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NEWS MEDIA: A MEN'S PRESERVE THAT IS DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN

WOMEN AND PRESS FREEDOM



**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

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The illustrations for this report come from the Séverine Bourguignon exhibition “**Dolorès**” about discrimination and violence against women. For more information in french: <http://38ruepolonceau.canalblog.com/>

WOMEN AND PRESS FREEDOM

TO MARK INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY TODAY, Reporters Without Borders is releasing a report on the problems of women who work journalists. It reaffirms several important principles, contains interviews with women journalists throughout the world and describes all the different problems they encounter, ranging from everyday discrimination to the most tragic forms of violence.

More and more women have been joining the ranks of journalists in the past 20 years but they still tend to occupy the lowliest jobs within the profession, with executive and editorial positions usually continuing to be the preserve of men. This clearly has an effect on the vision of the world reflected by the media. It is still a largely male world, one from which women are excluded, a world of men made by men.

In many countries, women journalists and human rights activists are the victims of violence, imprisonment, intimidation and censorship, just as men are. Some of them may be preferred targets. The vulnerability of women journalists varies considerably from one geographic region to another.

It is hard not to mention last month's appalling assault on Lara Logan of CBS News in Egypt, at the time of President Hosni Mubarak's fall from power. Reporters Without Borders offers her its entire sympathy. Even if such an incident is exceptional, it is symptomatic of the risks that women run when they work as journalists.



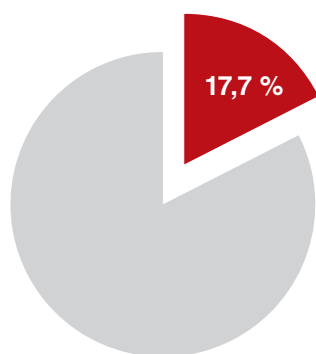
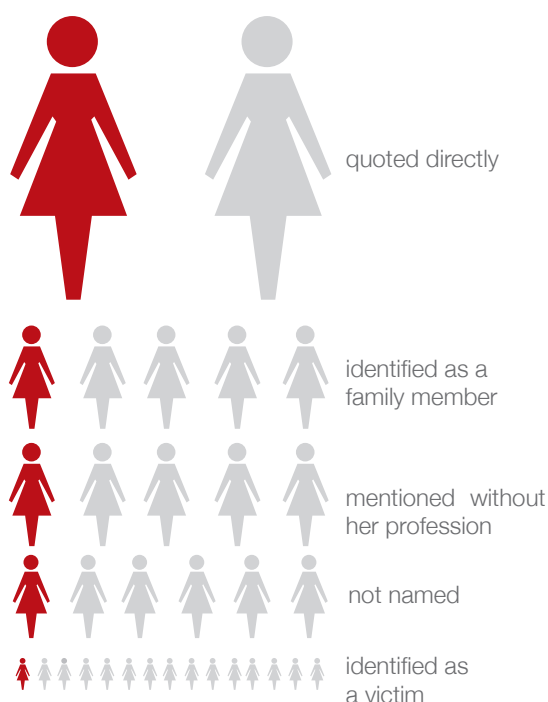
EQUALITY

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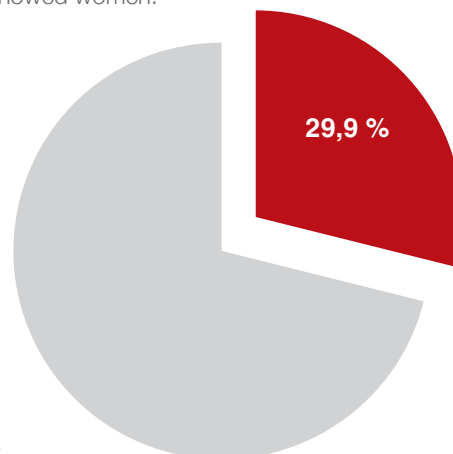
WOMEN ARE NEEDED IN NEWSROOMS FOR PROPER COVERAGE OF THE HIDDEN HALF OF HUMANITY

Equality for men and women still represents a challenge for media plurality. Aside from the basic principle of gender equality, women are needed in newsrooms for proper coverage of the hidden half of humanity, because they have the ability to deal with aspects to which men do not have access.

Several studies show that the media provide little coverage of women, or that the coverage offers a very conventional if not degrading image of women – coverage that is defended on the basis of polls indicating a lack of interest on the part of the public. Women remain largely invisible. A survey carried out by the Paris-based Association of Women Journalists (AFJ) in 70 countries in 2006 found that less than a fifth of the people quoted in articles were women. The situation does not seem to have evolved since then, the AFJ said.



Aside from ads, less than a third of photos showed women.



- 1 in 6 women were not named as against 1 in 33 men.
- 1 in 14 women were identified as a victim as against 1 in 21 men.
- 1 in 5 women were identified as a family member as against 1 in 16 men.
- 1 in 5 women were mentioned without her profession as against 1 in 20 men.
- Fewer than 1 in 2 women were quoted directly, as against more than 1 in 3 men.

DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A JOURNALIST IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES

It is not easy to make your way as a journalist and get access to information when you are a woman in Cameroon. Agnès Taïle, the former host of “You have the word,” a phone-in programme on Douala-based Sweet FM, said: “Women in many sectors, including the press, are often just part of the decor. On radio and TV, they are good for reading press releases, for women’s magazines, or for covering the beauty or health. Those who talk about politics, the economy, science or technology are rare.” The “casting couch” is common practice, not to speak of sexual harassment.

Fellow Cameroonian journalist Rosine Nkonla Azanmene, who works for Yaoundé-based Radio Tiemenie Siantou, condemns the “more or less perverse attitude of certain sources who sometimes go so far as to negotiate information (...) tending to orient the relationship towards sex.” Agnès added: “We also run up against discriminatory rules, such as a ban on women wearing trousers in certain government offices, including the president’s office and the defence ministry. In northern Cameroon it was hard for me to interview religious officials or to enter certain milieux reserved for men.”

The segregation of women journalists obviously parallels the segregation of women in general. Some countries allow them virtually no place at all in journalism. This is especially so in Afghanistan, where “women are excluded from television,” says French war correspondent Anne Nivat. “The few women working as journalists in Afghanistan are regarded as worthless sluts,” she said. “Afghanistan continues to be a country where women do not have the right to speak.”

■ After her editors kept giving her society-related stories to cover, Rosine Nkonla Azanmene joined Dynamic and Caring Female Journalists (JAFEC), an organization created by the Dakar-based journalist Liliane Nyatcha, who works for BBC Africa. JAFEC’s goal is to develop women’s journalistic skills and encourage them to take an interest in all subjects including, politics, economics and science. 🔍

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE, CONFINEMENT AND MARGINALIZATION

Authoritarian regimes, clans and religious groups often treat women journalists harshly. Rwanda, Eritrea, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iran, China, Vietnam and Thailand are all countries where they face the possibility of violence or imprisonment.

The recent case of Agnès Uwimana Nkusi, the editor of the privately-owned bimonthly Umurabyo, and one of her reporters, Saidath Mukakibibi, is one of several in Africa. A Kigali court convicted them on 4 February on charges of inciting civil disobedience, causing divisions and denying the 1994 genocide, sentencing Nkusi to 17 years in prison and Mukakibibi to seven years. The authorities had been irked by their coverage of several sensitive issues including the June 2010 murder of Jean-Léonard Rugambage, the editor of the newspaper Umuvugizi, and the attempted murder of an exiled Rwandan military officer, Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa, the same month in South Africa.

In Eritrea (ranked last in the Reporters Without Borders annual press freedom index), Yirgalem Fisseha has languished in prison since February 2009, when she and all the other employees were arrested during a raid on Radio Bana. Originally from Adi Keyih, a town south of Asmara, near the Ethiopian border, and a graduate of the Asmara Teachers’ Training College, she is one of Eritrea’s few women journalists. Before the independent media were all closed in September 2001, she was an art critic for the privately-owned weekly Addis Zemen. She also wrote for Hadas Eritrea, a state-owned daily, and Tigrita, a newspaper linked to the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students.

Abuse of women, including abuses sanctioned by tradition and genital mutilation, are subjects that often only women journalists can tackle but they run great risks when ➤

► they do so. Four journalists – Manjama Balama-Samba, Henrietta Kpaka of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, Isha Jalloh and Jenneh Brima of Eastern Radio – were kidnapped in Sierra Leone in February 2009 by members of Bondo, a traditional secret society that practices female genital mutilation.

After they were held overnight, Balama-Samba was stripped of her clothes and forced to walk naked down the street. The journalists had been conducting a series of interviews jointly with the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices for International Day of Zero Tolerance of Female Genital Mutilation, celebrated on 6 February. The Bondo group regarded their questions and comments as a sign of disrespect for their traditions.

WOMEN, MOTORS OF FREE EXPRESSION

In several countries that crack down on independent journalism, it is women who have been pushing hardest against the restrictions on free expression, often at the cost of their own freedom.

Thai journalist Chiranuch Premchaiporn (also known as Jiew), editor of the news website Prachatai and founder member of the Thai Citizens Network, has been arrested several times and is currently facing up to 70 years in prison on a range of charges for her objective coverage of the political turmoil in Bangkok in 2010. Her website has been repeatedly censored and has had to keep changing its Internet address. It is another woman, Natalia Radzina, who runs the Charter 97 news website in Belarus. She was one of the leading victims of the crackdown on the protests that followed President Lukashenko's disputed reelection last December. Freed after a month in detention, she is still facing a possible 15-year jail sentence on a charge of "participating in riots." These two women are on the frontline of the fight for free expression.

The young blogger Le Nguyen Huong Tra was arrested last October after posting a blog entry accusing Vietnam's deputy public security minister of granting favours to a beauty queen who was his son's mistress. Tra covered political issues with humour and her blog was one of the most popular in Vietnam, where freedom of expression has been subject to steadily increasing restrictions. She was released in January pending trial and her blog has been shut down.

Hla Hla Win, 26, was a video reporter in Burma for the Oslo-based Democratic Voice of Burma but since late 2009 she has been serving a 27-year jail sentence for covering such subjects as villages that lack drinking water and child soldiers who have deserted, and for interviewing Buddhist monks about their imprisoned colleagues. She is one of a total of 15 bloggers and journalists currently detained in Burma, where the military government has been pursuing people who send video and photos to exile news media and opposition groups ever since the Saffron Revolution in 2007.

It would be hard not to mention Hu Shuli, the star of investigative journalism in China, who has covered corruption, censorship of the government's handling of the SARS epidemic and the role of poor-quality construction in the high death toll in the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan. She resigned as editor of the business magazine *Caijing* in late 2009 after pressure from the owners, who wanted less confrontation with the authorities. She is now running a new publication, *Century Weekly*, where her fame seems to be shielding her from judicial harassment.



REPORTING AND CAMPAIGNING

JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM OFTEN GO HAND IN HAND. IN COUNTRIES WHERE THE AUTHORITIES TRY TO COVER UP POVERTY AND INJUSTICE, EXPOSING PROBLEMS IS TANTAMOUNT TO DEMANDING THAT THEY BE ADDRESSED.

Jila Baniyaghoob has spent all her life fighting for journalism and free speech in one of the world's most repressive countries for the news media – Iran. Now aged 40, she has worked for 16 publications during her 15-year career, including Capital, where she created a “Society” and “Women” section. All of them have been closed by the authorities. She has also been a war reporter in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq.

In recent years, she has edited Focus on Iranian Women (<http://www.irwomen.info/>), a website that campaigns against laws that discriminate against women. Two other well-known websites provide a similar combination of news reporting and social activism: The Feminist School (<http://www.feministschool.com/>), edited by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, and Change For Equality (<http://www.sign4change.info/>), edited by Parvin Ardalan, winner of the 2010 Reporters Without Borders Netizen Prize.

Being a woman, journalist and press freedom activist is all one and the same thing for Baniyaghoob, who began at a very early age to combat her country's paternalist culture. It is no surprise that women have played a leading role in the anti-government demonstrations that have been taking place since 2007. The Ahmadinejad administration's reactionary policies towards women have pushed them into the front-line of the resistance. The victim of both violence and imprisonment, Baniyaghoob was recently banned from working as a journalist for 30 years.

This is how Magali Norvis Otero Suárez, 47, a Cuban dissident journalist based in Havana (Hablemos Press), described her work as an independent journalist in Cuba: “Our role as journalists is to resist the Castro regime and expose

everything that it has always tried to cover up. The government wants people to believe there are no problems, that everything is fine in public health and education. By publishing our articles, we try to combat these lies, we try to let the world know what is happening in Cuba.”

Women are fighting in Tunisia as well. Sihem Bensedrine created the Monitoring Centre for Press Freedom, Publishing and Creation (OLPEC) and, together with her husband, Omar Mesteri, founded Radio Kalima, which has repeatedly been targeted by the political police. Its premises have been attacked and placed under seal and its equipment has been seized. Its satellite broadcasting was also stopped but it continued as a web radio. Bensedrine has been jailed, harassed, forced into exile and targeted by the

Ben Ali regime's smear campaigns. She returned to Tunisia the day that President Ben Ali fled the country, 14 January 2011.

“Women got special treatment under Ben Ali,” she

said. “As press freedom activists, we were seen as pariahs by the regime. The former president regarded demands and denunciation as acts of rebellion against him in person. We suffered every kind of repression. We were deprived of resources, communication and transport. We were under constant police surveillance and exposed to physical attacks. The regime's newspapers treated us as sluts and prostitutes. We were accused of holding orgies. I was the victim of all-out smear campaigns. You have to understand that the status of women was the Ben Ali regime's showcase. So we were doubly guilty. We were the ones contradicting the official propaganda.”

UNDER BEN ALI, {...} WE WERE SEEN AS PARIAHS BY THE REGIME. THE FORMER PRESIDENT REGARDED DEMANDS AND DENUNCIATION AS ACTS OF REBELLION AGAINST HIM IN PERSON. {...}

ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN

Several women from countries such as the Philippines and Cuba gave a very different kind of account of how they have been able to make their way as journalists and even turn the fact that they are women to their advantage.

Philippine writer and journalist Marites Dañguilan Vitug, who heads the board of the online news magazine Newsbreak (www.newsbreak.ph), said: "I would say that as a woman I have a certain facility for doing this job. People trust me more readily, I get information more easily than I think my male colleagues do. But it was hard starting out. I remember my editor at Business Day, where I began in the 1980s, bluntly asking me to choose between my family life and my work. In fact I chose both. Things have changed a lot since then and women are in a lot of key positions. The publishers of two big dailies, the Philippine Daily Inquirer and Philippine Star, are women, Letty Jimenez and Amy Pamintuan. The news chiefs of two leading TV stations are women – Jessica Soho at GMA7 TV and Luchi Valdez at TV5."

A similar view was voiced by Magali Norvis Otero Suárez. Otero covers "the news but also the system, human rights violations, the prisons and so on" – subjects that irritate the Castro regime. She thinks it is less dangerous for a woman to be an independent journalist in Cuba than a man. "They don't hit women when we go to cover demonstrations. The police are less violent towards us."

INVISIBLE WOMAN, UNDERCOVER REPORTER

■ French war correspondent Anne Nivat, winner of the Albert Londres Prize, has covered Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq: "It has been easier for me as a woman to do my work because women count for nothing in Iraq and Afghanistan and no one pays them any attention. You can see without being seen. Unlike our male colleagues, a woman journalist can pass relatively unnoticed. She can get through checkpoints. No one mistrusts her. But it is all to do with my method of working, total immersion in the local population. I dress like a local woman, with a burqa that allows me to go through very hostile environments. In countries at war, the population is always caught in the crossfire, between insurgents and regular army. While the men are at the front, the women try to survive. I have had privileged access to women thanks to men who have brought me into their families. Countries at war tend to turn in on themselves and become very conservative. Women's rights always suffer." 🔍



RELATIVES WHO CONTINUE THE FIGHT

Reporters Without Borders would also like to pay tribute to the wives of journalists and human rights activists who have been killed or imprisoned. In many cases, they married not only a man but also a cause, and they have continued the fight on behalf of their husband. In Cuba, the Ladies in White – the wives and mothers of dissidents who have been jailed since the 2003 Black Spring crackdown – march every Sunday to demand the release of the Castro regime's prisoners of conscience.

Sri Lanka's Sonali Samarasinghe Wickrematunga, a lawyer who has had to flee abroad, continues to demand the truth about the death of her husband, Sunday Leader editor Lasantha Wickrematunga, who was gunned down in January 2009. Sandya Ekneligoda recently complained to the Sri Lanka's authorities about the lack of any significant police investigation into the disappearance of her husband, Lanka-e-News cartoonist and journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda, who went missing in Colombo in January 2010. In the Philippines, the families of the 32 journalists who were massacred by members of a provincial governor's private militia on the southern island of Mindanao continue to demand justice.

In China, Liu Xia has been under house arrest since October 2010, when the Nobel Committee announced that it was awarding the peace prize to her husband, the jailed dissident and human rights activist Liu Xiaobo. Her fate shows that the government's persecution of dissident activists extends to their families and loved-ones. When Liu Xia managed to connect to the Internet for a few minutes on 17 February, she told a friend that she felt "miserable," that the family was being held "hostage" and that "no one can help us." She was last able to visit her husband in prison in October 2010. Since then she has been kept in complete isolation.

Blogger and human rights activist Zeng Jinyan, whose husband, the well-known human rights activist Hu Jia, has been jailed since December 2007, is herself under house arrest and subject to constant police surveillance. She and her husband jointly founded Loving Source, a now closed NGO that cared for the orphans of peasants who had died as a result of exposure to HIV-contaminated blood. The Chinese authorities do everything possible to cut off dissident activists and journalists from the outside world in order to demoralize them and those close to them.

ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT FOR EXILES

Threats and violence force many women journalists to flee into exile. Of the 213 cases of financial assistance and support for asylum requests handled by the Reporters Without Borders Assistance Desk in 2010, between 10 and 15 per cent concerned women, most of them from Iran, where there has been a ruthless crackdown on government opponents, human rights activists and journalists since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in June 2009.

As regards protecting women journalists, the priorities for Reporters Without Borders are:

- finding a safe refuge when the journalist's physical safety is threatened
- making the authorities aware of the issues involved
- more jobs for women in the media, the disparity in many countries being so great that more representation would necessarily increase acceptance of women journalists and reduce the number of cases of violence against them.

At the initiative of its vice-president, Safia Otokoré, the government of the French region of Burgundy has decided to establish a Residence for Women Journalists in the region's capital, Dijon. The project will accommodate three women refugee journalists at a time for periods of up to a year and will provide them with training, medical and psychological follow-up and assistance with administrative procedures and applications. Reporters Without Borders will help to choose beneficiaries and identify their needs.

Reporters Without Borders supports the idea that several countries should set up specific programmes for the protection of women journalists. This should be done in coordination with women's rights groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the interviews carried out for this report. Reporters Without Borders recommends :

- Establishing specific programmes for the protection of women journalists.
- Reinforcing cooperation between women's rights organizations and press freedom organizations
- Creating residences for women journalists.
- Supporting entities that provide journalism training specifically for women.
- Creating women journalists' associations and promoting exchanges with organizations already existing in other countries.



INFORMATIONS

CHOISIR LA CAUSE DES FEMMES: <http://www.choisirlacauseledesfemmes.org/>

The Paris-based NGO Choisir la Cause des Femmes was created in July 1971 by the philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir (its first president), the lawyer Gisèle Halimi, the French Academy member Jean Rostand, the novelist Christiane Rochefort and the biologist Jacques Monod (a winner of the Nobel prize in medicine). It combats all forms of discrimination against women.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MEDIA FOUNDATION : <http://www.iwmf.org/>

The International Women's Media Foundation is organizing a conference in Washington DC from 22 to 25 March 2011 for leading media women from all over the world to discuss gender barriers in the news business. A global report on women in the news media will be released during the conference.

THE PARIS-BASED **ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES JOURNALISTES:** <http://www.femmes-journalistes.asso.fr/>

THE ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION has released a new version of "Ethics in action - Women Speak Out." It contains 43 interviews with women from India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, Nepal and Bangladesh: <http://www.ethicsinaction.asia/archive/2010-ethics-in-action/vol.-4-no.-5-october-2010.>



International Secretariat

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

47 rue Vivienne, 75002 Paris, France - Tel: 33 1 4483-8484 - Fax: 33 1 4523-1151 - Website: www.rsf.org - E-mail: rsf@rsf.org - Ambroise Pierre - Africa desk: afrique@rsf.org - Benoît Hervieu - Americas desk: americas@rsf.org - Vincent Brossel - Asia desk: asie@rsf.org - Johann Bihl - Europe desk: europa@rsf.org - Soazig Dollet - Middle East desk: moyen-orient@rsf.org - Lucie Morillon - Internet desk: internet@rsf.org - Press contact: presse@rsf.org

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS is an international press freedom organisation. It monitors and reports violations of media freedom throughout the world. Reporters Without Borders analyses the information it obtains and uses press releases, letters, investigative reports and recommendations to alert public opinion to abuses against journalists and violations of free expression, and to put pressure on politicians and government officials.

General secretary : **Jean-Francois Julliard** | Chief Editor : **Gilles Lordet**