



REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS' 2013 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

2013 World Press Freedom Index: Uncertainties and dashed hopes after spring

(Continued from last issue)

After the “Arab springs” and other protest movements that prompted many rises and falls in last year's index, the 2013 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index marks a return to a more usual configuration. The ranking of most countries is no longer attributable to dramatic political developments. This year's index is a better reflection of the attitudes and intentions of governments towards media freedom in the medium or long term.

The same three European countries that headed the index last year hold the top three positions again this year. For the third year running, **Finland** has distinguished itself as the country that most respects media freedom. It is followed by the **Netherlands** and **Norway**. Although many criteria are considered, ranging from legislation to violence against journalists, democratic countries occupy the top of the index while dictatorial countries occupy the last three positions. Again it is the same three as last year – **Turkmenistan**, **North Korea** and Eritrea.

“The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders does not take direct account of the kind of political system but it is clear that democracies provide better protection for the freedom to produce and circulate accurate news and information than countries where human rights are flouted,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. “In dictatorships, news providers and their families are exposed to ruthless reprisals, while in democracies news providers have to cope with the media's economic crises and conflicts of interest. While their situation is not always comparable, we should pay tribute to all those who resist pressure whether it is aggressively focused or diffuse.”

Coinciding with the release of its 2013 Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders is for the first time publishing an annual global “indicator” of worldwide media freedom. This new analytic tool measures the overall level of freedom of information in the world and the performance of the world's governments in their entirety as regards this key

freedom. In view of the emergence of new technologies and the interdependence of governments and peoples, the freedom to produce and circulate news and information needs to be evaluated at the planetary as well as national level. Today, in 2013, the media freedom “indicator” stands at 3395, a point of reference for the years to come.

The indicator can also be broken down by region and, by means of weighting based on the population of each region, can be used to produce a score from zero to 100 in which zero represents total respect for media freedom. This produces a score of 17.5 for Europe, 30.0 for the Americas, 34.3 for Africa, 42.2 for Asia-Pacific and 45.3 for the former Soviet republics. Despite the Arab springs, the Middle East and North Africa region comes last with 48.5.

The high number of journalists and netizens killed in the course of their work in 2012 (the deadliest year ever registered by Reporters Without Borders in its annual roundup), naturally had a significant impact on the ranking of the countries where these murders took place, above all **Somalia** (175th, -11), **Syria** (176th, 0), **Mexico** (153rd, -4) and **Pakistan** (159th, -8).

From top to bottom

The Nordic countries have again demonstrated their ability to maintain an optimal environment for news providers. **Finland** (1st, 0), **Netherlands** (2nd, +1) and **Norway** (3rd, -2) have held on to the first three places. **Canada** (20th, -10) only just avoided dropping out of the top 20. **Andorra** (5th) and **Liechtenstein** (7th) have entered the index for the first time just behind the three leaders.

At the other end of the index, the same three countries as ever – Turkmenistan, North Korea and **Eritrea** – occupy the last three places in the index. Kim Jong-un's arrival at the head of the Hermit Kingdom has not in any way changed the regime's absolute control of news and information. Eritrea (179th, 0), which was recently shaken by a brief

mutiny by soldiers at the information ministry, continues to be a vast open prison for its people and lets journalists die in detention. Despite its reformist discourse, the Turkmen regime has not yielded an inch of its totalitarian control of the media.

For the second year running, the bottom three countries are immediately preceded by **Syria** (176th, 0), where a deadly information war is being waged, and **Somalia** (175th, -11), which has had a deadly year for journalists. **Iran** (174th, +1), **China** (173rd, +1), **Vietnam** (unchanged at 172nd), **Cuba** (171st, -4), **Sudan** (170th, 0) and **Yemen** (169th, +2) complete the list of the ten countries that respect media freedom least. Not content with imprisoning journalists and netizens, Iran also harasses the relatives of journalists, including the relatives of those who are abroad.

Big rises...

Malawi (75th, +71) registered the biggest leap in the index, almost returning to the position it held before the excesses at the end of the Mutharika administration. **Côte d'Ivoire** (96th, +63), which is emerging from the post-electoral crisis between the supporters of Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, has also soared, attaining its best position since 2003. **Burma** (151st, +18) continued the ascent begun in last year's index. Previously, it had been in the bottom 15 every year since 2002 but now, thanks to the Burmese spring's unprecedented reforms, it has reached its best-ever position. **Afghanistan** (128th, +22) also registered a significant rise thanks to the fact that no journalists are in prison. It is nonetheless facing many challenges, especially with the withdrawal of foreign troops.

...and big falls

Mali (99th, -74) registered the biggest fall in the index as a result of all the turmoil in 2012. The military coup in Bamako on 22 March and the north's takeover by armed Islamists and Tuareg separatists exposed the media in the north to censorship and violence. **Tanzania** (70th, -36) sank more than 30 places because, in the space of four months, a journalist was killed while covering a demonstration and another was murdered.

Buffeted by social and economic protests, the **Sultanate of Oman** (141st) sank 24 places, the biggest fall in the Middle East and North Africa in 2012. Some 50 netizens and bloggers were prosecuted on lèse majesté or cyber-crime charges in 2012. No fewer than 28 were convicted in December alone, in trials that trampled on defence rights.

Journalists in **Israel** (112th, -20) enjoy real freedom of expression despite the existence of military censorship but the country fell in the index because of the Israeli military's targeting of journalists in the Palestinian Territories.

In Asia, **Japan** (53rd, -31) has been affected by a lack of transparency and almost zero respect for access to information on subjects directly or indirectly related to Fukushima. This sharp fall should sound an alarm. **Malaysia** (145th, -23) has fallen to its lowest-ever position because access to information is becoming more and more limited. The same situation prevails in **Cambodia** (143rd, -26), where authoritarianism and censorship are on the increase. **Macedonia** (116th, -22) has also fallen more than 20 places following the arbitrary withdrawal of media licences and deterioration in the environment for journalists.

Varied impact of major protest movements

Last year's index was marked by the Arab spring's major news developments and the heavy price paid by those covering the protest movements. A range of scenarios has been seen in 2012, including countries such as **Tunisia**, **Egypt** and **Libya**, where regime change has taken place, countries such as **Syria** and **Bahrain** where uprisings and the resulting repression are still ongoing, and countries such as **Morocco**, **Algeria**, **Oman**, **Jordan** and **Saudi Arabia**, where the authorities have used promises and compromise to defuse calls for political and/or social and economic change.

Some of the new governments spawned by these protests movements have turned on the journalists and netizens who covered these movements' demands and aspirations for more freedom. With legal voids, arbitrary appointments of state media chiefs, physical attacks, trials and a lack of transparency, **Tunisia** (138th, -4) and **Egypt** (158th, +8) have remained at a deplorable level in the index and have highlighted the stumbling blocks that **Libya** (131st, +23) should avoid in order to maintain its transition to a free press.

The deadliest country for journalists in 2012 was **Syria** (176th, 0), where journalists and netizens are the victims of an information war waged by both the Assad regime, which stops at nothing in order to crack down and impose a news blackout, and by opposition factions that are increasingly intolerant of dissent. In **Bahrain** (165th, +8) the repression let up slightly, while in **Yemen** (169th, +2) the prospects continue to be disturbing despite a change of government. **Oman** (141st, -24) fell sharply because of a wave of arrests of

netizens.

Other countries hit by protests saw changes for the better and worse. **Vietnam** (172nd, 0) failed to recover the six places it lost in the previous index. The world's second biggest prison for netizens, it has remained in the bottom ten. **Uganda** (104th, +35) has recovered a more appropriate position although it has not gone back to where it was before cracking down on protests in 2011. **Azerbaijan** (156th, +6) and **Belarus** (157th, +11) both fell last year after using violence to suppress opposition demonstrations and this year they just moved back towards their appalling former positions. **Chile** (60th, +20) is beginning to recover after plummeting 33 places to 80th in last year's index.

Political instability puts journalists in the eye of the storm

Political instability often has a divisive effect on the media and makes it very difficult to produce independently-reported news and information. In such situations, threats and physical attacks on journalists and staff purges are common. **Maldives** (103rd, -30) fell sharply after the president's removal in an alleged coup, followed by threats and attacks on journalists regarded as his supporters. In **Paraguay** (91st, -11), the president's removal in a parliamentary "coup" on 22 June 2012 had a big impact on state-owned broadcasting, with a wave of arbitrary dismissals against a backdrop of unfair frequency allocation. **Guinea-Bissau** (92nd, -17) fell sharply because the army overthrew the government between the first and second rounds of a presidential election and imposed military censorship on the media. In **Mali** (99th, -74), a military coup fuelled tension, many journalists were physically attacked in the capital and the army now controls the state-owned media. This index does not reflect the January 2013 turmoil in the **Central African Republic** (65th, -3) but its impact on media freedom is already a source of extreme concern.

"Regional models" found wanting

In almost all parts of the world, influential countries that are regarded as "regional models" have fallen in the index. **Brazil** (108th, -9), South America's economic engine, continued last year's fall because five journalists were killed in 2012 and because of persistent problems affecting media pluralism. In Asia, **India** (140th, -9) is at its lowest since 2002 because of increasing impunity for violence against journalists and because Internet

censorship continues to grow. **China** (173rd, +1) shows no sign of improving. Its prisons still hold many journalists and netizens, while increasingly unpopular Internet censorship continues to be a major obstacle to access to information.

In Eastern Europe, **Russia** (148th, -6) has fallen again because, since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency, repression has been stepped up in response to an unprecedented wave of opposition protests. The country also continues to be marked by the unacceptable failure to punish all those who have murdered or attacked journalists. The political importance of **Turkey** (154th, -6) has grown even more because of the armed conflict in neighbouring Syria but it has again fallen in the index. It is currently the world's biggest prison for journalists, especially those who express views critical of the authorities on the Kurdish issue. There is no comparison with **South Africa** (52nd, -10), where freedom of information is a reality. It still has a respectable ranking but it has been slipping steadily in the index and, for the first time, is no longer in the top 50. Investigative journalism is threatened by the Protection of State Information Bill.

Democracies that stall or go into reverse

The situation is unchanged for much of the European Union. Sixteen of its members are still in the top 30. But the European model is unravelling. The bad legislation seen in 2011 continued, especially in **Italy** (57th, +4), where defamation has yet to be decriminalized and state agencies make dangerous use of gag laws. **Hungary** (56th, -16) is still paying the price of its repressive legislative reforms, which had a major impact on the way journalists work. But **Greece's** dramatic fall (84th, -14) is even more disturbing. The social and professional environment for its journalists, who are exposed to public condemnation and violence from both extremist groups and the police, is disastrous.

Japan (53rd, -31) plummeted because of censorship of nuclear industry coverage and its failure to reform the "kisha club" system. This is an alarming fall for a country that usually has a good ranking. **Argentina** (54th, -7) fell amid growing tension between the government and certain privately-owned media about a new law regulating the broadcast media.

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