



Committee to Protect Journalists

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## PRESS FREEDOM: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

It is a dangerous time to be a journalist. Over the past five years, the Committee to Protect Journalists has seen an unprecedented diversification in the range of attacks and challenges faced by journalists in many countries around the world. Violence and repression have morphed into impunity and exile. Meanwhile, sophisticated online censorship tactics are coupled with punitive laws that suppress the reporting and dissemination of news and fact-based commentary.

An un welcome development in the past year is the surge of press freedom violations and attacks on journalists covering conflict and political unrest. CPJ has documented this phenomenon particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. Libya was among the deadliest places for journalists in 2011. CPJ research [shows](#) that at least 16 journalists have been killed since November 2011 while covering the Syrian conflict, at least nine in circumstances that raise questions about [government culpability](#). More than half of those killed are citizen journalists, who play a key role in covering the conflict and whose footage is used by international news organizations.

As clearly shown in the case of Syria, the use of technology, which has been transforming the ways that information is gathered and disseminated, means journalism itself is changing, giving more people the ability to participate. Consequently, CPJ has also seen that many of the journalists under attack are freelancers and online journalists, who are responsible for their own preparation, equipment, and safety. Anti-state charges and “terrorist” labels have become commonplace and are used to intimidate, detain, and imprison journalists. Media blackouts and limited access to war and conflict zones have become routine, along with the uninvestigated killings of journalists.

Regardless of the medium or circumstance, one thing is certain: It is overwhelmingly local journalists working on local stories who are targeted and censored, whether with violence or intimidation or by the use of laws meant to punish and silence critical information.

Since 1981, it has been our mandate to take action when journalists are censored, harassed, threatened, jailed, kidnapped, or killed for their work, without regard to political ideology. In

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doing so, we document cases, publish in-depth reports, conduct high-level advocacy, and provide individual moral and material support. CPJ's work is based on its research, characterized primarily by the following areas, which provide a global snapshot of obstructions to a free press worldwide.

## KILLINGS

On average, more than 30 journalists are [murdered](#) every year, and the murderers go unpunished in nearly nine of 10 cases. Among the countries leading in journalist killings that evade justice are established democracies where the rule of law should function yet a culture of impunity prevails. The absence of justice in journalist murders deters the rest of the press from critical reporting and leaves the public with a shallow understanding of their world. Journalists reporting on corruption, organized crime, conflict, and politics are the most targeted for exposing vital truths.

The reality is that the combat/crossfire casualties have long been a relatively small subset of all journalists killed (about 1 in 6 cases). The leading causing of death is targeted murder.

These murders do not take place in a vacuum. They occur in societies experiencing war and conflict, although many of them—like Russia, Colombia, and the Philippines—have democratic forms of government.

The generalized violence and the breakdown of law and order provide the backdrop for criminal, militant, sectarian, and paramilitary forces to carry out these killings. Most journalists killed in conflict zones are not covering war—they are local journalists covering local issues like human rights and corruption. In about a third of the cases, according to CPJ research, government links are suspected, thus reinforcing the cycle of impunity.

## IMPRISONMENT

In 2011, the number of journalists imprisoned for their work reached a 15-year peak. Their continued imprisonment sends the same silencing message as the murder of journalists. CPJ research points to a general trend: Where journalists are being silenced through imprisonment, they are often not being assassinated, but the result is the same—the perpetuation of fear leading to self-censorship or to exile, particularly in countries where it is clear that the rule of law barely exists.

Despite the release of 70 journalists with CPJ assistance in 2011, our research shows that the number of journalists in jail has remained persistently high. To put it starkly, 81 journalists were in jail around the world at the end of 2000. By the end of [2001](#), that number shot up to 118. Today, there are [179](#), most held on state security charges. Abusive use of national security was the single greatest charge invoked to justify journalist imprisonments in 2011, followed by violation of censorship rules. The vast

majority of those jailed were local journalists held by their own governments. Sixty-five journalists, or over a third of those included in the CPJ census, were being held without any publicly disclosed charge.

Iran, consistently among the world's leading jailers of journalists, maintains a revolving prison door with furloughs and new arrests; subjects prisoners to inhumane treatment; and targets their legal counsel. A relentless crackdown on the press has led 68 journalists to flee Iran since 2009, [CPJ research](#) shows.

## EXILED

Journalists facing imprisonment and other threats for their work are being forced into exile worldwide, with more than 450 fleeing their countries in the past five years, [CPJ research](#) shows.

In the past year, more than a quarter of the 57 journalists who fled their homes came from East Africa, reinforcing a trend from previous years, CPJ [research](#) shows. This has resulted in a journalist refugee crisis in East Africa that has drastically affected the region's ability to maintain media institutions that provide reliable, vital information. After enduring violence and threats, these journalists fled abroad, only to land in a state of prolonged uncertainty as governments and the U.N. refugee agency process their cases.

During the past five years, the greatest number of journalists fled violence in Somalia, where six journalists have been [killed](#) in 2012 and [no journalist murders](#) have been prosecuted since 1992. Eritrea and Ethiopia, East Africa's [worst](#) jailers of journalists, also lost many to exile. Journalists also sought refuge from targeted attacks and threats in conflict-ridden Syria and Pakistan.

CPJ's annual survey of journalists in exile counts those who fled due to work-related persecution in the past 12 months and provides an overview of the past five years. Dozens of journalists seeking asylum without the legal right to work nor access to basic services live in desperate, insecure, and impoverished conditions, CPJ research shows.

## ONLINE CENSORSHIP & SURVEILLANCE

As journalists increasingly use social media to report breaking news and the number of people with Internet access explodes worldwide, governments are employing sophisticated new tactics to suppress information, according to CPJ's 2011 special report "[The 10 Tools of Online Oppressors.](#)"

CPJ's assessment of the prevailing strategies for online oppression and the leading countries utilizing such tactics shows that traditional mechanisms of repression have evolved into pervasive digital censorship. The tools utilized include state-supported

emails designed to take over journalists' personal computers in China, the shutting down of anti-censorship technology in Iran, monopolistic control of the Net in Ethiopia, as well as synchronized cyberattacks in Belarus.

The techniques go well beyond Web censorship. The Internet is being used to spy on writers and sabotage independent news sites where press freedom is most threatened. The aim is not only to censor but also to block or disrupt the reporting process and the dissemination of news and information.

The digital offensive is often coupled with physical intimidation of online journalists. Recent developments in Honduras, Russia, and Turkey, which we shall focus on below, demonstrate the broad range of repression, coerced censorship, impunity, and outright violence faced by journalists today.

## HONDURAS

The Honduran press continues to suffer from the violent fallout of the 2009 coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya. Due to political and drug-related violence as well as widespread impunity, Honduras, a nation of 7.5 million people, is one of the most dangerous countries in the region for journalists, CPJ research shows. It is also important to note that Honduras is one of the world's most violent countries. A 2011 United Nations [report](#) found that it has the world's highest per capita homicide rate, with 82.1 murders per every 100,000 inhabitants.

At least 14 journalists have been killed since President Porfirio Lobo took office in January 2010. The systematic failure of Honduran authorities to investigate these crimes has frustrated any attempt to solve the murders, CPJ said in a [letter](#) sent to President Lobo in December 2011. A 2010 CPJ special report, "[Journalist murders spotlight Honduran government failures](#)," found that the government has been slow and negligent in pursuing journalists' killers. As a result, many journalists fear the murders have been conducted with the tacit approval, or even outright complicity, of police, armed forces, or other authorities.

The climate is so intimidating that reporters told CPJ that they don't dare probe deeply into crucial issues like drug trafficking or government corruption. Many print reporters have removed their bylines from their stories. *Tiempo*, a San Pedro Sula-based daily newspaper that consistently criticizes the government, has shut down its investigative unit due to safety concerns. Some reporters claim the only safe way to tell the truth about Honduras is to write a novel.

Besides damaging the country's democracy, the June 2009 military-backed coup that ousted leftist former President Zelaya fractured the national press corps into opposing camps. Journalists in favor of the coup or who work for media outlets that supported Zelaya's ouster are known in Spanish as "golpistas" or "coup-backers," while those who opposed it have been pigeon-holed as "resistencia," or part of the political resistance. Local journalists state that when "resistance" journalists are attacked or killed, the news receives scant attention or comment from pro-coup media—which includes most of the country's major television, radio, and print outlets.

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By contrast, the May 15 [killing](#) of Ángel Alfredo Villatoro, a prominent radio host and close friend of President Lobo, was headline news for days.

If the Honduran government is to be treated as a responsible international partner, it must move immediately and aggressively to correct these failures. It must assign disinterested and trained investigators to these cases; investigations must be transparent and free of conflicts of interest. President Lobo and top officials in his government must begin to speak out, in a forceful and timely way, against anti-press violence. His government must respect its obligations to the Organization of American States and enforce orders of protection for journalists.

The international community must demand that the Honduran government immediately undertake these meaningful, measurable, and lasting steps.

## EMBLEMATIC HONDURAS CASE

**NAHÚM PALACIOS ARTEAGA**

TV Channel 5

March 14, 2010, in Tocoa, Honduras

Hit men lay in wait at the home of Palacios, 34, a well-known anchor for Channel 5, the main TV station in the Tocoa area, according to news reports and CPJ interviews. Palacios arrived at about 10 p.m. with a cousin in the backseat of a double cabin 4-by-4 pickup, and his girlfriend, a doctor, in the passenger seat. Neighbors told local reporters that a few shots were initially fired, apparently by a lookout, followed by a fusillade of gunfire as other assailants joined in. Palacios died at the scene. Dr. Yorlenny Sánchez, badly injured, died two weeks later. Palacios' cousin was not injured, local press reports said.

Several work-related motives emerged in a July 2010 CPJ investigation. Palacios had opposed the 2009 military-backed coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya, and he had turned the TV station into an openly opposition channel, his colleagues said. Military personnel appeared at his house and detained him and his family for several hours in June 2009. That episode, along with other threats from the military, was strong enough that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued an order to the government of Honduras to protect Palacios. According to the commission, it was one of more than 400 such orders issued for journalists and activists in Honduras in 2009 and 2010.

The Honduran government was required by an international treaty to follow the directives, but it appeared to have ignored most of them. The government asserted that it never received an order in the Palacios case, although the Inter-American Commission noted that it had a signed receipt from the Honduran Supreme Court.

In the months before his slaying, Palacios campaigned on behalf of a group of several thousand peasants who had been demanding vast tracts of land they said rightfully belonged to them. They claimed that a few large landowners, in violation of agrarian reform laws, had greatly underpaid them for land many years earlier. Some of the land was retaken by the peasants—simply stolen, according to the landowners—and there were occasional armed encounters. Peasant activists said some of their leaders had been abducted and disappeared, or singled out and killed.

Aside from the wide belief that Palacios' killing was politically inspired, some CPJ sources said he could have angered a local drug gang with a recent news story about a cartel-linked kidnapping. Sources also said that Palacios, like other Tocoa journalists, had been accused of extorting money from sources. Palacios' father, José Heriberto Palacios, denied that his son could have been dishonest. “They killed him because he was honest and was not corrupt,” he told CPJ.

The case was marked by a series of investigative failures. Almost three months after Palacios was gunned down, a team of investigators came to his grave in his hometown of Rigores, dug up his body, and at the graveside, in the open, conducted an autopsy. The coroner never examined the body after the murder; it had gone straight from the murder scene to the funeral home. Investigators also started asking news photographers if they had any pictures of the crime scene because police had no photographs of their own. The prosecutor in charge of the case, Arody Reyes, conceded to CPJ that although the gunmen had lain in wait for hours at Palacios' house, police had not been able to retrieve any evidence from the scene.

Reyes said the exhumation and autopsy were suddenly important because the Honduran government had enlisted the help of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Local investigators, Reyes said, needed to show their U.S. counterparts something.

## RUSSIA

As Russia enters into a third term of government under President Vladimir Putin, a convergence of violence, impunity, and constraining legislation severely limits the space for public debate, dissent, and press freedom in Russia.

Impunity in attacks on the press remains high in Russia, [CPJ research shows](#). Despite high-level promises of justice, including by former President Dmitry Medvedev, Russian investigators have yet to apprehend those responsible for vicious attacks. A CPJ delegation [met](#) with Aleksandr Bastrykin, chairman of Russia's Investigative Committee (a body responsible for probing serious crimes), to discuss this record of impunity in September 2010. Most recently, Bastrykin made headlines for threatening the life of a journalist and subsequently apologizing. He remains in charge of the country's chief investigative body.

Failure to prosecute the masterminds perpetuates impunity, even in cases where significant initial progress is made. The heart of the problem is a lack of political will and an apparent link between political power and criminality.

With 16 unsolved murder cases, Russia's rating is stagnant in CPJ's Impunity Index, a list of countries where journalist's murderers evade justice. The most recent victim was [Gadzhimurad Kamalov](#), founder of the independent Dagestani weekly *Chernovik*, who was gunned down while leaving work in December 2011. The newspaper had received frequent threats for its coverage of government corruption, human rights abuses, and Islamic radicalism.

Authorities have made modest progress in some cases: Several suspects have been indicted in the 2006 killing of [Anna Politkovskaya](#), but authorities have yet to bring the case to trial or identify the mastermind. "The impunity the masterminds enjoy—this is the main part of the mechanism, which breeds new murders," said Sergey Sokolov, deputy editor of Politkovskaya's newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*.

Russia's parliament moved quickly this month to pass a new Internet bill that will create a blacklist of websites. The law is one in a recent slate of repressive measures, all rushed through the State Duma, aimed at reining in dissent. The steps call into question President Putin's commitment to democracy.

A key pending bill would [re-criminalize defamation](#), while two other ones—[just approved by the parliament's upper house](#)—impose limits and labels on NGOs and enable the government to block websites. These bills follow the introduction last month of excessive fines for unauthorized protests.

The Internet statute [Duma Bill 89417](#) is one of several provisions that would create a blacklist of websites which all Russians Internet service providers (ISPs) would have to block and refuse to host. Internet technologists had [warned](#) that 436-FZ was too broad, and would require individual comments and home pages to be marked with age-appropriate ratings in the style of American movies.



The defamation bill is a step backward for Russia. In November, parliament voted to decriminalize libel and insult in a move widely perceived as part of then-President Dmitry Medvedev's liberalization policies. According to the independent news agency [Regnum](#), the new bill allows for imprisonment of up to five years, and a fine for moral damages up to 500,000 rubles (US\$15,300) for those found guilty of defamation. The restrictive NGO bill requires that organizations receiving money from international sources carry the label “foreign agents”—a particularly negative term in a society where the Kremlin sustains and nourishes deep suspicion of foreigners. At the time of this writing, all three bills were awaiting President Putin’s signature.

To stem the escalation of media repression and counter impunity, U.S. legislators should immediately consider an expansion of the “Magnitsky Bill”—which would place Russians connected with human rights abuses on a blacklist, denying them U.S. visas and freezing their assets—to include officials implicated in the murders of journalists.

The United States and the international community should continue to engage with Russian leaders on press freedom and hold authorities publicly accountable for crimes against those who expose misdeeds, as journalists regularly do.

## EMBLEMATIC RUSSIA CASE

### NATALYA ESTEMIROVA

*Novaya Gazeta, Kavkazsky Uzel*

July 15, 2009, in between Grozny and Gazi-Yurt, Russia

Four men forced [Estemirova](#), 50, into a white Lada sedan in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, as she was leaving her apartment for work, Reuters reported. Witnesses said the journalist shouted that she was being kidnapped as the car sped from the scene, according to press reports. Later the same day, her body was found in the neighboring region of Ingushetia, according to international news reports. She was shot in the head and the chest; no belongings were reported missing.

Estemirova was a frequent contributor to the independent Moscow newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and the Caucasus news website *Kavkazsky Uzel*. She was also an advocate for the Moscow-based human rights group Memorial and a consultant for the New York-based international rights group Human Rights Watch (HRW). She was the fifth *Novaya Gazeta* journalist killed since 2000. Estemirova’s colleagues told CPJ that her relentless reporting on human rights violations committed by federal and regional authorities in Chechnya put her at odds with regional officials.

Three years after Estemirova was abducted and found murdered, her killers walk free. The investigation into the July 15, 2009, killing started off on the right track only to get derailed, her colleagues at *Novaya Gazeta* and Memorial told CPJ. At a July 2011 press conference in Moscow, they presented the results of their independent investigation, which revealed numerous apparent flaws in the official inquiry.



At the time of the murder, Estemirova was investigating the possible involvement of Chechen police officers in the July 7, 2009, public execution of Rizvan Albekov in the village of Akhkinchu-Borzoi. She was the first journalist reporting on the case. The Investigative Committee initially focused on the story as the likeliest reason Estemirova was murdered, colleagues said. In their report, "Two Years After the Killing of Natalya Estemirova: Investigation on the Wrong Track," *Novaya Gazeta*, Memorial, and the International Federation for Human Rights found that lead investigator Igor Sobol had sought information from the local prosecutor's office about Albekov's killing and local police abuses.

But investigators inexplicably stopped pursuing the lead in early 2010. The current inquiry, the report's authors said, has focused on Alkhazur Bashayev, a rebel leader whom Chechen authorities say was killed in a 2009 special operation. Bashayev was allegedly angered by Estemirova's investigation into accusations that he and other separatists were recruiting young men in a Chechen village. But the report by Estemirova's colleagues raised dozens of questions about the official theory.

How could the car allegedly used to kidnap Estemirova contain no sign of a struggle? How was the unsophisticated suspect able to falsify the police identity card that Chechen police claim to have found in the Bashayev home, along with the murder weapon? What happened to the genetic material collected from under Estemirova's fingernails that likely contained the DNA of her killers? The material, the report said, showed that Estemirova struggled with at least three attackers, one of whom was a woman. But investigators ordered only one type of DNA testing, which could neither categorically confirm nor disprove the involvement of Bashayev. In the process of testing, the report's authors said, the DNA samples were depleted, making further testing nearly impossible. It is possible, however, to compare the completed test results against other potential suspects—such as the police officers implicated in the Albekov execution. Why hasn't this been done?

The Investigative Committee did not respond in detail to the report, instead issuing a statement that said the findings "are not based on facts but are simply the subjective opinion of persons who do not possess the necessary competence, do not have information, and do not have access to all of the materials of the criminal case." The Investigative Committee did not explain what it found concerning the possible link to Estemirova's reporting on the extrajudicial killing of Chechen resident Albekov. The committee did not respond to CPJ's written request for comment on the Estemirova investigation. In July, CPJ learned through a source at the Investigative Committee that the Estemirova case was being transferred from lead investigator Igor Sobol—who had been in charge of the probe since the beginning—to another, yet to be named, investigator, due to Sobol's "heavy workload." In Russia's context, this translates into burying the case for good.

## TURKEY

A critical journalist in Turkey these days needs a lawyer on standby. The press is laboring under a creaking judicial system and a panoply of antiquated and vague legislation that officials and politicians of every stripe find irresistible as a weapon against muckraking reporters and critical commentators.

The extent of journalist imprisonments has been disputed by the Turkish government, which asserts that independent assessments have been exaggerated. CPJ is currently carrying out exhaustive research on individual cases, legislation, and online censorship, all of which are choking press freedom in Turkey. Our research thus far indicates that there are dozens of journalists imprisoned in direct relation to their work. A report with our findings and assessment will be published in the fall of 2012.

After several years of legal and constitutional reform prompted by Turkey's application for European Union membership, moves to lighten the dead hand of the law on journalists are running out of steam. The United States seems wary of calling out Turkey on its human rights and press freedom record. Turkey, a NATO member and crucial U.S. ally in the region, is a progressive, secular democracy and a model of free speech compared with its neighbors Iran, Iraq, and Syria. But for journalists, particularly Kurdish and leftist ones, progress in freedom of expression has not kept pace with political and economic advances.

Journalists and press groups estimate there were up to 5,000 criminal cases open against reporters at the end of 2011. The cases involve charges such as criminal defamation, influencing the outcome of a trial, and spreading terrorist propaganda. The bulk of these cases have not resulted in convictions historically, but the endless court proceedings and legal costs have had a severe chilling effect, according to reporters, media analysts, and lawyers interviewed by CPJ throughout 2011. Prosecutions have intensified since authorities in 2007 first detailed the "[Ergenekon](#)" conspiracy, an alleged ultra-nationalist military plot to overthrow the government.

### EMBLEMATIC TURKEY CASE

**AHMET ŞIK, FREELANCE**

Imprisoned: March 2011-March 2012

Şık, a prominent reporter who had written for the dailies *Cumhuriyet* and *Radikal* and the weekly *Nokta*, was charged with aiding the Ergenekon conspiracy, an alleged nationalist military plot to overthrow the government.

Şık, co-author of a 2010 book on Ergenekon, had been known throughout his career for his critical writings about the "deep state," the purported secular, nationalist forces operating within the army, security agencies, and government ministries. Before being arrested, Şık was writing a new book with the working title, *The Imam's Army*, which was to allege the existence of a

shadowy organization operating within police and other government agencies and said to be populated by members of the Sufi Muslim religious community known as Fettullah Gülen.

A draft of the new book was deleted from the computers of his publishing house and that of a colleague during police raids, *Hürriyet Daily News* reported. The interrogations of Şık focused almost exclusively on the unfinished book, according to the paper. The government's indictment, which appeared months after the arrest, focused on Şık's journalistic activities, especially in regard to the book, the local press freedom group Bia said.

"Criticizing the government and drawing attention to the dangerous network of people in the police and judiciary who are members of the Gülen community is enough in today's Turkey to become an Ergenekon suspect," Şık told CPJ. Amid international outcry, authorities granted temporary release to Şık in March 2012. However, the charges against him remain and he can be rearrested upon conviction.

In a disturbing development, Special Authority Public Chief Prosecutor Muammer Akkaş launched a new investigation against Şık shortly after his release. The new investigation accused Şık of allegedly "threatening and identifying judges and prosecutors as targets for terror organizations" in his statement to journalists upon his release from prison, the independent news portal *Bianet* reported. Şık had told the press that day: "Incomplete justice is not going to bring justice and democracy. About 100 journalists are still in prison. The police officers, prosecutors, and judges who plotted and carried out this complot will go to prison. Justice will come when they enter this prison," according to news reports.

In July, an Istanbul prosecutor demanded that Şık serve up to seven years in prison for "insulting" and "threatening" state officials, the Dogan News Agency reported.