president, Thein Sein has too contradictory a record to warrant cancelling his status as predator.

In March 2011, he declared in his inauguration speech that the role of the media should be respected. Yet in May 2011, harsh restrictions on cyber cafés were made even tougher. On 14 September 2011, Sithu Zeya, a reporter for the *Democratic Voice of Burma*, had a previous prison sentence extended for 10 years on a charge of having reported information that could "damage the tranquillity and unity in the government".

A general amnesty decreed on 13 January this year led to the release of all the *Democratic Voice of Burma* journalists, as well as independent reporters, and several dozen political prisoners. Then an engineer in the construction ministry initiated criminal proceedings against the *Modern Weekly* magazine and one of its reporters, Thet Su Aung. In March 2012, the newspaper *The Voice* was sued for defamation by the mining ministry.

Censorship has not completely disappeared under Thein Sein, despite his recognition of the international benefits that his moves toward political openness have brought. The repressive reactions of the notorious press scrutiny and registration division have returned in full force. The media-control agency summoned and reprimanded two newspapers in March 2012, following publication of articles deemed to violate official policy.

Thein Sein could be the last member of the Burmese junta to be listed as a predator. To achieve this, he should undertake legal reforms that would annul the Electronic Act against unauthorized use of digital media, and the state of emergency law, as well as enact a media law to end censorship. He should also order the release of four journalists and a blogger who are still imprisoned.

## Laos - Choummaly Sayasone

### President

Choummaly Sayasone maintains control over all national media, preventing any objective and independent information from reaching the public. Only a few non-political publications are exempt.

Sayasone, the former defence minister, was re-appointed by the National Assembly on 15 June 2011 as president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. He was also retained as leader of the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party, whose doctrine assigns journalists and media the task of promoting national development – that is, of transmitting party and government policy.

Journalists, who are in effect functionaries of the information and culture ministry, are required to echo the official wire service, Khaosan Pathet Lao (Lao News Agency) when they write of the chief of state, who, along with the top party leaders, is a constant presence on the front pages of all publications. The ban on criticism also applies to coverage of friendly countries, such as North Korea, Vietnam and Burma.

At the end of January 2012, the information ministry cancelled the only call-in program that allowed members of the public to speak out on the country's economic and social problems. "Talk of the News" on Lao National Radio had been hosted by Ounkeo Souksavan. Ironically, one week after the program was ended, the ruling party's propaganda and training committee announced that it favoured increased use of the media to help educate the public.

Sayasone is hostile to all information and debate concerning the Hmong minority, and religious liberty in general, and opposes human rights and individual freedoms that could lead the country into "chaos and anarchy."

That was Laos' official position in February 2012, in a message on the duties and responsibilities of member states of ASEAN, as countries in the region were formulating a declaration of human rights. Laos declared that "national security, public order and morality" had a higher priority than human rights.

## China – Hu Jintao

### President

The imprisonment of 68 netizens and 30 journalists make President Hu Jintao, who is also general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, the leading jailer of press freedom defenders.

On the day after the "Jasmine Revolution" rally on 20 February 2011, he called for the strengthening of "controls on the information Web" in order to maintain social order and promote a harmonious society.

Government and party officials understood the message. During the last year of Hu's term, information restrictions, especially online, have been strengthened, as has the propaganda department's media censorship. Summonses to appear before officials and other pressures on journalists, netizens and dissidents have become more frequent. Working conditions for foreign journalists have steadily worsened.

The president has ordered information blackouts on regions gripped by social or political unrest. In Inner Mongolia, he responded with repressive measures to a protest movement launched in May 2011. Likewise in Tibet, where nearly 20 monks have burned themselves to death since March 2011. That region now is cut off from the world. Not only are foreign media barred from covering events, but the authorities have also organized a full-scale disinformation campaign via pro-government media (such as the *Global Times*), designed to minimize events and denounce the international community's involvement as interference.

The announced successor of Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, has promised to “smash” any attempt to “destroy stability” in Tibet. He seems well on his way to taking his place as the next press freedom predator in China.

### **North-Korea - Kim Jong-un** **Chairman of Central Military Commission**

The successor to North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il, who died of a heart attack in December 2011, Kim Jong-un moved even before he took over to shut down the flow of information from abroad.

In August 2011, Kim Jong-un ordered repression intensified throughout the country, with special attention to media originating in South Korea. And he completely cut off shipments of foreign goods including mobile phones and CDs. Group 109, the anti-smuggling unit, received authorization to conduct random searches of homes.

The government then created another investigative unit under the control of the propaganda and agitation department, assigned to eradicate “anti-socialist activities.”

Little is known of Kim Jong-un. His having attended school in Switzerland, his youth and his inexperience do not provide a basis for predicting how he will rule. But information that is circulating, notably concerning party purges at the local level, point to a hard-line policy aimed at ensuring his dominance of the country's ruling elite.

Some refugees who had escaped North Korea before 2009 said that before they fled they had never even heard of Kim Jong-un. Since September 2010, when he was named a four-star general of the Korean People's Army, appointed a permanent member of the party central committee and vice president of its military commission, Kim Jong-un has generated a personality cult similar to the one that centred on Kim Jong-Il. Since January 2010, state media refer to him as “father.”

Despite the opening of a permanent Associated Press bureau in Pyongyang in January 2012, North Korea is as closed to the outside world as any nation on earth. Kim Jong-un does not appear ready, for now, to loosen his absolute control of the media.

### **Pakistan - Government intelligence agencies**

MI, IB and ISI are the opaque acronyms used by Military Intelligence, the Intelligence Bureau and, most important of all, Inter-Services Intelligence – the Pakistani spy agencies that have repeatedly been implicated in monitoring, abduction, torture and murders of journalists.

The 2002 execution-style murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl drew attention to the links between Pakistan's intelligence services and extremist groups, including Al Qaeda. Relations between the media and the military-dominated regime have been consistently poor since the "war on terror" began. There is evidence tying the spy agencies to 21 kidnappings of journalists from 1999 to 2006.

In most cases – ranging from *Geo TV* correspondent Mukesh Rupeta's abduction and torture in 2006 to the threats received by renowned *Geo TV* host Hamid Mir in December 2011 after referring to former ISI Director-General Ahmed Shuja Pashathose's political role – those in charge of these intelligence agencies were never even questioned by civilian investigators.

The most recent case is that of *Asia Times Online* investigative reporter Syed Saleem Shahzad, who was found dead in his car on 21 May 2011. A specialist in covering Islamist militant groups and Al Qaeda, he had just written about a Taliban attack on the Pakistani naval air base in Karachi, reporting that Al Qaeda had developed an effective network within the navy. He had also reported that naval officers had been negotiating with an Al Qaeda operative in North Waziristan. Many journalists in Islamabad suspect that ISI kidnapped and executed Shahzad.

Operating with impunity, the Pakistani intelligence agencies constitute a major threat to press freedom.

### **Pakistan - Mollah Mohammad Omar**

#### **Taliban chief**

Mullah Mohammad Omar, who likes to call himself "Commander of the Believers" and "Servant of Islam," has led the many factions of the Afghan Taliban since 1994. Nowadays he also has a lot of support in Pakistan and heads the Pakistan-based Taliban ruling council, the Rahbari Shura, which consists of himself and 10 other Talebs. Created in 2003, it encompasses four regional shuras and 10 committees. The present chief of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Hakimullah Mehsud, owes allegiance to Omar.

The Taliban, who control many regions of Afghanistan, spread terror by kidnapping journalists, by suicide attacks and by the use of improvised explosive devices. The use of terror enables the Taliban to control the population, and creates virtual information blackouts in southern and eastern Afghanistan and in western Pakistan.

Although the Taliban finally released two French hostages, *France 3* journalists Hervé Ghesquière and Stéphane Taponier, in June 2011 after holding them for 18 months, they are responsible for a growing number of murders of civilians and journalists.

In eastern Afghanistan, Jafar Vafa, a young journalist with radio *Aleh Ghosh*, was killed by an IED in November 2011. Before him, Rupert Hamer, correspondent of the British *Sunday Mirror* newspaper, and Michelle Lang of the Canadian *Calgary Herald* newspaper, were killed in similar fashion. Taliban members do not hesitate to execute journalists in broad daylight and in front of onlookers. On 17 January 2012, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan murdered Mukarram Khan Atif, a journalist for *Deewa Radio*, while he was at prayer in a mosque in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Despite the differences and borders between them, these criminal groups are united in their campaign – waged in the name of religion – to stamp out freedom of the press and access to

information. Their presence constitutes a permanent threat to journalists. Terror marks the regions they control, where the remaining journalists practice self-censorship to survive.

### **Philippines - Private militias**

Made up of thugs in the pay of corrupt politicians, paramilitary groups and contract hit men paid a few thousand dollars per killing, private militias continue to threaten and kill journalists. Authorities have shown themselves powerless in the face of these groups. Moreover, official corruption as well as links between some politicians and organized-crime networks often allow private militias to escape justice.

Some efforts have been made to halt the cycle of impunity. The most noteworthy example concerns the case of the massacre of 36 journalists on 23 November 2009 in Maguindanao province by the Ampatuan family's militia. But in a climate dominated by bureaucratic ineptitude and lack of political will, legal proceedings against those responsible for the biggest mass-killing of journalists ever committed began more than two years ago and are still dragging on, without a single conviction.

In the first four months of 2012, two journalists were shot to death and two others survived murder attempts. Christopher Guarin, editor of *Tatak News Nationwide* and a host on radio station *dxMD*, was killed in an ambush on 5 January. Aldion Layao, a journalist with *Super Radyo* and *dxRP*, was murdered on 8 April on the island of Mindanao.

In almost all cases, the same method is used: masked men on motorcycles shoot their target in cold blood, in plain sight and in broad daylight. In many cases, the victims are local radio station hosts who clearly must have said things on the air to upset those who hired the hit-men. Killings are concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Manila, and Cagayan de Oro on the islands of Luzon and Mindanao.

### **Sri Lanka - The Rajapakse clan**

Defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, younger brother of President Mahina Rajapakse, is not the only clan member openly hostile to press freedom. On 19 July 2011 the president personally issued a threat by telephone to Lal Wickrematunge, editor of *The Sunday Leader* newspaper after it published an article reporting embezzlement by the president and his son Namal Rajapakse, a member of parliament.

Violence, threats, censorship and propaganda aimed at journalists and press freedom defenders continue. On 29 July 2011 in Jaffna, Gnanasundaram Kuhanathan, editor of the Tamil-language newspaper *Uthayan*, was attacked by assailants wielding iron bars. The assault has gone unpunished.

Access to the main websites providing information critical of the government or the Rajapakse brothers, including *LankaeNews*, *SriLankaMirror*, *SriLankaGuardian*, *Papracigossip9* and *LankaWayNews*, was blocked in October and November 2011.

In response to the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 27 February 2012, the ruling clan unleashed a fierce hate campaign against exile media and human rights

defenders. Journalists were attacked by the Rajapakse government as terrorists and traitors for reporting on Council activities, for joining in the “Black January” media defence campaign, and writing about the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. The government carried out its campaign through official media such as the Lake House newspaper chain, the *Independent Television Network (ITN Ltd)* and the daily *Dinamina*.

The government’s media policy is fully apparent from the violence, threats and propaganda directed at journalists and free-press defenders during the first two months of 2012 alone.

### **Vietnam - Nguyen Phu Trong**

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

Nguyen Phu Trong, appointed general secretary of the country’s only legal political party on 19 January 2011, has lost no time in silencing critical voices. During the months that followed his taking office, the former president of the national assembly (2006-2011) has cracked down hard on cyber dissidents.

The conservative-dominated party that he heads has maintained unrelenting pressure on pro-democracy activists, for fear that the kind of opposition movements ignited in the Middle East could spread to Vietnam.

In April 2011, Cu Huy Ha Vu was sentenced to seven years in prison and three years under house arrest for “anti-state propaganda.” Vi Duc Hoi, another pro-democracy activist convicted of the same charge, had his sentence of eight years’ imprisonment and three years’ house arrest reduced to five years in prison and three years under house arrest.

Since Trong’s appointment, seven netizens have been imprisoned, in all cases for calling for a multi-party system or democracy. The ruling party uses the legal system against dissidence on the Web. A draft decree under consideration, scheduled for possible enactment in June this year, would enlist Internet companies in an effort to strengthen censorship on the Web.

Traditional media have not been spared. Radio journalists Vu Duc Trung and his brother-in-law, Le Van Trinh, were sentenced in November 2011 to three and two years in prison respectively for “illegal broadcasting.” On 2 January 2012, Hoang Khuong (real name: Nguyen Van Khuong), a journalist for the daily *Tuoi Tre*, was arrested on a charge of having bribed a police officer, in the course of reporting on police corruption.

Trong’s censorship and arrest powers override the authority of the prime minister and of the president, and are carried out in defiance of the international community’s recommendations.

## **Europe**

### **Azerbaijan - Ilham Aliiev**

#### **President**

Power is a family affair at the head of this heavily-courted oil-rich state. Ilham Aliiev, the president since 2003, was carefully prepared for the job by his father, who had ruled without interruption

ruler since 1969. Heydar Aliev put him at the top of the ruling party's candidate list in the 1999 parliamentary elections, paving the way for him to be prime minister and then finally president. He was "reelected" with 89 per cent of the vote in October 2008 and tightened his grip in 2009 by removing any limits on reelection.

Initially seen as an amiable man unsuited to the harsh realities of politics, he proved himself a worthy heir of his father by getting a tight grip on all the reins of power and cracking down hard on opponents. Any unauthorized coverage of the president, his wife and other family members is completely off-limits for the media. Anything can happen to those who dare violate the taboo, including smear campaigns, death threats and abduction. Investigative journalist Khadija Ismaylova and reporters for the opposition newspaper *Azadlig* are among the recent victims.

There was a sharp increase in repression in response to major opposition protests in March 2011. Appearing to panic in the wake of the Middle East uprisings, the regime jailed young bloggers and activists such as Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, who had used Facebook and other social networks to issue calls for demonstrations. Reporters were arrested or were physically prevented from working. Foreign journalists were refused visas or were deported.

Although fiercely repressive domestically, the Aliev family is never short of petrodollars for promoting Azerbaijan's image internationally, until now with success.

Hosting the Eurovision Song Contest and Internet Governance Forum in Baku 2012 is the crowning achievement of the government's intense lobbying. However, by turning the international spotlight on Azerbaijan, the regime has given civil society an unexpected opportunity to make its voice heard. The battle lines are drawn. It is up to the international media to help make the difference.

### **Azerbaijan - Vasif Talibov** **Supreme Council President**

Vasif Yusif Oghlu Talibov reigns supreme over the isolated region of Nakhchivan. An "autonomous republic" separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by a strip of Armenian territory, it is known as "Azerbaijan's North Korea." Talibov has been "reelected" every five years since 1995 as head of Nakhchivan's parliament and has concentrated all power in his hands. He appoints ministers, promulgates laws which the parliament just registers, controls the justice system and runs the all-powerful security agencies.

Closely linked to the Aliev family that governs in Baku, Talibov's family also monopolizes the region's most profitable business activities. But all this is not enough to satisfy this control freak. He has banned his "subjects" from drying their washing on balconies and from celebrating marriages after 11 pm. In a zeal for neatness, he makes ministers sweep the street outside their offices and ordered the demolition of traditional bread ovens (a measure that happens to benefit the bakeries controlled by the Talibov family). Neatness was also used as grounds in 2005 for closing most bars and tea houses – places which, coincidentally, could be used for gatherings and debate.

Debate is not a concept that is welcome in Nakhchivan. Talibov has eliminated all forums for discussion and dissident opinion in the course of more than 15 years in power. The two TV



stations (one state-owned, one owned by his brother), the two radio stations and the many local newspapers pour forth praise for the president and his “achievements.” As a result, the public tends to watch Turkish satellite TV.

The local independent media have been eliminated and the opposition newspapers printed in Baku do not reach Nakhchivan. The Internet, provided by a local state monopoly, is closely monitored and often blocked, as it was during the pro-democracy demonstrations in the spring of 2011. A handful of independent journalists try to operate despite all the obstacles and pay for their audacity with frequent physical attacks and threats, and constant harassment. Journalists such as Ilgar Nasibov, Malahat Nasibova and Hakimeldostu Mekhtiev have received countless beatings.

When a man died in detention a few hours after his arrest in August 2011, a few journalists tried to investigate but they were quickly stopped. *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty* reporter Yafez Hasanov was arrested, escorted to the Iranian border and told to make his way back to Baku via Iran, where *RFE/RL* is regarded as an “illegal organization.” Abuses by the police and the by Ministry of National Security’s agents go completely unpunished and use of torture and forced confinement in psychiatric hospitals is widespread.

A member of the presidium of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, a fervent supporter of the Aliev family and a high priest of the Aliev personality cult, Talibov has carte blanche in his fiefdom. President Aliev awarded him the “medal of glory” in 2010 and with Aliev’s blessing, he has turned Nakhchivan into a laboratory for the repressive methods that are increasingly being used in the rest of the country.

### **Belarus - Alexander Lukashenko** President

An uninhibited despot, Alexander Lukashenko spoke his mind in March this year to the German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle: “Better to be a dictator than gay.”

With a woeful record stretching back to his accession to the leadership in 1994, he moved to a new level with the harsh repression of protests after his “re-election” in December 2010. Between then and December 2011, about 100 journalists were arrested, many beaten up and 30 or so sentenced to prison terms of varying lengths.

Freedom of expression and assembly were so restricted that protesters were only able to clap hands to express their discontent when they gathered in the main towns and cities. Even those resorting to this last-ditch form of popular expression were violently dispersed.

House searches, arrests and trials in Minsk and elsewhere have increased. Natalia Radzina, editor of the opposition website *Charter97.org*, was forced to flee abroad. Irina Khalip, correspondent of the independent Russian paper *Novaya Gazeta*, was released from prison in late January 2011 but kept under house arrest.

Independent national newspapers are collapsing under the weight of fines imposed on them, while the print runs of some regional title are regularly seized. The government is exacting vengeance for sanctions imposed by the European Union on its own citizens. For example, independent

journalists, members of the opposition and human rights activists were alarmed to discover that they were no longer allowed to leave the country.

The surprising areas of freedom that have remained over the past 20 years have now been sharply reduced. Selective granting of accreditation forces many foreign media outlets and their local correspondents to work illegally, making them even more vulnerable. The Internet cannot make up for this lack of freedom, since cybercafé users and shared-line phone subscribers have since 2010 been identified and monitored, and website content subject to prior approval and monitoring by an “analysis centre” directly attached to the president’s office. On the very doorstep of the European Union, Lukashenko is doing all he can to re-assert control over the country. But activists are resisting and biding their time.

### **Italy - Organized crime**

Italian shopkeepers, business people 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 report on the Italian mafia. There have been hundreds of threats, anonymous letters, slashed tyres and burned cars.

Every journalist writing about these criminal groups has been watched at one time or another. Roberto Saviano, author of the bestseller “Gomorra”, an exposé of the Camorra, is forced to live under round-the-clock police protection, as are dozens of other journalists. Giovanni Tizian, who has carried out detailed research on the 'Ndrangheta, was also placed under police protection in January this year after receiving threats.

Lirio Abbate, correspondent in Palermo for the news agency *Ansa* and author of “I Complici” (The Accomplices) also lives under police protection, as does (since March 2008) Rosaria Capacchione, who has covered the Camorra for the main Naples daily *Il Mattino* for more than 20 years. She and Saviano are both hunted by the Casalesi clan.

### **Kazakhstan - Nursultan Nazarbayev President**

The re-election of Nursultan Nazarbayev in early April last year with an announced 95% of the vote gives a fairly clear idea of the little consideration he gives to alternative and critical opinion. However, the system created more than 20 years ago by the undisputed leader of the most prosperous republic in Central Asia has entered a turbulent period. The government responded with brutality to an unprecedented wave of labour unrest in the strategically important oil industry.

Persistent rumours that Nazarbayev is in poor health are fuelling a bitter behind-the-scenes succession battle. Opposition and independent media, already stifled to a large extent, more than ever pay the price of this corrosive atmosphere.

He has decreed prison sentences for anyone attacking his “honour” and “dignity” and tightened rules for officially registering media outlets. Newspapers can be legally shut down more easily and journalists who work for a suspended publication can be banned from working for three years.

The Internet has also been caught up in this desire for control, to the extent that Kazakhstan has been placed “under surveillance” this year because of its online censorship.

Prosecution of, and physical attacks on journalists and news organizations that report on corruption and the problems faced by the oil industry were already common. However, since the bloody suppression of a riot by oil workers in the city of Zhanaozen last December, pressure on independent media outlets has increased considerably.

Staff members of the newspaper *Golos Respubliki* and the television station *Stan TV*, no strangers to harassment by the authorities, are now summoned by the National Security Committee, the KNB, almost on a weekly basis.

Igor Vinyavsky, the editor of the Kazakh daily *Vzglyad*, was detained for almost two months on trumped-up allegations. Lukpan Akhmedyarov, another journalist and government opponent, narrowly escaped an attempt on his life in April. The end of the Nazarbayev era looks like being even more brutal than its beginning, and he has yet to fire his final shots.

### **Russia - Vladimir Putin** **Prime Minister and future President**

Will Vladimir Putin ever succeed in being dropped from the “Predators of Press Freedom” list? It all depends on what the Russian Federation’s former and future president does after moving back into his old Kremlin office on 7 May 2012. This former KGB officer has been in charge in one form or another since 2000 and “control” has always been his watchword – control of the state, control of economic and political forces, control of geopolitical interests and control of the media

Tough leadership from the top in all areas of society is his formula for rebuilding a strong (but not impartial) state after years of confusion and diluted authority under Boris Yeltsin.

And the press has not been spared. As well as manipulating institutions and groups such as the patriotic youth movement Nashi (Ours), Putin has fostered an atmosphere of exaggerated national pride that encourages persecution of dissidents and freethinkers and a tradition of impunity that is steadily undermining the rule of law.

Independent journalists and human rights activists are exposed to considerable danger, especially in the North Caucasus. Brutal physical attacks on journalists, including Mikhail Beketov in November 2008 and Oleg Kashin in November 2010, have risen in recent years. Five were murdered in connection with their work in 2009 and at least 26 have been since Putin came to power in 2000. TV stations have been brought back under close control.

A high price has been paid but Russia is changing. As memories of the Soviet Union fade, the burgeoning middle classes identify less and less with the United Russia leader’s violent, nostalgic and deliberately paranoid rhetoric. Will he be able to adapt and embody the country’s modernization and liberalization, including at the political level? It seems unlikely. His response to the unprecedented wave of protests that has swept the country since December 2011 has been dominated by contempt. He says the demonstrators have been paid to protest, refers to the white ribbons they wear in their buttonholes as “condoms” and accuses critical news media of being manipulated by the US state department.

These media have meanwhile had to grapple with a bizarre series of management changes and various forms of internal pressure. But promises of democratization have also been made and some TV stations have gone so far as to allow the political opposition to speak on the air. Will Putin yield to the winds of change, trying to preserve whatever is possible, or will he cling to his old ways of thinking and resist? Much of the Russian media's future depends on what the Kremlin's ruler decides.

### **Russia - 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 to a region traumatised by two wars.

A high price has been paid for this superficial stability: the introduction of a regime that behaves in a particularly brutal manner towards anyone who calls into question the official consensus – a mixture of personality cult, top-down leadership and strict Islam. Kadyrov's private militias, which even carry out armed actions in neighbouring republics, are not the only ones to take advantage of this situation.

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. Oleg Orlov, the head of the Russian human rights NGO Memorial, was nonetheless prosecuted – and acquitted — for repeating the allegations.

In Chechnya, fear of the regime and the trauma of war mean self-censorship operates at full steam, and the media toe the line. 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 money. New newspapers have been created with Chechen government funding to create the impression that the republic's media are flourishing and vibrant. But with few exceptions, they all just repeat the same refrain ad infinitum. As for Moscow-based and foreign journalists, they are accused of distorting Chechen reality. Kadyrov has a few friends he can count on. They include the only head of state to congratulate him when he was sworn in for a second five-year term as president on 5 April 2011 – Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko.

## Spain - ETA

### Armed separatist group

Euskadi ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom), the Basque armed separatist group better known by the acronym ETA, has constantly targeted journalists in France and Spain since it was founded in 1959. Its 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 suffered 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 set off a car bomb outside the Bilbao headquarters of the Basque public TV station *EiTB* on 31 December 2008, causing considerable damage but no injuries. In a statement, ETA accused journalists of distorting the facts with the support of “political commissars and editors” and accused *EiTB* of practising “political apartheid” and “taking orders from Spain.” In a barely veiled threat, it 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 way.”

Despite announcing in October last year that it was ending its armed struggle, the organization has not yet surrendered its weapons. In January this year, 19 journalists in the Basque country and other parts of Spain had to live and work under police protection. This is still the case for several of them nowadays.

## Turkmenistan - Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov

### President

Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov’s talk of reform since he came to power in 2006 only serves to make the gap between words and reality even wider in one of the world’s most absolute and brutal dictatorships.

“Re-elected” this year with 97% of the votes cast, he said he favoured a multiparty system and privately-owned media. The one-party system has been abolished and replaced by two new parties ... created by the government. There is little chance that government opponents in exile will dare to return home.

Despite opening up the economy and playing Russia and Western countries off against each other, this former health minister and personal dentist to the late President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov still has his face set against the media. The number of journalists and human rights activists in prison or psychiatric hospitals is unknown.

State control of the country’s five TV stations, 25 newspapers and 15 magazines is absolute and even Russian TV stations that can be picked up in Turkmenistan are censored before being relayed to local viewers.

Activity at the handful of recently-opened Internet cafés is very closely monitored and they only give access to a highly-censored version of the Web known as Turkmenet.

The availability of the mobile Internet allowed ordinary citizens to tell the world about the deadly explosion of an arms depot in the capital’s suburbs in July last year. However, the crackdown was ferocious.

Berdymukhamedov appears to be more intent on promoting his own personality cult than allowing his critics to express themselves.

Hopes rose in vain when he broke with the weirder aspects of the legacy of his predecessor. It is true that days of the week and months are no longer named after members of the late leader's family, but the new president has ordered that he be officially known from now on as Arkadag (Protector).

His smiling portrait has replaced his predecessor's everywhere, his books are bestsellers and his father is honoured for having brought up a son who is "infinitely loyal to the people."

The local media undoubtedly cannot wait to see the new "holy book" on which Berdymukhamedov has been working to replace the "Rukhnama", a collection of the late dictator's sayings that are a compulsory part of the school curriculum at all levels.

## **Uzbekistan - Islam Karimov**

### **President**

Islam Karimov's daughter Lola went to court in France to try to force the European media to stop referring to her father as a "dictator". To no avail. After more than 20 years in power, he is still breaking his own records for repression and paranoia.

"Re-elected" in 2007 with 88 per cent of the vote, he has steadily boosted his power, ruthlessly silencing the opposition press through disappearances, forcible internment in psychiatric hospitals and arbitrary imprisonment. Journalists can pay dearly for their reporting, with charges of terrorism and trial on trumped-up charges.

At least 10 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 tranquility".

Karimov is everywhere in the state media, which credits him with all the country's successes, and tolerates no reporting of the country's social and economic life. Economic under-development and the plight of women, for example, are incompatible with the modern image the regime wants to project.

"Insulting the Uzbek people" was one of the charges in prosecutions in 2010 of photographer Umida Akhmedova and radio show host Khayrullo Khamidov for covering social problems. More simply and effectively, Elena Bondar and Viktor Krymzalov were sentenced early this year to heavy fines for articles they did not write.

Fewer and fewer independent local journalists are working and it has been impossible for the foreign media to operate in Uzbekistan since the bloody repression of the 2005 uprising in Andijan. Since March 2011 Karimov has tried to ward off any local imitation of the Middle East revolts.

Human Rights Watch has been expelled from the country, visiting journalists have been refused entry at the airport, state media journalists banned from talking to foreign diplomats without government permission and contacts with the outside world sharply reduced. Online censorship

has been stepped up and mobile phone operators are required to report “suspicious content” and cut off Internet access whenever the government decides.

## Middle-East

### **Bahrain - Hamad Ben Aissa Al Khalifa,** King

Since the start of the country’s pro-democracy movement in February last year, the government has tried to control news about the protests and the excesses of police and troops towards the protesters by using a formidable array of weapons.

Foreign journalists have been arrested and deported, and others have encountered severe difficulties in obtaining entry visas, Bahrainis wanting to tell foreign news organizations what is happening have been threatened.

Free-speech activists have been hounded and prosecuted, photographers, bloggers and netizens arrested (one of them dying in prison), journalists forced to resign from the main opposition paper and called before the state prosecutor, and publication of any news about ongoing investigations by the military prosecutor banned for supposed national security reasons.

The media blackout has been accompanied by a big regime propaganda campaign, through media it controls, against major protest leaders, who are dubbed traitors or terrorists.

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After the state of emergency was lifted and a “national dialogue” launched, a report published by an inquiry commission last November concluded that the security forces were guilty of serious human rights violations. The authorities have committed themselves to undertake some reforms, but too little is being done. The seven-year prison sentences imposed on two police officers implicated in the death in detention of the blogger Zakariya Rashid Hassan Al-Ashiri in April last year are derisory.

Journalists and bloggers convicted by military tribunal during the popular uprising have not had their cases reviewed by civilian courts despite a public commitment by the authorities to do so. Such is the case of the blogger Abdeljalil Al-Singace, director and spokesman of the Al-Haq Movement’s Human Rights Bureau, who was arrested in March last year.

On the eve of the first anniversary of the uprising in February, many foreign journalists were refused entry visas. This occurred again in April at the time of the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix. This was clearly aimed at restricting the number of inconvenient witnesses to the demonstrations and their suppression.

Hamad Ben Aissa Al Khalifa, as king of Bahrain, is responsible for the violence and abuses.

### **Iran - Ali Khamenei**

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

Despite all the political infighting, the Islamic Republic of Iran's two leading politicians, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, always manage to agree on the need to harass journalists and censor the press. These two predators see eye to eye when it comes to eliminating critics and independent media.

Ayatollah Khamenei has ruled Iran since the death of the Islamic Republic's founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989. He has been consolidating his predecessor's ultra-conservative policies for more than 20 years and controls all the country's political and judicial institutions.

As Supreme Leader, he is responsible for the continuing crackdown on journalists and others since President Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in June 2009. His virulent and inflammatory criticism of media with international links has fuelled the rage of government bodies carrying out the repression. He explicitly agreed to staging show trials of journalists from August 2009 to January 2010 and giving journalists and netizens long prison terms and sometimes death sentences.

As Supreme Guide and commander of the armed forces and Revolutionary Guards, Khamenei is directly responsible for the mistreatment and torture of journalists and bloggers held in Teheran's Evin prison. Many of the detainees are held incommunicado, in flagrant violation of international law. Reporters Without Borders accuses Khamenei of crimes against humanity.

### **Iran - Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**

#### **President**

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There has been a violent and relentless crackdown on the opposition ever since President Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in June 2009. For the past three years, many journalists have alternated spells of arbitrary detention with periods on parole until they finally fled abroad for fear that their next arrest could be the definitive one. In all, more than 300 journalists and bloggers have been arrested and 48 are currently detained. The exodus is the biggest since the 1979 revolution.

As president, Ahmadinejad is responsible for this crackdown. He organises it jointly with the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic guidance, which are under his direct control, and in close coordination with the Revolutionary Guards.

More than 20 media outlets have been shut down by the Ministry of Culture's censorship arm, the Press Authorisation and Monitoring Commission. The government hounds journalists and their families, carries out summary arrests and uses secret imprisonment in order to prevent unwanted



coverage of its activities. It also uses every possible method to prevent foreign radio and TV stations from broadcasting to Iran in Farsi. Foreign media are closely watched and their local correspondents risk losing their accreditation at any time. Many foreign journalists were unable to get their visas extended in 2011 and had to leave the country.

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

Israel's armed forces routinely carry out abuses against media workers in the Palestinian Territories. Last year, Reporters Without Borders recorded more than 70 cases of violence by IDF troops against Palestinian, Israeli and foreign journalists.

The Palestinian photojournalist Mohammed Othman was seriously wounded by gunfire from an Israeli soldier last year near the Beit Hanoun (Erez) border crossing while covering clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli troops on 15 May, the anniversary of the creation of Israel, which is marked by Palestinians as "Nakba Day" (Day of Disaster). He was partially paralysed and is undergoing rehabilitation in Turkey.

Although the armed forces carry out some investigations, the abuses committed by soldiers rarely lead to a prosecution. Such was the case with the Israeli photographer Mati Milstein, who filed complaints against the army's Alexandroni brigade after he and other photojournalists were the target of an attack by soldiers on the outskirts of the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh last July. He was received a response from the army in December, saying the soldiers responded appropriately to what it considered a "violent and illegal demonstration". The letter was clearly a stonewalling exercise.

The IDF carried out numerous raids on Palestinian news organizations in the West Bank, which is controlled by the Palestinian Authority, on the pretext that they did not have the required licenses. Many Palestinian media workers were arrested and at least seven are still in custody.

The treatment of foreign journalists aboard the Gaza aid flotillas when they were raided by Israeli commandos was particularly shocking. In August last year, Israeli authorities banned passengers and journalists from boarding a new convoy. Last November, five journalists on board the latest flotilla were arrested, together with 22 other passengers. Four were immediately expelled but the fifth, a correspondent for the Iranian English-language television station *Press TV*, was held for more than a week.

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

Journalists have been paying dearly in the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian Territories since Hamas seized power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The media are sharply divided between those linked to the Palestinian Authority and those in Hamas-ruled Gaza. Arresting journalists has become a way to settle scores. Nobody is spared and the lack of agreement between the two movements on holding parliamentary and presidential elections has aggravated the situation.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority's security forces and intelligence service controlled by President Mahmoud Abbas made many arbitrary arrests of pro-Hamas journalists, including about

30 in 2011 working mainly for media outlets affiliated to Hamas who were questioned about their work, their sources of funding and their links with officials of the Hamas government.

In late March, a court in Ramallah extended by 15 days the detention of the journalist Youssef Shayeb, who was arrested on 26 March after libel suits were lodged against him by several people including the head of the Palestinian diplomatic mission in France, Hael al-Fahoum, and the Palestinian foreign minister, Riyad al-Malki.

The journalist wrote an article published in the Jordanian daily *Al-Ghad* in January about irregularities within the diplomatic mission in France. He was released on bail on 2 April after going on hunger strike.

### **Palestinian territories - Hamas security forces in Gaza**

Journalists have been paying dearly in the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian Territories since Hamas seized power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. The resulting major split in the media was aggravated by the lack of agreement between the two movements on holding parliamentary and presidential elections in 2010.

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 journalists can be imprisoned for putting out news deemed to threaten “national unity.”

Threats, physical violence and arbitrary arrest and detention by Hamas security forces are common. A score of journalists were arrested or roughed up during 2010 by the Hamas interior ministry’s security service. Such measures oblige Palestinian journalists to censor themselves. In mid-March last year, security forces harshly broke up meetings in the centre of Gaza City organised by the “March 15 Coalition” calling for reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and arrested and beat journalists, including about 20 on 15 March 2011. Security forces raided many local and foreign media offices looking for photos of the crackdown.

Since last October, the head office of the Union of Palestinian Journalists in Gaza has been occupied by dozens of journalists affiliated to Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The group seized the premises and evicted the staff, confiscating their mobile telephones and proclaiming themselves the new management. Their action was a damaging blow against journalists’ independence.

The Gaza interior minister imposed new regulations on 25 September making access to the Gaza Strip more difficult for foreign journalists. Since then, any foreigner wishing to enter the territory via the Erez and Rafah crossing points must obtain prior authorization from the interior ministry in Gaza. Journalists must complete an application and give the name of a guarantor in the territory. Such a tactic is a blow against the free movement of journalists.

## **Saudi-Arabien - Abdallah Ibn Al-Saud**

### **King**

The country's sixth king, Abdallah ibn Abdulaziz Al-Saud, came to the throne in August 2005 and his regime has wavered between repression and openness. Political activists and journalists have been arrested but the country's first local elections have been held.

The royal family's hold on the state and the supremacy of its Wahabi ideology is based on total control of news. No laws protect freedom of expression and self-censorship is the rule. Stability-threatening regional unrest and the fight against terrorism are 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 towards the Internet. New restrictions came into force on 1 January 2011, adding to laws passed in 2007. More than 400,000 websites are currently blocked. Far from trying to hide from what they are doing, the Saudi authorities embrace the censorship policy as being necessary to maintain social order.

Since the onset of the Middle East uprisings and the start of the protest movement in neighbouring Bahrain, the Riyadh government has striven to prevent a similar movement from reaching Saudi Arabia.

Access to Saudi websites that sprung up in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions calling for reforms (<http://dawlaty.info/> and <http://www.saudireform.com/>) were blocked, along with a Facebook page, "Revolutionary Nostalgia," which also urges reform. Foreign journalists were also banned from covering protests in the eastern part of the country.

In March last year the monarch promised to improve living and working conditions and health care for Saudis, but at the same time exceptional measures were brought in to avoid the risk of "destabilizing society". In October 2011, three Web television journalists were arrested and held for several days after the broadcast of a report in the series "Malub Aleyna" on the living conditions of the poorest people in the Saudi capital. The website of the Dutch radio station Radio Nederland was blocked after it published an article on the ill-treatment of immigrants in Saudi Arabia.

Evidence of the authorities' unbending intolerance of freedom of expression was the imprisonment of the journalist Hamza Kashgari for having expressed a personal opinion online. He faces a possible death sentence for tweets that the authorities regard as blasphemous.

## **Syria - Bashar Al-Assad**

### **President**

Since the start of popular protests in mid-March 2011, brutality towards civilians, including those working in the media, has continued to increase. Bashar Al-Assad and his government have imposed a total information blackout while promoting their own propaganda. The Syrian predator and his cronies are waging an information war, using disinformation as a weapon.

Journalists, bloggers, citizens and activists-turned-journalists pay daily for their commitment to exposing atrocities. Thirteen have been killed in the course of their work since the start of the uprising, including four foreign reporters.

Syrian journalists, bloggers and activists are regularly followed, arrested and tortured. Many are unaccounted for. Ordinary citizens who have had contact with foreign news organizations are also targeted. More than 30 professional and amateur media workers are behind bars.

For the foreign media, visas have virtually dried up. The carefully chosen few who receive an entry permit are flanked by mukhabarat (intelligence service) agents and have no freedom of movement. Most of the others take their lives in their hands enter the country illegally. In March this year, the information minister openly threatened to take steps against Arab and foreign media organizations and their correspondents who entered Syria illegally, and against anyone who worked with them.

On the Web, the cyber army responsible for tracking cyber dissidents on social networking sites has redoubled its activities. Its members flood Web pages and sites supporting the demonstrators with pro-Assad messages. Twitter accounts have been created to interfere with information provided by the hashtag #Syria.

The cyber army also seeks to discredit the popular uprising by posting appeals for violence on the pages of government opponents and pretending they are the work of protesters. In order to monitor dissidents, the authorities obtain their personal details using phishing techniques by creating fake login pages on Facebook and Twitter.