



## **WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY, MAY 3**

*Drug-related  
violence in  
Reynosa, Mexico  
leads to deaths of  
journalists.*

Five journalists were assassinated in Honduras last month, all in drive-by shootings. In a wave of

drug-related violence in the Mexican city of Reynosa, near the Texas border, several journalists were abducted and one reporter found mysteriously dead.

These are brutal times for journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 71 journalists were killed last year. In 2008, another source reports that 929 were physically attacked or threatened. Most of these victims were not international correspondents covering war zones. As large newspapers shed their foreign bureaus, they hire more vulnerable freelancers instead. These brave local writers risk being murdered, kidnapped, or assaulted when they throw light in the dark corners of their societies, with stories about local politics, drug trafficking, and political or business corruption.

They also risk being thrown in jail. Laws that forbid "inciting hatred," "endangering national security" or, specifically, commenting on religion or ethnicity, are becoming more common. Libel and defamation laws are also used to punish the press. At this moment, some 160 journalists are in jail.

Press freedom is on the block. For every courageous story, another isn't written because journalists and their editors and publishers censor themselves.

Some people argue that the Internet will ultimately make it impossible for anyone—including governments--to hide the truth from their people. As the technology of media changes, we increasingly share information online, rather than through paper newspapers and television or radio, which gives governments great power

when they filter and block Internet access. But on-line journalists can circumvent restrictions, using anonymous personas and social networking technologies, to get the word out.

In Cuba, for example, at least 25 journalistic blogs cover social issues and political news. Despite repressive censorship, bloggers cobble together personal computers from parts sold on the black market or move between public Internet cafes.

Freedom House, in its annual survey on the state of the press, reports that global press freedom declined for a seventh straight year. The new survey found that only 17 percent of the world's inhabitants live in countries that enjoy a free press, while 41% have a partly free press and 42% have a not free press. These numbers are skewed by the huge populations in China, with a "not free" press and India, where the press is partly free. Even excluding these populations the percent free is still a troublesome 25 percent. Iran became a country with a "not-free" press last year when it cracked down and became the world's biggest jailer of journalists.

The United Nations celebrates "World Press Freedom" Day to remind us to defend our press. Freedom of speech and press is a vital moral issue, intrinsically connected to human rights worldwide, and the basis on which other freedoms rest. What we don't know can harm us. And who decides what we are to know?

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