



Reporters Without Borders - TV5 Monde Prize 2015

Nominees



Journalist Category

Mahmoud Abou Zeid, aka Shawkan (Egypt)

"I am a photojournalist, not a criminal," Shawkan wrote from Tora prison in February. "My indefinite detention is psychologically unbearable. Not even animals would survive in these conditions."

Shawkan is an Egyptian freelance photojournalist who has been in pre-trial detention for more than 760 days. He was arrested on 14 August 2013 while providing the US photojournalism agency *Demotix* and the US digital media company *Corbis* with coverage of the violence used to disperse demonstrations by deposed President Mohamed Morsi's supporters in Rabiaa Al-Awadiya Square. Three journalists were killed that day in connection with their work

Aged 28, Shawkan covered developments in Egypt closely from Mubarak's fall to Morsi's overthrow and on several occasions obtained striking shots of the popular unrest. His detention became illegal in August of this year because, under Egyptian law, pre-trial detention may surpass two years only in exceptional cases. Few people in Egypt have ever been held pending trial as long as him.

A date has finally been set for the start of his trial, 12 December 2015, when he will be prosecuted before a Cairo criminal court along with more than 700 other defendants including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was declared a terrorist organization in December 2013. Many charges have been brought against him without any evidence, according to his lawyer, Karim Abdelrady. The most serious include joining a banned

organization [the Muslim Brotherhood], murder, attacking the security forces and possession of weapons. He is facing a death sentence or life imprisonment.

His lawyers have still not been able to get their hands on the evidence that is essential to prepare his defence. Held in Cairo's Tora prison, he is suffering from mental exhaustion and hepatitis C, and his health has been getting steadily worse since 2014. According to human rights organizations, conditions are appalling in the prison and he is receiving no medical care.

Zaina Erhaim (Syria)

In 2012, Zaina Erhaim chose to leave London and the *BBC* to go and help cover the war in her homeland, Syria. A journalism graduate, she is now teaching Syrian citizen-journalists in Aleppo, where she has been living for more than a year.

In all, she has provided training in print and broadcast journalism to nearly 100 citizen journalists, about a third of them women, in the past two years. She has also help to create many new independent newspapers and magazines. She wants to show that there are alternative ways to cover the Syrian conflict, above all by focusing on the human dimension.

"I wanted to see Syria's name in the headlines without news about the tragedies and massacres only," she told The Arab Weekly in September. "Unfortunately, the humanitarian side of the Syrian conflict has been absent from Western media coverage for a while. You could only read news about the Islamic State and the massacres they have been committing."

She also coordinates a training project for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, an international NGO that helps journalists in countries in conflict, crisis or transition. Many of her students, who come from all backgrounds, have had their stories published in leading international media. This extraordinary woman was awarded the 2015 Peter Mackler Award for Courageous and Ethical Journalism.

Ali Anouzla (Morocco)

The former editor of the news website *Lakome's* Arabic-language version, Ali Anouzla was arrested in Rabat on 17 September 2013 and was charged with terrorism for posting a link to an article by well-known Spanish journalist Ignacio Cembrero in the Madrid daily *El País* because it included a propaganda video by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) calling for Jihad. Because of this one link, Anouzla was held for five weeks before being released conditionally on 25 October 2013 pending trial.

His articles for both the Arabic and French-language versions of *Lakome* are still being blocked and he continues to face a possible 20-year jail sentence on the terrorism charge. After two years of professional inactivity, he has launched a new site, *Lakome2*, of which he

is the only shareholder for the time being because he does not want involve other investors as long as his case is still pending.

Anouzla is on the list of 100 Information Heroes that Reporters Without Borders published on World Press Freedom Day (3 May) in 2014.

Pravit Rojanaphruk (Thailand)

“The military hadn’t carried out detention without charge since the Sarit Thanarat dictatorship in the 1960s,” Pravit Rojanaphruk told Reporters Without Borders last July. This well-known journalist is the only one to have been detained arbitrarily twice in the “behaviour readjustment” camps created by the military junta that took power in May 2014.

Held for a week immediately after the coup, Pravit was detained again on 13 September 2015 and, with a hood over his head, was taken off to a military base whose location was kept secret. There he was interrogated and threatened for three days and was only released on 15 September after signing a written pledge not to take part in any “anti-coup” activity. On his release, he was asked to resign by his employers at *The Nation* newspaper, who had been pressured by the authorities. Thus ended his 23-year career with this well-known English-language daily.

Despite the junta’s threats, Pravit refuses to remain silent. As soon as he was freed, he wrote an article describing the conditions in which he was held and the pressure put on him and fellow detainees to make them crack. He also revealed that he gets calls from army officers who urge him to stop tweeting and criticizing the junta and who warn him that he is under close physical surveillance. Now a freelancer, he is one of Thailand’s last journalists, perhaps the only one, to openly question the junta’s legitimacy, an activity that could lead to criminal charges at any time.

Esdras Ndikumana (Burundi)

An experienced journalist who is *Radio France Internationale’s* Burundi correspondent, Esdras Ndikumana has kept reporting during all the unrest that was triggered by President Pierre Nkurunziza’s insistence on running for a third term.

The authorities closed privately-owned radio stations and used threats and violence against journalists in the ensuing dangerous chaos but Ndikumana continued to report the news, becoming one of the few independent sources of information about the Burundian crisis.

While reporting from the spot where Gen. Adolphe Nshimirimana, the head of Burundi’s National Intelligence Service (SNR) had just been murdered on 2 August, he was seized by SNR officers, who threw him into a police truck, pinned him to the floor, and kept beating him throughout the long drive to their headquarters. There they continued to beat him and torture him for two hours, calling him an “enemy of the nation.” After removing his shoes and

trousers, they hit him again all over his body with blunt objects. One of his torturers broke his finger in order to take a ring.

A few days later, the president's office said every effort would be made to shed light on the assault on Ndikumana. Nonetheless, no one has been arrested although there were many witnesses to what took place.

Ahmed Abba (Cameroon)

A Hausa-language correspondent for *Radio France Internationale* in northern Cameroon, Ahmed Abba was arrested in Maroua on 30 July on suspicion of spying for Boko Haram. After 15 days in the custody of the Maroua police, he was transferred to Yaoundé, where he has been held incommunicado ever since. His lawyer, who heads the Yaoundé bar association, has not been able to see him or have access to his case file, and no official has said what he is charged with.

RFI regards his continuing detention as “extra-judicial” in nature because all the deadlines for taking him before a judge have been exceeded. *RFI* is pressing for his lawyer to be allowed see Abba and read the case file.

Cameroon has distinguished itself by its mistreatment of journalists, who are often jailed or arbitrarily summoned for questioning by the police. The situation was not improved by the adoption of an anti-terrorism law in late 2013 that allows anyone suspected of endangering state security to be held by the police indefinitely. This is what has happened to Abba.

Ever since the start of the offensive against Boko Haram in northern Cameroon, the region has been a minefield for independent journalists. They are denied access by the army or find themselves being arrested on spying charges if, for example, they try to carry out interviews in refugee camps after managing to enter the region by avoiding the army checkpoints.

Rauf Mirkadyrov (Azerbaijan)

Well-known newspaper reporter Rauf Mirkadyrov has languished in prison for the past year and a half with no sign of a trial. Although his health is deteriorating, his pre-trial detention keeps on being extended. The judicial investigation into his case is dragging on for an obvious reason – because the “high treason” charge brought against him is utterly absurd. If a trial is eventually staged, it will be a sham, like the trials of Khadija Ismayilova, Seymour Khazi and so many other journalists who have recently been given long jail sentences.

A veteran journalist, Mirkadyrov is known for being critical not only of the Azerbaijani government but also the Turkish and Russian ones. One of the founders of the opposition newspaper *Bizim Yol*, he was also deputy editor of *Monitor*, a newspaper whose managing editor, Elmar Huseynov, was murdered in 2005. At the time of his arrest, he was working for

Zerkalo, a newspaper that was forced to close a few months later after being economically throttled by the regime.

Ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, President Ilham Aliyev's autocratic regime has been conducting an unprecedented crackdown on independent media outlets and human rights defenders for the past two years. The Turkish authorities are complicit in Aliyev's attempt to brand Mirkadyrov as a spy for trying to promote dialogue with Armenia. It was in Ankara that Mirkadyrov had been based for the previous three years when he was arrested in April 2014 and illegally deported back to Azerbaijan.

Lázaro Yuri Valle Roca (Cuba)

Like most independent journalists in Cuba, Lázaro Yuri Valle Roca is close watched by the police. In his case, the persecution began at the start of 2015 when he tried to join other Cuban journalists and bloggers in covering the demonstrations that the Ladies in White stage every Sunday. Since then Valle Roca has been subjected to constant and intolerable harassment: he has repeatedly been jailed, he has been beaten by prison guards, he has been abducted in police cars, and his equipment is often confiscated.

Of late, police patrols cars prevent him from leaving his home on Sundays. At the same time, he has received anonymous death threats, while rumours of his suicide have even been circulated in his neighbourhood. His is a classic example of the kind of ordeal that independent journalists undergo in Cuba, which is ranked last in the Americas in the Reporters Without Borders 2015 press freedom index.

Valle Roca recently wrote to Reporters Without Borders requesting its support. Regarding his situation as akin to that of a "war reporter," he courageously continues his work.

Julio Ernesto Alvarado (Honduras)

At the end a marathon defamation trial in 2014, a court issued a sentence banning Julio Ernesto Alvarado from working as a journalist for 16 months. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights interceded in November 2014, asking the Honduran authorities to stay implementation of the ban as a "precautionary measure" until it ruled on the substance of the case.

The Honduran authorities have nonetheless ignored the request, and have dismissed Alvarado's appeals against the sentence. In the latest example the supreme court rejected a request for a trial review on 4 September. This judicial persecution is typical of the harassment that all outspoken journalists and opposition media undergo in Honduras.

For the time being, Alvarado continues to host a programme called "Mi Nación" on *Radio Globo y TV*, pending formal notification of the work ban. In his programme, he covers

sensitive political developments including the scandal about the ruling party's alleged embezzlement of social security funds, as well as the problems of chronic corruption and violence in Honduras.

Markus Beckedahl and André Meister (Germany)

Two German journalists, Markus Beckedahl and André Meister, were accused of high treason in July for disclosing the German domestic intelligence agency's plans for developing Internet surveillance. Their source was also charged. This is the first time that the intelligence agency has brought high treason charges since 1962, when there were two Germanies.

The information that Beckedahl and Meister posted on the *Netzpolitik.org* blog included details of the programme's budget, which – like almost all of German intelligence service budgets – is classified. They revealed that 2.75 million euros had been allocated for “bulk Internet data analysis.”

The findings of legal experts published on 3 August confirmed that the information was classified. As a result of the outcry about the charges, the government distanced itself from the prosecutor who requested this expert report, Harald Range. Shortly after complaining of being pressured by the government, Range was dismissed by the justice ministry. But the judicial investigation continues.

Shedding light on the German intelligence agencies' surveillance programmes is *Netzpolitik.org*'s chief concern. It is one of the German blogs that devotes most space to this issue.

Federica Angeli (Italy)

A journalist who has specialized in covering the mafia and organized crime for the daily *La Repubblica*, Federica Angeli has been threatened repeatedly in recent years and she and her family have lived under police protection for the past two years. On 14 September, she was threatened live on TV by a man whose family is linked to a mafia clan. Insults were posted on social networks during the broadcast. Angeli filed a complaint.

She was threatened for the first time in July 2013 while investigating racketeering in Ostia, Rome's seaside suburb, where she discovered that the mafia had infiltrated the municipality's services. She and the two TV technicians accompanying her were kidnapped for more than two hours. *La Repubblica* ran the story and, on its website, posted video footage of the abduction that the two technicians had secretly filmed. Around 50 people were arrested within the next few days.

When Angeli witnessed a shootout between various mafia families a few weeks later, she recognized her abductors and went to the police with this information. Thereafter she

received more threats, this time against her children. She recounted all of this in a TV programme, naming participants in the shootout including two members of the Spada family. More threats ensued. She filed a complaint in August 2014 and ten people were arrested as part of the “beach racket” investigation the following November, including Armando Spada, the person who had made the first death threat against her.

The Italian government meanwhile dissolved the Ostia municipal administration on the grounds of the mafia infiltration revealed by Angeli.

Mohammad Sedegh Kabodvand (Iran)

The onetime editor of *Payam-e Mardom-e Kurdistan* (a newspaper closed by the authorities in 2004), Mohammad Sedegh Kabodvand, 55, has been held in Tehran’s Evin prison since July 2007. He was given an 11-year sentence in June 2008 for creating an illegal human rights organisation in Iran’s Kurdish northwest.

He suffers from heart problems and his condition has worsened in Evin, where he is being denied adequate treatment and where prison officials have repeatedly rejected his requests for medical parole. He has staged several hunger strikes since June 2014 in protest against the conditions in which he is being held and against the judicial authorities’ refusal to allow him to visit his son, who is very ill and who is hospitalized in Tehran.

His wife, Prinaz Bagheban Hosseini, said in an interview on 3 August that the prison authorities are still denying him proper medical care although his condition is now much worse and he has often felt extremely ill.

Farida Nekzad (Afghanistan)

The former editor of the *Pajhwok Afghan News* agency, Farida Nekzad has spent the past 12 years being threatened by media freedom’s enemies, who have repeatedly tried to kidnap or kill her. While investigating female journalist Zakia Zaki’s murder in 2007, she received phone calls and emails promising her the same fate. They just reinforced her determination to defend freedom of information and women’s rights.

She launched the *Wakht News Agency* in 2008 and still runs it, employing women journalists to cover a range of issues including women’s rights. Despite financial difficulties, the agency has a network of correspondents throughout Afghanistan and continues to be one the country’s leading independent news outlets.

In 2014, Nekzad was put in charge of the Independent Election Commission’s media commission, with the job of monitoring media impartiality during the presidential election campaign. Despite a climate of extreme tension, she spent several months investigating media violations of the electoral rules and complaints from the public about election coverage.

The winner of many international prizes including the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation, Nekzad continues to spearhead the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan and to campaign for the overhaul of media legislation with the aim of getting more protection for journalists in their often dangerous work.

Netizen Category

Abduljalil Al-Singace (Bahrain)

A member of the Bahrain Thirteen, a group of human rights activists who were arrested for their role in the peaceful protests of 2011, Abduljalil Al-Singace used to criticize the regime's human rights violations and persecution of its political opponents in his blog *Al Faseela*.

After being arrested in March 2011, he and a total of 20 other defendants were tried by a military court on charges of belonging to terrorist organizations and trying to overthrow the government. The sentence of life imprisonment he received in June 2011 was confirmed by an appeal court in September 2012. He and the 12 other human rights activists then turned to the Court of Cassation, which rejected their appeal in January 2013.

This prisoner of conscience began a hunger strike on 21 March of this year in protest against police use of collective punishments and torture against inmates in Jau prison after a riot in the prison at the start of March. At the time of writing, he was still continuing his hunger strike, which has so far lasted 160 days. In August, Reporters Without Borders joined 40 other international organizations in sending the Bahraini government an urgent appeal for his release.

Osama Al-Najjar (United Arab Emirates)

On 25 November 2014, the Abu Dhabi federal supreme court sentenced citizen-journalist and blogger Osama Al-Najjar to three years in prison and a heavy fine for tweeting about the mistreatment that his father and all the other defendants in the "UAE 94" trial received in detention.

Al-Najjar was one of the first people to use social networks to criticize the conditions in detention and torture of the UAE 94 – the 94 Emiratis who were arrested on charges of links with the Muslim Brotherhood and trying to overthrow the government and who were given sentence ranging from seven to 15 years in prison in July 2013.

Arrested on 17 March 2014, he was convicted of insulting the state via Twitter, inciting hatred and violence, being a member of Al-Islah (a party affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood), and spreading false information. His laptop, camera and mobile phone were seized when he was arrested and his Twitter account was shut down.

Any connection with the Muslim Brotherhood is regarded as a crime in the UAE, which is ranked 120th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. The government pursues "cyber-criminals" with the help of the Telecommunications

Regulatory Authority (TRA) and anti-cybercrime units, which coordinate efforts to monitor and censor the Internet.

Atena Farghadani (Iran)

Atena Farghadani, 28, is a citizen-journalist and human rights activist who was sentenced to 12 years and nine months in prison on 2 June 2015. She was arrested on 11 January, a few days after posting a video on Facebook and YouTube in which she described her experiences in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison – a section controlled by Revolutionary Guards – after her earlier arrest in August 2014.

She was arrested on charges of “activities against national security,” “anti-government propaganda by means for performance art,” and “insulting government officials and parliamentary representatives in a published cartoon.” The charges were prompted by a cartoon she drew of parliamentarians with animal feature in protest against a new law restricting access to contraception.

She was hospitalized on 27 February, 18 days after beginning a hunger strike. According to her lawyer, Mohammad Moghimi, she had a heart attack and was taken to Firozgar Hospital in Sharrai but was returned to Evin prison a week later. She is now being held with non-political detainees in Gharchak prison in Varamin, a municipality south of Tehran. Her family said she staged another hunger strike from 16 to 19 September in protest against mistreatment.

Zone9 bloggers (Ethiopia)

Four of the six *Zone9* bloggers arrested in April 2014 – Atnaf Berhane, Befekadu Hailu, Abel Wabella and Natnail Feleke – continue to languish in Addis Ababa's notorious Kality prison 18 months later. The case is still being investigated and the charges have changed over time. Initially arrested for “working with foreign organizations claiming to defend human rights” and “receiving funding in order to incite the public to violence via social media,” they were later charged with violating the 2009 anti-terrorism law, under which they are facing a possible sentence of five to ten years in prison.

Zone9 calls itself as “an informal group of young Ethiopian bloggers working together to create an alternative independent narration of the socio-political conditions in Ethiopia.” Alluding to the eight detention zones in Kality prison, where human rights defenders and journalists are held, the group's name implies that entire country is a ninth zone where no one is really free to say what they think or report what is happening.

The blog was blocked by the authorities within Ethiopia soon after its creation in 2012 but it remained accessible abroad and the group continued to post information and comments on social networks. Because of constant harassment by the authorities, they suspended activity seven months before their arrests, which occurred immediately after they announced that they were going to resume blogging.

When two of the six bloggers (and three journalists who had been arrested at the same time) were released in July, the reason given was lack of evidence. One wonders why the other four are still being held, since the case against them is the same evidence.

Roy Ngerng (Singapore)

Blogger Roy Ngerng has been the target of judicial harassment by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long for nearly a year and a half because of a May 2014 post on his blog, *The Heart Truths*, in which he accused the government of mismanaging Singapore's Central Provident Fund (CPF) for retirees.

This is the first time in the city-state's history that a prime minister is suing a member of the public for libel. Officially, Lee has brought the suit as an ordinary citizen, not as prime minister. In practice, he has not hesitated to use the resources available to someone in his position to make the 34-year-old blogger pay for his audacity and simultaneously send a dissuasive measures to all professional and citizen-journalists covering political and economic affairs in Singapore.

Threatened by the prime minister's team of lawyers, fired from his hospital job on spurious grounds shortly after the suit was filed, insulted and threatened on social networks and in the comments sections of news websites by an army of Internet users on the government's payroll, Ngerng nonetheless continues to report and comment on the government's lies about its handling of the CPF.

In another article published in September, the fruit of detailed research and analysis of publicly available information, Ngerng brilliantly demonstrated both the government's fraudulent operations and its attempts to censor any revelations about these operations.

The target of both civil and criminal proceedings, Ngerng is currently awaiting a supreme court decision on Lee's summary judgement application, under which the courts would take the alleged defamation as a given and would just determine the penalty and the size of the damages award. The damages could be as high as 400,000 Singapore dollars and, if Ngerng cannot pay, the courts could declare him bankrupt and ban him from leaving the city-state in a substitute for imprisonment.

Charlie Smith (China)

A co-founder of GreatFire.org, a Chinese NGO that monitors and documents the Chinese Communist Party's cyber-censorship, Charlie Smith is one of the few bloggers and citizen-journalists who can claim to be capable of rendering this censorship obsolete. "Charlie Smith" is a pseudonym that he uses to protect himself from arrest.

This cyber-activist and his anonymous associates are responsible for "Collateral Freedom," an initiative that uses strategically located mirror sites with the aim of making it very costly for the Chinese authorities to block the sites of leading international media such as the *BBC* and *Deutsche Welle*, and other news sites such as *Boxun* and *China Digital Times*.

Since 2011, they have also been developing applications that allow Chinese Internet users to circumvent the Great Firewall of China – the vast collection of censorship technologies developed by the government to filter and block information. The first of these apps was Freeweibo, which enables users to search for censored messages on Weibo, China’s Twitter equivalent. Then came Freebrowser, a search engine that, unlike the Chinese Internet giant Baidu’s search engine, does not filter out politically sensitive content. GreatFire’s tools and technology are freely available so that anyone can use them to combat online censorship.

Smith also urges leading international Internet and information technology companies to accept their social responsibilities. In articles posted on GreatFire.org, Smith and his team have directly challenged the likes of Apple, Microsoft and Wikipedia and have forced some of them to stop cooperating with China’s censors. In 2013, for example, Microsoft had to start protecting the data of its Skype users, which until then had been transmitted in full to a Chinese company controlled by the government.

With the support of Smith and GreatFire, Reporters Without Borders launched its own worldwide Collateral Freedom initiative in March 2015 with the aim unblocking access to nine websites that provide news and information about countries with authoritarian regimes such as Iran, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Bahrain.

Huynh Thuc Vy (Vietnam)

Huynh Thuc Vy is a dissident who has been blogging about human rights violations in Vietnam, especially in the H’Mong community, on the *Dan Chim Viet Online* website and on her own blog (<http://huynhthucvy.blogspot.com>) since 2009. She also runs the website of Vietnamese Women for Human Rights, an NGO she helped to found.

This year she published “Commentaries on the truth – freedom and human rights,” a collection of her articles about civil liberties, democracy, Vietnam’s dictatorial regime and its violations of basic rights.

What with arbitrary arrest, interrogation, fines, raids on her home and confiscation of material and articles, she has been subjected to constant harassment by the police and government since 2011. She was prevented from boarding a flight to Bangkok on 12 July of this year to attend a seminar on cyber-security organized by Reporters Without Borders. In an attempt to denigrate her, the Dak Lak provincial police went around on 15 September telling friends, neighbours and fellow citizens that her articles were reactionary and dangerous.

She also writes for the *BBC*, *The Diplomat*, *Voice of America* and *Asia Sentinel* and in 2012 she received Human Rights Watch’s Hellman/Hammett award and the Vietnam Human Rights Network’s annual award for human rights work.

Angel Santiesteban Prats (Cuba)

An independent blogger and Reporters Without Borders media freedom hero,

Angel Santiesteban Prats was released conditionally on 18 July after being held for two years for criticizing the government in his blog called “Los hijos que nadie quiso” (The children no one wanted”).

In an attempt to conceal the political nature of his arrest, the authorities convicted him on trumped-up charges of “home violation” and “injuries” in a summary trial on in December 2012. In September 2014, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked the Cuban government to guarantee his safety because he had been mistreated, threatened and subjected to mental torture in prison.

He refused to remain silent while detained, continuing to protest about the government’s harassment and getting his views posted on his blog with help of Elisa Tabakman, the blog’s Argentinian editor.

Since his release, he has been constantly subjected to arbitrary arrests and threats of being returned to prison, above all with the aim of preventing him from covering the demonstrations by the Ladies in White. A book he wrote about his time in prison has just been published, and he is now fighting for the right to free speech in Cuba and trying to get his trial revised.

Media Category

***Inkyfada.com* (Tunisia)**

Launched in 2014, *Inkyfada* is a Tunisian online magazine with Arabic and French-language versions that aims to restore faith in independent journalism by publishing investigative reports and feature stories on such sensitive subjects as tax fraud, human trafficking and prostitution. The initiative is unique in Tunisia and offers a new model for the Tunisian media, which are still struggling to emerge from the effects of decades of self-censorship.

Inkyfada pays attention to both substance and presentation. Articles are long but have a clean, easily-navigated interface. One of its biggest stories so far was about the Tunisian accounts exposed in the SwissLeaks investigation and the fraudulent practices of former President Ben Ali's relatives and associates. Written by *Inkyfada* founders Malek Khadraoui and Sana Sbouai and published in February 2015, it was hailed by media freedom defenders but, to their surprise, received little attention from the Tunisia media.

The reaction suggests that the Tunisian media are still frightened of investigative journalism and that *Inkyfada's* innovative model needs promoting so that journalists finally take ownership of the reform of the media sector initiated after the January 2011 revolution.

***Cumhuriyet* (Turkey)**

This year, the Istanbul-based daily *Cumhuriyet* has distinguished itself by its defence of media freedom in Turkey but has paid a high price. As the government kept stepping up its harassment of its critics, *Cumhuriyet's* independent and courageous journalism triggered one prosecution after the other, a smear campaign and the repeated blocking of its website.

"The person who committed this crime will pay dearly, he won't get away with it so easily," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in June when announcing on TV that he was bringing a formal charge of "spying" against *Cumhuriyet* editor Can Dündar. The newspaper had just published photos and a video showing that a convoy of the Syria-bound trucks leased by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) in 2014 had indeed been carrying firearms, as suspected at the time. The revelations revived a scandal that had been suppressed in 2014 by means of drastic censorship. And it was an explosive one because, according to many observers, the convoy had been heading for a region controlled by jihadi groups.

But this is just one of many cases for Dündar, who is also being prosecuted (like other media editors) on charges of insulting Erdogan and "terrorism." Other *Cumhuriyet* employees are also facing the possibility of long jail sentences on various grounds including the newspaper's decision to reprint some *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons after the massacre at the

Paris-based magazine's headquarters in January – a decision that prompted a night-time police raid on its printing press. Other examples of *Cumhuriyet's* courage include its coverage of the Kurdish issue and the Armenian genocide. On 24 April, it dedicated its front page to the 100th anniversary of the genocide, with the headline “Never again” in Armenian.

Meydan TV and Azerbaijan Saati (Azerbaijan)

Meydan TV and *Azerbaijan Saati* are a new generation of Azerbaijani independent media outlets that have been created in exile in response to the regime's annihilation of the domestic media landscape. The first is an Internet TV station and the second is TV programme that is broadcast by satellite twice a week. The determination of a handful of journalists has been responsible for their emergence, especially two charismatic figures – well-known blogger Emin Milli in the case of *Meydan TV* and Ganimat Zahid, the editor of the opposition newspaper *Azadlig*, in the case of *Azerbaijan Saati*.

The emergence of *Meydan TV* and *Azerbaijan Saati* clearly worries President Ilham Aliyev's autocratic government, which thought it had silenced all critical media. As a result, it is now hard to keep track of all the arrests and attempts to intimidate those working for these two outlets. In a bid to put pressure on Milli and Zahid, the authorities are now targeting their relatives still in Azerbaijan, even if they have nothing to do with journalism. Several of them have been arrested on trumped-up charges in recent months. To escape this fate, members of Milli's family publicly distanced themselves from him in an open letter to President Aliyev in June.

Iwacu (Burundi)

It has been hard to know what is happening in Bujumbura and even more so in the provinces ever since 14 May, the fateful day when almost all of Burundi's media outlets were silenced, some when attacked with firebombs or rocket grenades. Nowadays the only independent news outlet still operating in Bujumbura is the newspaper *Iwacu* (which has both print and online versions).

Created in 2008, it has distinguished itself by the accuracy of its reporting, the rigour of its journalists and the depth of its features – qualities that have failed to win over the government. Presidential media adviser Willy Nyamitwe even brought a legal action against one of its journalists whose only crime was to have reported the interview Nyamitwe gave him.

“Just keep going” was what *Iwacu* editor Antoine Kabuhare told his staff when shooting was to be heard all over Bujumbura and President Pierre Nkurunziza's henchmen were using deadly violence to disperse the street protests against his decision to run for a third term. And this is what his reporters still try to do, even though they put their lives at risk whenever they venture on to the streets.

Droit Libre TV (Burkina Faso)

Droit Libre TV is an independent online feature TV station based in Burkina Faso that covers social issues in West Africa from the human rights viewpoint and does not shrink from difficult stories. It describes itself as a TV station without borders accessible to all, and its slogan is “The Web TV that is 100% human rights and 100% free speech.”

Targeted at a young, independent and critical public, its online format encourages debate and viewer participation. It is one of a kind and constitutes a minor revolution in the West African media landscape. It aims to be a subregional media outlet and does stories on all of Burkina Faso’s neighbours. Even more remarkably, it stands above the sterile party politics that only too often contaminate the African media and instead focuses on the region’s population, the daily lives, their challenges and their aspirations.

Droit Libre TV also covers major breaking news. When members of the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP) – former President Blaise Compaoré’s praetorian guard – staged a coup attempt in Ouagadougou on 16 September, *Droit Libre TV*’s crews took to the streets to do interviews and cover this critical moment in Burkina Faso’s history. And they were targeted by RSP members, who used force to confiscate their material.

Hablemos Press (Cuba)

Hablemos Press is an independent Havana-based news agency that aims to gather and disseminate news in Cuba and abroad. Founded in 2009, it has 30 correspondents in the country’s 15 provinces and is nowadays regarded as one of Cuba’s leading independent news outlets. It also monitors the government’s harassment of journalists and human rights defenders, and provides constant and courageous coverage of the problems and dangers for independent reporters as well as the difficulties of Internet access.

The authorities constantly target its editors and reporters. Reporters Without Borders has registered many cases of arbitrary arrests of its correspondents, as well as almost daily cases of harassment and intimidation. The persecution was stepped up in July and August, when Cuba was in the process of reestablishing diplomatic relations with the United States. Although this is a particularly difficult time for freedom of information, *Hablemos Press* continues to provide independent reporting with the aim of “reinforcing the country’s democratization.”

Cuba is ranked last in the Americas in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index because its government maintains a complete monopoly on news and information and permits no independent media outlets aside from a few Catholic Church magazines. Internet access is extremely limited because of its prohibitive cost and the government’s draconian controls.

The *Hablemos Press* website, which the authorities have rendered inaccessible in Cuba since 2011, was one of the sites that was unblocked by the “Collateral Freedom” operation that Reporters Without Borders launched on 12 March.

Radio Globo y TV (Honduras)

One of Honduras's most popular opposition broadcasters, *Radio Globo y TV* has been a government target ever since the 2009 coup d'état and is subjected to constant harassment that includes prosecutions, death threats against its employees and murders.

Five of the station's employees have been murdered since 2011 without any investigation being carried out by the authorities. Impunity is one of the key characteristics of violence against journalists in Honduras. Speaking on the programme "Interpretando las Noticias" on 14 May, *Radio Globo* director David Romero said he was the target of death threats for covering the alleged involvement of President Juan Orlando Hernández's party in the embezzlement of funds from the Honduran Institute for Social Security. He obtained police protection after being told of a plan to murder him. He is now the target of a criminal defamation prosecution and says the authorities plan to have him sentenced to imprisonment.

Judicial harassment is one of the many ways used by the government to pressure media outlets. The leading example is *Radio Globo* presenter Julio Ernesto Alvarado, who was banned from working as a journalist for 16 months at the end of a drawn-out defamation trial in 2014. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights interceded in November 2014, asking the authorities to stay implementation of the ban until it ruled on the substance of the case. But they have ignored the request, and have dismissed all of Alvarado's appeals against the sentence, the latest of them on 4 September. Such judicial persecution is typical of the way that critical journalists and opposition media are hounded in Honduras.

Correo del Caroní (Venezuela)

Founded 38 years ago in Ciudad Guayana, the capital of the southeastern state of Bolívar, this provincial newspaper is a perfect example of the way President Nicolás Maduro's government uses threats, prosecutions and of course restrictions on access to newsprint to pressure Venezuela's independent and opposition print media.

At the start of September, the interior and justice minister said judicial proceedings would be brought against *Correo del Caroní* journalist Damián Prat because he was part of a paramilitary group that was planning to carry out acts of looting and destruction in Ciudad Guayana. The warning came three weeks after National Assembly speaker Diosdado Cabello made similar accusations against Prat during his programme "Con el Mazo Dando."

Because of the government-orchestrated newsprint shortage, the newspaper had to switch from being a daily to a weekly in August in order to continue producing a print edition.

In Venezuela, the newsprint distribution system is controlled by Corporación Maneiro, an entity that reports to the president's office. Since 2014, many independent and outspoken newspapers have accused it of distributing newsprint in an unfair manner, one that is a form of indirect government censorship. Many newspapers have had to reduce the number of pages they produce, publish less frequently or abandon print editions altogether and just publish online.

***Bivol* (Bulgaria)**

Sofia-based *Bivol.bg* is a leading investigative news website that has been the official partner of WikiLeaks since 2011 for the publication of leaked US diplomatic cables about Bulgaria. It has been sued many times in connection with its coverage of corruption and misgovernment.

Four banks sued *Bivol* in 2012 over articles exposing their bad practices. In a move approved by Bulgaria's central bank, the Commission for Financial Supervision ordered *Bivol* in 2014 to reveal its sources for recent stories about questionable bank loans, or face a fine. Editor Atanas Chobanov learned in August 2015 that he was the target of criminal libel complaint over a report that a former government minister had fraudulently claimed unemployment benefit in France. These proceedings were abandoned as result of various kinds of international intervention including by Reporters Without Borders.

***Mukto-Mona* (Bangladesh)**

Founded in 2001 by several bloggers including the late Avijit Roy, *Mukto-Mona* (www.mukto-mona.com) is a Bengali and English-language website that publishes contributions by freethinkers of mainly Bengali and South Asian descent who are scattered across the globe. Its mission is to promote science, rationalism, secularism, freethinking, human rights, religious tolerance, and harmony among all people. To this end, it posts analytical articles, essays and reviews and has a forum for debate that is open to readers. Many well-known authors, scientists, philosophers and human rights activists have contributed to the site, including the blogger Asif Mohiuddin.

Since the start of 2015, four secularist bloggers, including Avijit Roy and other contributors to the site, have been murdered in Bangladesh by members of radical Islamist groups. Roy was hacked to death in Dhaka on 26 February. Washiqur Rahman was killed in a similar manner on 30 March. Ananta Bijoy Das was murdered in the northeastern city of Sylhet on 12 May. Intruders armed with machetes hacked Niloy Neel to death in his Dhaka suburb home on 7 August. All four had criticized religious fundamentalism and had advocated tolerance, free speech and freedom of thought in their blogs.

As well as risking deadly physical violence, *Mukto-Mona's* contributors are pressured by the Bangladeshi authorities, who often threaten to use article 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, under which "publishing fake, obscene or defaming information in electronic form" is punishable by seven to 14 years in prison.

Despite all the pressure and the fact that many Bangladeshi bloggers are forced into exile, *Mukto-Mona* continues to publish the contributions of writers who refuse to censor themselves and who accept no taboos, not even the taboo on criticizing Islam, the religion of 90 percent of Bangladesh's inhabitants.

***Geo News TV* (Pakistan)**

The Pakistani media are increasingly the victims of “clashes” between the various political forces present in Pakistan. As an independent TV channel, *Geo News* does not hesitate to criticize the establishment, armed forces and intelligence agencies as well opposition parties. And for that, the TV station and its journalists are often the target of threats and violence by the government, by the intelligence agencies and by radical armed groups.

In September, gunmen opened fire on a *Geo News* van in Karachi, killing one employee and injuring another. In July, projectiles were fired at the windows of *Geo News* star presenter Hamid Mir’s armour-plated car. The host of “Capital Talk,” a political talk show that often tackles controversial subject and criticizes government officials, Mir has been protected by bodyguards ever since becoming the subject of a fatwa. Already badly injured in a shooting attack in Karachi in April 2014, Mir had said the military intelligence agency known as Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) should be held responsible for any attack against him.

Geo News is constantly the target of harassment that bears the fingerprints of ISI and its allies. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority suspended it for 15 days in June 2014. An anti-terrorism court in the far-north semi-autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan sentenced *Geo TV* owner Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman and one of the station’s presenters, Shaista Lodhi, to 26 years in prison in November 2014 for a supposedly blasphemous programme.

Radical armed groups of all kinds, from Taliban to Hezbollah, are also the source of threats and attacks against *Geo News*, which does not hesitate to criticize US and Afghan policies as well as Pakistani government policies.

***Anh Ba Sam* (Vietnam)**

Launched in 2007, the independent news website *Anh Ba Sam* is one of Vietnam’s best-known political news outlets. With a name that means Sidewalk News Agency, in allusion to the official *Vietnam News Agency*, its distinguishing feature is its wide range of sources – including government officials, policemen, diplomats and dissidents – which have often enabled it to expose political scandals and abuse of authority.

Its creator, the blogger Nguyen Huu Vinh, is himself a former police officer who became a private investigator. Since becoming *Anh Ba Sam*’s editor, he has been subjected to constant pressure from the authorities, who have tried to close the site down. The site has been the target of several waves of cyber-attacks, especially distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, which typically bombard a site with so many access requests that they crash its server.

The arrest of Vinh and one of his collaborators, Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy, on 5 May for posting articles critical of the authorities has alarmed many bloggers and has increased self-censorship. But although Vinh is still detained, *Anh Ba Sam* continues to operate and to post many news stories thanks to the network of contributors trained by Vinh.

***Asia Plus* (Tajikistan)**

President Emomali Rahmon's increasing authoritarianism could end up reigniting the civil war that tore Tajikistan apart in the 1990s. It also endangers independent journalism, whose leading exponents have included *Asia Plus* since April 1996. A news agency, radio station, TV studio and news website, *Asia Plus* uses a network of sources in almost all of the country's regions to provide freely and independently reported news despite often very difficult conditions.

Asia Plus is one of the few Tajik news outlets that does not wear blinkers and does not yield to the temptation to censor its own coverage, including coverage of political and security issues that is likely to annoy the authorities. As a result, its website has been blocked countless times in recent years without reference to a judge and *Asia Plus* and its editor, Olga Tutubalina, have on several occasions been ordered to pay astronomical sums in damages.

They were the target of a new and particularly absurd warning in 2014, when they were deemed to have "insulted the intelligentsia" and were ordered to pay 30,000 somoni (4,500 euros) in damages, a sum more than ten times Tutubalina's monthly salary as editor. It was yet another way to intimidate *Asia Plus* and posed a grave threat to independent journalism in Tajikistan.