

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FEATURE

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## Ten ways to repress a journalist

Governments and other organizations across the world are perfecting techniques to prevent journalists from shining a light on corruption and human rights abuses. From trumped-up charges, removing work licences to murder, here are 10 ways journalists are repressed and prevented from reporting freely and fairly.

### Physical attacks

In some countries such as Syria, Turkmenistan and Somalia, governments, military forces and armed groups attack and even kill journalists who are seen to be critical of their policies and practices.

Last November, Palestinian cameramen Hussam Salameh and journalist Mahmoud al-Koumi, from the Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV, were killed by a targeted Israeli missile strike on their car in Gaza City. Amnesty International found no evidence that either was anything other than a civilian journalist, despite claims by military authorities in **Israel** that both were " Hamas operatives".

In May 2012, 18-year-old citizen journalist Abd al-Ghani Ka'ake was fatally shot by a government sniper in **Syria** while filming a demonstration in Aleppo. Armed opposition groups have also attacked and killed journalists.

Journalist Miguel Ángel López Velasco, his wife and their son were shot and killed at their home in Veracruz, **Mexico**, by unidentified gunmen in June 2011. He had previously received death threats.

Abdihared Osman Aden, from **Somalia**, was shot dead by unidentified men while walking to work on 19 January 2013. He is one of at least 23 journalists killed in the country since 2011.

### Threat of prison

Journalists also risk being charged under legislation that criminalizes the peaceful expression of views, or with trumped-up, politically motivated charges (such as possession of drugs and fraud) to stop them from reporting is common.

On 12 March 2013, Avaz Zeynali was found guilty of bribery, extortion by threats, failure to implement a court decision and tax evasion and sentenced to nine years in prison in **Azerbaijan**. He has regularly reported on corruption and criticised the President's clampdown on the media and activists.

In **Iran**, at least 18 journalists have been arrested since January 2013, accused of cooperating with "anti-revolutionary" media organizations outside Iran. Dozens of journalists and bloggers are now behind bars in Iran.

On 5 February 2013, Abdiaziz Abdnur Ibrahim was sentenced to one-year imprisonment in Mogadishu, **Somalia**, for insulting a national institution after interviewing a woman who reported being raped by government forces. The case was quashed in March by the Supreme Court.

In January 2012, journalists Reyot Alemu and Woubshet Taye were convicted of terrorism offences in **Ethiopia**. During the trial, access to lawyers was restricted, defendants were not

provided with effective interpretation and evidence obtained under coercion was admitted.

### **Harassment**

Many governments find that threatening journalists or their relatives is effective in silencing them.

Relatives of the Voice of America reporter Negar Mohammadi, from **Iran**, have been banned from travelling and the passport of one of them was confiscated in February 2012.

In **Yemen**, Abdul Karim al-Khaiwani has been under threat since early 2013 after he wrote articles about secret detention centres and torture by the First Armoured Division. Weapons were twice fired outside his home and he received anonymous phone calls asking him if he could hear the shooting.

Musa Mohammad Auwal was arrested by the State Security Services in his home in Kaduna, **Nigeria**, last February, held for eight days and interrogated about his news organization and the whereabouts of his Editor-in-Chief (currently in hiding in fear of his life). He was released on bail.

### **Monitoring**

In countries including Cuba and China, activists and journalists find it particularly difficult to report on human rights issues because their communications can be monitored by state officials.

In March 2012, **Cuban** blogger and journalist Yoani Sánchez was unable to receive text messages or calls during the Pope's visit to the country.

In **China** many people were sentenced to long prison terms in 2012 for posting blogs or sending information that was deemed sensitive.

In March 2013, the authorities in **Saudi Arabia** reportedly threatened to block access to Skype, WhatsApp, Viber and Line, if these telecommunication companies do not enable their encrypted applications to be monitored.

### **Banning access to the internet**

Some repressive regimes seek to control internet access in order to regulate journalists' activities.

The authorities in **China** temporarily blocked access to the *New York Times* and *Bloomberg* websites and banned searches for 'New York Times' after the news organizations exposed controversial financial details of some of China's leaders.

### **Set up excessive libel laws**

Libel laws in countries can be misused in an attempt to prevent journalists from criticising government officials and powerful individuals.

In **Timor-Leste** Oscar Maria Salsinha and Raimundo Oki were accused of "slandorous denunciations" after publishing articles on a District Prosecutor who allegedly received a bribe in a traffic accident case that occurred on 18 October 2011.

In August 2012, Islam Affifi, editor of **Egyptian** newspaper *El-Dostor*, was brought to trial for publishing false information "insulting the President". The trial is still continuing.

The **Palestinian Authority's** security forces in the **West Bank** and **Hamas'** Internal Security in the **Gaza Strip** both have a record of interrogating and harassing journalists. In March 2013, Palestinian Mamdouh Hamamreh was sentenced to one year in prison for allegedly insulting President Mahmoud Abbas. He was released after the President pardoned him.

### Removing visas and work permits

In some countries, including Syria, governments deny or remove visas from foreign journalists to stop them from investigating human rights abuses while national journalists face the same risk to their work permits.

In 2011, Ayad Shabi's permit was revoked in **Syria** after he failed to comply with official guidelines provided by the Ministry of Information on how to report on the protests.

Andrzej Poczobut is serving a three-year suspended prison sentence in **Belarus** – imposed in July 2011 – on charges of “libelling the President” for articles about prisoners of conscience in Belarus. Under the conditions of this ruling he has to register with the police regularly and cannot leave the country.

Last August a BBC journalist who had travelled to **Gambia** to report on a resumption of executions was held at the airport and told he had to leave the country, despite having authorization to be there.

In May 2012, Al Jazeera English closed its Beijing bureau in **China** after the authorities refused to renew the visa of Melissa Chan, whose stories included reports on secret jails and forced abortions.

### Failure to investigate attacks against journalists

By failing to bring to justice those responsible for attacks against journalists, governments send the message that preventing reporting on what they see as sensitive issues is permitted.

One of the individuals accused of torturing journalist Nazeera Saeed after she was arrested in **Bahrain** in 2011 was acquitted, despite forensic evidence of her torture. Nazeera was detained and tortured after speaking out about the killing of a protester she witnessed at the Pearl Roundabout.

In April 2012, Idrak Abbasov and Adalet Abbasov were hospitalized in **Azerbaijan** after they were attacked by around 25 state employees and police. They had tried to film illegal house demolitions on the outskirts of Baku. The attack was never fully investigated.

No one has been brought to justice in **Pakistan** for the May 2011 abduction and killing of Saleem Shahzad. Just two days before his death Shahzad published a story on alleged al Qaeda infiltration of the military, one of the most sensitive and taboo topics in the country.

### Shutting down media outlets

The authorities in many countries shut down newspapers and radio stations deemed critical of them.

In the first two months of 2012, the authorities in **Sudan** suspended three newspapers using laws that allow them to ban any publication containing information considered a threat to national security.

Last September, *The Standard* and *Daily News* newspapers in **Gambia** were forced to close after plain-clothed men suspected to be intelligence officers, entered their offices and ordered them to suspend all activities.

In **Somalia**, in April 2013, the authorities in Puntland banned three radio stations in what is seen as the latest in a string of attacks on the media ahead of local elections.

### Promote smear attacks

In many countries, governments promote smear attacks against journalists critical of the authorities.

In **Sri Lanka** a state-sanctioned smear attack forced Gnanasiri Kottegoda to flee his home in 2012 and go into exile as his safety was compromised.

**Venezuelan** Rayma Suprani has been receiving threats and insults via text message and social media sites. She thinks this is a coordinated attack due to her work as a political cartoonist and journalist.