



RSF unveils 22 nominees for 2016 Press Freedom Prize

Journalists

Azerbaijan - Seymour Khazi

Seymour Khazi was a well-known reporter for Azerbaijan's sole remaining opposition daily, *Azadlig*, and used to present the exiled opposition's TV programme, "Azerbaijan Saati," but he has been in prison for more than two years on trumped-up charges. Arrested on 29 August 2014 after trying to fend off an assailant, he was given a five-year sentence for "aggravated hooliganism." His imprisonment is an example of how President Ilham Aliyev continues to suppress freedoms ruthlessly despite having released a few political prisoners, including leading investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova, in the spring of 2016. At last seven journalists are currently detained and new waves of arrests have taken place.

France / Luxembourg - Edouard Perrin

French investigative journalist Edouard Perrin was the first reporter to shed light on Luxembourg's massive system of tax avoidance for multinationals, eventually dubbed the LuxLeaks scandal. Perrin's revelations on the *France 2* TV magazine programme "Cash Investigation" in 2012 were based on information provided by two former employees of the Luxembourg branch of the international accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), who leaked a total of 28,000 documents. In 2015, the Luxembourg authorities accused Perrin of theft, money-laundering and relaying information leaked by the two whistleblowers. He was acquitted on 29 June 2016 but the Luxembourg prosecutor's office has appealed, so he and the whistleblowers will be in court again in December.

Egypt - Ismail Alexandrani

A renowned Egyptian investigative journalist and independent researcher specializing in the Sinai region, Ismail Alexandrani is being held because of his reporting critical of government policy in the Sinai. Aged 32 and based in Turkey, he has worked for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Orient XXI*, the Lebanese daily *Al-Safir* and such international thinktanks as the Arab Reform Initiative. Obligated to visit Egypt for family reasons, he was arrested on arrival at the Red Sea city of Hurghada on a flight from Germany on 29 November 2015, and was jailed on a provisional detention order that has been renewed repeatedly ever since. He is accused of spreading false information with the aim of harming Egypt's interests and of being a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Colombia - Jineth Bedoya

Aged 42, Jineth Bedoya is a well-known Colombian investigative reporter and defender of the rights of women who have been victims of violence. While investigating arms trafficking by Colombian officials and paramilitaries in 2000, she was kidnapped, sexually abused and then dumped at a roadside. Despite pressure from civil society, the judicial system took more than ten years to punish those responsible for her abduction. The trial was marred by countless irregularities and contradictory testimony, and the outcome – with just two defendants sentenced to 28 and 11 years in prison – was regarded as completely inadequate by the NGOs that supported her. She was kidnapped again, this time by the FARC, while on a reporting trip in 2003. She has written books about her experiences and her work, continues to campaign for freedom of expression, and contributed to the peace accords that the FARC and the Colombian government signed in 2016. Bedoya personifies courage and the fight for women's rights in Colombia.

South Sudan - Alfred Taban

South Sudan's best-known journalist, Alfred Taban founded the new nation's first newspaper, the *Juba Monitor*, after founding the *Khartoum Monitor* in 2000. He was arrested on 26 July 2016 and was held incommunicado for several weeks for writing an editorial condemning the behaviour of President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar, whose respective forces fought each other in Juba from 8 to 11 July, leaving a toll of 300 dead and 42,000 displaced. Taban courageously continues to provide his fellow citizens with news and information although many other journalists have ceased to do so because the situation in this torn country is now so dangerous.

Maldives - Zaheena Rasheed

Zaheena Rasheed is the editor of the *Maldives Independent* (former *Minivan News*), one of her country's few remaining independent online media outlets. As a result of her courage and determination, she has come to embody the revival of journalism and the fight for media freedom in Maldives. She has dared to cover highly sensitive stories in a country where the most radical form of Islamism has taken hold, and she has not hesitated to criticize the authorities, including their culpable passivity in the investigation into fellow journalist Ahmed Rilwan's disappearance in 2014. She was one of 16 journalists arrested in Malé on 3 April 2016 during a demonstration against the decline in media freedom. Their grievances included a court order closing the newspaper *Haveeru*, a new bill to re-criminalize defamation (which was decriminalized in 2009) and the lack of progress in the investigation into Rilwan's disappearance.

Syria - Hadi Abdullah

This nurse from Homs decided to abandon a post-graduate course in nursing in order to dedicate himself to independent reporting in support of the Syrian population. He quickly made a name for himself among professional journalists as a freelancer who covers Syrian civil war stories diligently and goes to dangerous areas to film and interview civil society actors. Aged 29, he has had many close brushes with death in the course of his reporting and his cameraman was fatally injured in June 2016 in a bomb attack on their home that was meant to kill them both. By his courage, Hadi Abdullah has become the international community's eyes, reporting the atrocities committed every day in Syria. For this reason, he is now a target for both pro-government forces and armed groups.

Afghanistan - Najiba Ayubi

Afghan journalist and activist Najiba Ayubi heads the Killid Group of non-profit media, which includes Afghanistan's two most popular magazines (*Killid Weekly* and *Mursal Weekly*) and eight radio stations with a total of 12 million listeners. The Killid Group's role in providing news coverage to the population of several provinces encircled by the Taliban is particularly important. Now aged 48, this courageous woman has been getting threats for more than 15 years but has never been intimidated, defending media freedom at all costs. She is one of RSF's 100 Information Heroes and received the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation in 2013.

Bangladesh - Mahfuz Anam

The editor of the *Daily Star*, Bangladesh's most popular English-language daily and a source of critical coverage of the government, Mahfuz Anam became the target of a campaign of harassment after acknowledging in a February 2016 interview that, during a period of military rule in 2007 and 2008, he published information provided by the army although he could not verify it independently. No fewer than 79 legal actions were filed against him in the space of three weeks in 53 districts throughout the country – 17 accusing him of sedition (punishable by three years in prison) and 62 accusing him of defamation (which carries a possible two-year sentence). More than a trillion taka (15 billion euros) in damages were sought by the plaintiffs. Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister and leader of the ruling Awami League, called on Anam to resign on 22 February. The *Daily Star* is meanwhile the victim of an illegal and discriminatory boycott imposed by the DGFI intelligence agency, which ordered the country's biggest companies not to advertise in the newspaper. Anam is nonetheless an acknowledged champion of democracy and media freedom. Referring to military censorship in a 2007 editorial, he wrote: "As long as we do not get a written order from the government, we will regard it as illegal. The friends of democracy never silence the press. Only the autocrats do. The people of Bangladesh will never accept autocrats."

Media

Oman – Azamn

An Omani court has ordered the permanent closure of *Azamn*, the Sultanate's only independent newspaper, given it a heavy fine and sentenced its three most senior editors to imprisonment for running a story in July 2016 about suspected corruption within the judicial system. Since its creation in 2007, the newspaper had already covered several corruption stories and was suspended for a month in 2011. Freedom of information is very limited in Oman because of the ubiquitous censorship imposed by the authorities and because most of the media prefer to toe the government line.

Central Asia - Ferghana Agency

Fergananeews.com, the website of the independent Russian-language news agency *Ferghana*, is the leading source of news about the countries of Central Asia because of its speed, the quality of its analyses, and its extensive network of local correspondents. It was the first credible media outlet to report Uzbek President Islam Karimov's death in late August, several days before the Uzbek authorities acknowledged it. But these

qualities mean that it is also targeted by the region's repressive governments. *Ferghana's* correspondents in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in particular, operate clandestinely and take great risks to do so. Access to the website is blocked in both of these countries and partially in Tajikistan.

Algeria - *Radio M*

Launched in May 2013, Algiers-based *Radio M* is Algeria's first privately-owned web radio with general news coverage. Although it cannot broadcast on FM because of a lack of political will within the regime to open up the broadcasting sector, it is one of several media outlets that promote diversity of opinion. It offers a wide range of political and cultural programming but its best-known programme is "Political Press Café" (CPP), which analyses the week's political developments with the help of journalists and experts of various political tendencies including opposition members. Counting both open audio sessions (SoundCloud) and its YouTube pages, *Radio M's* various kinds of content have been getting an average of 18,000 visits a day in 2016.

Libya - *Bawabet Al Wasat*

Libya's *Al Wasat* media group, which already had a newspaper and a radio station, launched a website called *Bawabet Al Wasat* in 2013 that quickly became the country's most visited online source of news. According to founder Mahmoud Shammam, who is well known internationally as both a media figure and politician, it was visited by nearly 2 million people in 2015. Access to the site was blocked in Libya for nine months from February 2015 because of its coverage of the talks that led to the creation of the Government of National Accord now based in Tripoli. *Bawabet Al Wasat* has been the target of frequent cyber-attacks since the censorship was lifted. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a press release condemning the repeated confiscations of *Al Wasat's* print version after militias yet again seized thousands of copies in May 2016.

China - *64Tianwang*

Five citizen journalists working for the *64Tianwang* independent news website were abducted by the authorities because of their coverage of the G20 summit in Hangzhou on 4-5 September 2016 and related protests, and have been held ever since. *64Tianwang* and its reporters continue to be persecuted by the authorities 12 years after RSF awarded its Cyber-Dissident Prize to the website's founder and editor, Huang Qi. One of its women reporters, Yang Dongying, was arrested in the eastern province of Zhejiang in June 2015, while the site itself, which the government regards as subversive, has been the target of a series of cyber-attacks. But the determination of its reporters does not flag. As Huang Qi recently said, "in 18 years of activity, no *64Tianwang* journalist has ever agreed to sign a confession drafted by the authorities." And none of

them has contributed to the party's propaganda, which includes broadcasting such "confessions" on *CCTV* and *Xinhua* with the aim of discrediting government critics.

Brazil - *Agência Pública*

Launched in 2011, the São Paulo-based *Agência Pública* is a completely independent, non-profit news agency staffed by investigative journalists of many different backgrounds, above all women. After winning many awards for its reports on environmental and human rights issues, it opened the Casa Pública in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. This is a cultural centre for journalists that aims to promote quality journalism and organizes debates and seminars on the challenges facing journalists. As part of its commitment to free speech and independent journalism, *Agência Pública* offers scholarships for investigative reporting projects and houses foreign journalists on assignment in Brazil. One of its directors, Natalia Viana, was Julian Assange's liaison in 2010 for the translation and publication of WikiLeaks cables about Brazil.

Poland - *Gazeta Wyborcza*

Founded by Adam Michnik, a leading Communist-era dissident, the pro-European daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* has become a symbol of the opposition to the excesses of Law and Justice (PiS), the party that won the October 2015 parliamentary elections, to the point that a priest and a PiS delegation stood outside the newspaper in December 2015 and tried to exorcise it. State-owned companies have been banned from placing ads in the newspaper and government agencies have cancelled their subscriptions with the aim of starving it of funds. The head of PiS put *Gazeta Wyborcza* editor Jaroslaw Kurski's brother, Jacek Kurski, in charge of the state television broadcaster *TVP* after a purge of the state-owned media in December. The political differences between these two brothers are emblematic of the deep ideological divisions in Poland since the start of the democratic transition.

Citizen journalists

Brazil - Leonardo Sakamoto

A São Paulo-based former war reporter, Leonardo Sakamoto, 39, posts information every day about human rights in Brazil on his eponymous blog, one of the country's most widely-read online resources on the subject. He is also very involved in combatting slavery, both in Brazil, via his NGO, Reporter Brasil, and internationally as an adviser to

the United Nations Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. As a result of these activities, he has often been the target of hate messages, threats and smear campaigns, especially on social networks. He was subjected to especially virulent online attacks in January 2016 after someone posing as him criticized the “uselessness of retired people” in an interview for the daily *Edição do Brasil*, which failed to check its interviewee’s identity. In April 2016, a leading agro-industrial company he had criticized orchestrated an online smear campaign that accused him of taking money from the government to attack its opponents. Shortly thereafter, he wrote a book entitled “What I learned from being hounded online.” <http://blogdosakamoto.blogosfera.uol.com.br>

China - Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu

Shortly after arriving in Dali (in the southwestern province of Yunnan) in June 2016, citizen journalists Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu suddenly stopped sending messages, alarming colleagues and relatives. They were held incommunicado for more than three weeks before being allowed to see lawyers. Why were they arrested? For investigating unrest and work protests. Since 2012, they have been gathering information from all over China, checking social networks every day and collecting photos and the accounts of striking workers or citizens demonstrating for their rights. Posted on a dedicated website, their work is used by NGOs and university academics and constitutes an unique and highly sensitive barometer of social unrest in China – a taboo subject for the Chinese Communist Party. Accused of disturbing public order, Lu told his lawyer he had been beaten by guards in the Dali detention centre where he was being held.

Burundi - SOS Médias Burundi

Forty-eight hours after the closure of all the independent radio stations in Burundi in May 2015, a dozen journalists and activists began working together to keep covering developments in their country. Within a day, a Facebook page and a website were created and SOS Médias Burundi was born. The journalists work anonymously and separately, covering what they see in their neighbourhoods and using WhatsApp to discuss editorial decisions. They follow strict rules that include getting the viewpoints of all the parties involved in any story and no editorializing. The one exception to these nameless heroes is Eloge Willy Kaneza, 34, who has taken the risk of operating openly. A professional journalist who has worked for several media outlets including *Bonesha FM* in Bujumbura and *KF Radio* in the Rwandan capital of Kigali, he was given the 2016 Peter Mackler Award for Courageous and Ethical Journalism. This citizen journalism initiative has gradually become the main source of news and information about Burundi’s crisis, which continues to unfold without getting much attention from the rest of the world.

Bahrain - Ali Al-Mearaj

The 36-year-old blogger Ali Al-Mearaj used to manage *Lulu Awal*, a news website that was very critical of the Bahraini regime. For this, he was arrested on 6 January 2014 and was sentenced on 8 April 2014 to 30 months in prison on charges of “misusing information technology” and insulting the king. Released in April 2016, he was arrested again two months later, on 5 June, without a warrant and without his family knowing why, and was consigned to Dry Dock prison. According to our sources, he and a journalist with the independent daily *Al-Wasat* are accused of supporting terrorism in connection with another case. He is facing the possibility of life imprisonment and being stripped of his nationality.

Iran - Roya Saberi Negad Nobakht

A 50-year-old Facebook user with British and Iranian dual nationality, Roya Saberi Negad Nobakht was arrested while visiting Iran in October 2013 and has been held ever since. She was arrested at the same time as several social media activists, who were all detained in connection with their online posts, especially on Facebook. On 27 May 2014, a Tehran revolutionary court sentenced her to 20 years in prison for “insulting Islam” and “threatening national security. The sentence was reduced on appeal to five years in prison. She is now very ill in Tehran’s Evin prison and a doctor has recommended her transfer to a specialized hospital. But the authorities have refused, presumably because they want to conceal the prison’s shortcomings. Nobakht is one of 18 citizen journalists currently detained in Iran.

Cuba - Tania Quintero and her son, Ivan García Quintero

Now a 74-year-old political refugee in Switzerland, Tania Quintero lived through the darkest hours of independent journalism in Cuba. After brief, unhappy period working for government media, she gradually emerged as one of Cuba’s leading dissident journalists, working with most of the country’s independent news outlets and with international media freedom NGOs. As a result, she was repeatedly arrested, burgled, persecuted and even publicly humiliated by Fidel Castro. She also trained young Cuban journalists, including her son, Ivan García Quintero. Now aged 51, García Quintero has had a similar career, criticizing the regime’s authoritarian excesses and defending dissidents in his blog posts. In 1991, he was held for two weeks on a charge of anti-government propaganda. Thanks to considerable international support, his blog posts are nowadays widely read and are translated into several languages. He could have left Cuba but decided to stay and continue the fight for freedom of information. He has written several posts this year about censorship and the work of independent journalists. The Quinteros embody resistance through writing, and exemplify the difficulties of free speech in Cuba.