

Tuesday 16 October 2007

## Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007

### **ERITREA RANKED LAST FOR FIRST TIME WHILE G8 MEMBERS, EXCEPT RUSSIA, RECOVER LOST GROUND**

#### **Bloggers now threatened as much as journalists in traditional media**

Eritrea has replaced North Korea in last place in an index measuring the level of press freedom in 169 countries throughout the world that is published today by Reporters Without Borders for the sixth year running.

“There is nothing surprising about this,” Reporters Without Borders said. “Even if we are not aware of all the press freedom violations in North Korea and Turkmenistan, which are second and third from last, Eritrea deserves to be at the bottom. The privately-owned press has been banished by the authoritarian President Issaias Afewerki and the few journalists who dare to criticise the regime are thrown in prison. We know that four of them have died in detention and we have every reason to fear that others will suffer the same fate.”

Outside Europe – in which the top 14 countries are located – no region of the world has been spared censorship or violence towards journalists.

Of the 20 countries at the bottom of the index, seven are Asian (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vietnam, China, Burma, and North Korea), five are African (Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Somalia and Eritrea), four are in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Palestinian Territories and Iran), three are former Soviet republics (Belarus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and one is in the Americas (Cuba).

“We are particularly disturbed by the situation in Burma (164th),” Reporters Without Borders said. “The military junta’s crackdown on demonstrations bodes ill for the future of basic freedoms in this country. Journalists continue to work under the yoke of harsh censorship from which nothing escapes, not even small ads. We also regret that China (163rd) stagnates near the bottom of the index. With less than a year to go to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the reforms and the releases of imprisoned journalists so often promised by the authorities seem to be a vain hope.”

#### **G8 members, except Russia, show slight improvement**

After falling steadily in the index for the past three years, the G8 members have recovered a few places. France (31st), for example, has climbed six places in the past year. French journalists were spared the violence that affected them at the end of 2005 in a labour conflict in Corsica and during the demonstrations in the city suburbs. But many concerns remain about repeated censorship, searches of news organisations, and a lack of guarantees for the confidentiality of journalists’ sources.

There were slightly fewer press freedom violations in the United States (48th). Blogger Josh Wolf was freed after 224 days in prison and the repeated attacks on the confidentiality of

sources seemed to have let up. But the detention of *Al-Jazeera's* Sudanese cameraman, Sami Al-Haj, since 13 June 2002 at the military base of Guantanamo and the murder of Chauncey Bailey in Oakland in August mean the United States is still unable to join the lead group.

Italy (35th) has also stopped its fall, even if journalists continue to be under threat from mafia groups that prevent them from working in complete safety. Japan (37th) has seen a letup in attacks on the press by militant nationalists, and this has allowed it to recover 14 places.

"These developments are good news," Reporters Without Borders said. "Perhaps the repeated calls to these democracies to behave in an exemplary manner has finally borne fruit. But we must remain careful and vigilant. Nothing can be taken for granted and we hope this trend will continue or even accentuate near year. We regret all the same that only two G8 members, Canada (18th) and Germany (20th), managed to be among the top 20."

Russia (144th) is not progressing. Anna Politkovskaya's murder in October 2006, the failure to punish those responsible for murdering journalists, and the still glaring lack of diversity in the media, especially the broadcast media, weighed heavily in the evaluation of press freedom in Russia.

### **Bulgaria and Poland – Europe's bad boys**

All of the European Union member countries made it into the top 50 except Bulgaria (51st) and Poland (56th). In Sofia, journalists can be physically attacked because of their work. The climate got even worse after charges were withdrawn against police officers who beat up a journalist in May. In Poland, the authorities refuse to decriminalize press offences and the courts often pass suspended prison sentences on journalists. Ever since Lech Kaczynski became president in October 2005 and his brother, Jaroslaw, became prime minister a few months later, there has been an increase in prosecutions of news media.

The countries of northern Europe are always the ones who behave best. The exception is Netherlands (12th), which has fallen 12 places because it kept two *Telegraaf* journalists in custody for two days for refusing to reveal their sources to the judicial authorities.

### **Fickleness of young democracies**

Some non-European countries have made their first appearance in the top 50. They are Mauritania (50th), which has climbed 88 places since 2004, Uruguay (37th) and Nicaragua (47th). "We hope these improvements will be lasting ones," Reporters Without Borders said. "Bolivia (68th) rose dramatically last year, but that improvement unfortunately seems to have been purely circumstantial as it has fallen many places this year because of serious press freedom violations."

Some countries that traditionally held a good position have also fallen noticeably. This is the case with Benin (53rd) and Mali (52nd). Journalists have been imprisoned in these two African countries for the first time in several years for defamation or insulting the president. In the Americas, El Salvador (64th) also dropped from the top 50, falling 36 places in two years.

### **Government repression no longer ignores bloggers**

The Internet is occupying more and more space in the breakdown of press freedom violations. Several countries fell in the ranking this year because of serious, repeated violations of the free flow of online news and information.

In Malaysia (124th), Thailand (135th), Vietnam (162nd) and Egypt (146th), for example, bloggers were arrested and news websites were closed or made inaccessible. "We are

concerned about the increase in cases of online censorship,” Reporters Without Borders said. “More and more governments have realised that the Internet can play a key role in the fight for democracy and they are establishing new methods of censoring it. The governments of repressive countries are now targeting bloggers and online journalists as forcefully as journalists in the traditional media.”

At least 64 persons are currently imprisoned worldwide because of what they posted on the Internet. China maintains its leadership in this form of repression, with a total of 50 cyber-dissidents in prison. Eight are being held in Vietnam. A young man known as Kareem Amer was sentenced to four years in prison in Egypt for blog posts criticising the president and Islamist control of the country’s universities.

## **War and peace**

War is largely responsible for the low position assigned to some countries. The increase in fighting in Somalia (159th) and Sri Lanka (156th) has made it very hard for journalists to work. Several have been killed and censorship has been stepped up as clashes became frequent. The belligerents refuse to recognise journalists’ rights and accuse them of supporting the other side.

The battle raging between Hamas and Fatah is the main cause of the large number of serious press freedom violations in the Palestinian Territories (158th). Hostage-taking, arrests, physical attacks and ransacking of news organisations – the Palestinian media and the few visiting journalist are threatened from all sides.

As predicted last year, Nepal (137th) has jumped more than 20 places in the ranking. The end of the war and the return to democratic rule resulted in an immediate recovery of basic freedoms and created new space for the media.

*Reporters Without Borders compiled this index by sending a questionnaire to the 15 freedom of expression organisations throughout the world that are its partners, to its network of 130 correspondents, and to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists. It contained 50 questions about press freedom in their countries. The index covers 169 nations. Other countries were not included because of lack of data.*

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World Press Freedom Index 2007 - The rankings

Rank	Country	Note	
1	Iceland	0,75	=
-	Norway	0,75	↑
3	Estonia	1,00	↑
-	Slovakia	1,00	↑
5	Belgium	1,50	↑
-	Finland	1,50	↓
-	Sweden	1,50	↑
8	Denmark	2,00	↑↑
-	Ireland	2,00	↓
-	Portugal	2,00	=
11	Switzerland	3,00	↓
12	Latvia	3,50	↓
-	Netherlands	3,50	↓↓
14	Czech Republic	4,00	↓
15	New Zealand	4,17	↑
16	Austria	4,25	=
17	Hungary	4,50	↓
18	Canada	4,88	↓
19	Trinidad and Tobago	5,00	=
20	Germany	5,75	↑
21	Costa Rica	6,50	↑
-	Slovenia	6,50	↓↓
23	Lithuania	7,00	↑
24	United Kingdom	8,25	↑
25	Mauritius	8,50	↑
-	Namibia	8,50	=
27	Jamaica	8,63	↓
28	Australia	8,79	↑
29	Ghana	9,00	↑
30	Greece	9,25	↑
31	France	9,75	↑
32	Taiwan	10,00	↑↑
33	Spain	10,25	↑
34	Bosnia and Herzegovina	11,17	↓↓
35	Italy	11,25	↑
36	Macedonia	11,50	↑
37	Japan	11,75	↑↑
-	Uruguay	11,75	↑↑
39	Chile	12,13	↑↑
-	South Korea	12,13	↓
41	Croatia	12,50	↑↑
42	Romania	12,75	↑↑
43	South Africa	13,00	↑
44	Israel (Israeli territory)	13,25	↑
45	Cape Verde	14,00	=
-	Cyprus	14,00	↓↓
47	Nicaragua	14,25	↑↑
48	United States of America	14,50	↑

49	<b>Togo</b>	15,17	↑↑
50	<b>Mauritania</b>	15,50	↑↑
51	<b>Bulgaria</b>	16,25	↓↓
52	<b>Mali</b>	16,50	↓↓
53	<b>Benin</b>	17,00	↓↓
54	<b>Panama</b>	17,88	↓↓
55	<b>Tanzania</b>	18,00	↑↑
56	<b>Ecuador</b>	18,50	↑↑
-	<b>Poland</b>	18,50	↑
58	<b>Cyprus (North)</b>	19,00	↑
-	<b>Montenegro</b>	19,00	n. c.
60	<b>Kosovo</b>	19,75	↑↑
61	<b>Hong-Kong</b>	20,00	↓
-	<b>Madagascar</b>	20,00	↑
63	<b>Kuwait</b>	20,17	↑↑
64	<b>El Salvador</b>	20,20	↓↓
65	<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	20,25	↑↑
66	<b>Georgia</b>	20,83	↑↑
67	<b>Serbia</b>	21,00	↓↓
68	<b>Bolivia</b>	21,50	↓↓
-	<b>Burkina Faso</b>	21,50	↑
-	<b>Zambia</b>	21,50	↑↑
71	<b>Central African Republic</b>	22,50	↓
72	<b>Dominican Republic</b>	22,75	↓↓
73	<b>Mozambique</b>	23,00	↓↓
74	<b>Mongolia</b>	23,40	↑↑
75	<b>Botswana</b>	23,50	↓↓
-	<b>Haiti</b>	23,50	↑↑
77	<b>Armenia</b>	23,63	↑↑
78	<b>Kenya</b>	23,75	↑↑
79	<b>Qatar</b>	24,00	↑
80	<b>Congo</b>	24,50	↓
81	<b>Moldova</b>	24,75	↑
82	<b>Argentina</b>	24,83	↓
83	<b>Senegal</b>	25,00	↓
84	<b>Brazil</b>	25,25	↓
85	<b>Cambodia</b>	25,33	↑↑
-	<b>Liberia</b>	25,33	↓
87	<b>Albania</b>	25,50	↓
-	<b>Honduras</b>	25,50	↓↓
-	<b>Niger</b>	25,50	↑
90	<b>Paraguay</b>	26,10	↓
91	<b>Angola</b>	26,50	=
92	<b>Malawi</b>	26,75	↑
-	<b>Ukraine</b>	26,75	↑↑
94	<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	27,00	↑
-	<b>Timor-Leste</b>	27,00	↓↓
96	<b>Comoros</b>	28,00	↓
-	<b>Uganda</b>	28,00	↑↑
98	<b>Lebanon</b>	28,75	↑
99	<b>Lesotho</b>	29,50	↓↓
100	<b>Indonesia</b>	30,50	↑
101	<b>Turkey</b>	31,25	↓

102	<b>Gabon</b>	31,50	↑↑
103	<b>Israel (extra-territorial)</b>	32,00	↑↑
104	<b>Guatemala</b>	33,00	↓↓
-	<b>Seychelles</b>	33,00	↓↓
106	<b>Morocco</b>	33,25	↓
107	<b>Fiji</b>	33,50	↓↓
-	<b>Guinea</b>	33,50	↑
-	<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	33,50	↓↓
110	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	33,60	↑↑
111	<b>Cameroon</b>	36,00	↑
-	<b>United States of America (extra-territorial)</b>	36,00	↑
113	<b>Chad</b>	36,50	↑↑
114	<b>Venezuela</b>	36,88	↑
115	<b>Tajikistan</b>	37,00	↑
116	<b>Bhutan</b>	37,17	↓↓
117	<b>Peru</b>	37,38	↓
118	<b>Bahrein</b>	38,00	↓
119	<b>Tonga</b>	38,25	↓↓
120	<b>India</b>	39,33	↓↓
121	<b>Sierra Leone</b>	39,50	↓↓
122	<b>Jordan</b>	40,21	↓↓
123	<b>Algeria</b>	40,50	↑
124	<b>Malaysia</b>	41,00	↓↓
125	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	41,63	↑
126	<b>Colombia</b>	42,33	↑
127	<b>Burundi</b>	43,40	↓
128	<b>Philippines</b>	44,75	↑↑
129	<b>Maldives</b>	45,17	↑↑
130	<b>Gambia</b>	48,25	↑↑
131	<b>Nigeria</b>	49,83	↓↓
132	<b>Djibouti</b>	50,25	↓↓
133	<b>Democratic Republic of Congo</b>	50,50	↑
134	<b>Bangladesh</b>	53,17	↑
135	<b>Thailand</b>	53,50	↓↓
136	<b>Mexico</b>	53,63	↓
137	<b>Nepal</b>	53,75	↑↑
138	<b>Swaziland</b>	54,50	↓↓
139	<b>Azerbaijan</b>	55,40	↓
140	<b>Sudan</b>	55,75	↓
141	<b>Singapore</b>	56,00	↑
142	<b>Afghanistan</b>	56,50	↓↓
143	<b>Yemen</b>	56,67	↑
144	<b>Russia</b>	56,90	↑
145	<b>Tunisia</b>	57,00	↑
146	<b>Egypt</b>	58,00	↓↓
147	<b>Rwanda</b>	58,88	↓↓
148	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	59,75	↑↑
149	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	62,00	↓
150	<b>Ethiopia</b>	63,00	↑↑
151	<b>Belarus</b>	63,63	=
152	<b>Pakistan</b>	64,83	↑
153	<b>Equatorial Guinea</b>	65,25	↓↓
154	<b>Syria</b>	66,00	↓

155	<b>Libya</b>	<b>66,50</b>	↓
156	<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>67,50</b>	↓↓
157	<b>Iraq</b>	<b>67,83</b>	↓
158	<b>Palestinian Territories</b>	<b>69,83</b>	↓↓
159	<b>Somalia</b>	<b>71,50</b>	↓↓
160	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>74,88</b>	↓
161	<b>Laos</b>	<b>75,00</b>	↓
162	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>79,25</b>	↓
163	<b>China</b>	<b>89,00</b>	=
164	<b>Burma</b>	<b>93,75</b>	=
165	<b>Cuba</b>	<b>96,17</b>	=
166	<b>Iran</b>	<b>96,50</b>	↓
167	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	<b>103,75</b>	=
168	<b>North Korea</b>	<b>108,75</b>	=
169	<b>Eritrea</b>	<b>114,75</b>	↓