

FCO List of Imprisoned Journalists

The FCO Freedom of Expression panel agrees a list of imprisoned journalists every year. The criteria for choosing those who feature on the list are:

- Overall severity of restrictions on freedom of the media
- Severity of the individual case
- The effect inclusion on the list may have in resolving the case

The FCO raises the cases of those that appear on the list in ministerial and other high-level exchanges with the governments concerned. Where appropriate we also encourage the EU to take action. The FCO reports back in detail to the FCO Freedom of Expression panel on the action it has taken on each case.

The list below was agreed by the Freedom of Expression panel in February 2004. It includes details of the individual case as well as a brief overview of the general climate of freedom of expression in that country.

U Win Tin

74 years old U Win Tin was Vice President of the Burmese Writers Association and a prominent journalist. He was amongst the founders of the National League of Democracy (NLD) and served on its Central Executive Committee. He was arrested on 4 July 1989 during a nation wide crackdown on the opposition by the authorities. Sentenced in total to no more than 20 years imprisonment in the notorious Insein Prison, he has twice had his prison sentence extended, including for writing about prison conditions.

Burma has been under the control of oppressive military regimes for over 40 years. During this period all media outlets have been rigorously censored. Respect for the basic rights of freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association are non-existent. It is a country where peaceful expression of opinion can lead to long term imprisonment. Over 1350 political prisoners remain in detention.

Pham Hong Son

Pro-democracy activist Dr Pham Hong Son was jailed following a half-day trial in June 2003 for five years (reduced from 13 on appeal) plus three years probation for translating and circulating a piece entitled 'What is democracy?' from the US State Department website from English into Vietnamese. He was charged with espionage. He is a high-profile dissident and member of the 21-strong self-described 'democracy group' which petitioned the authorities for peaceful political reform in 2002. He is reported to be being kept in solitary confinement at Nam Ha detention camp, south of Hanoi.

Vietnam has severe restrictions on freedom of expression. Despite constitutional safeguards, there is no free media in Vietnam. All media are state-controlled and may not report on sensitive issues. The media's role is regarded as mouthpiece of the regime. Foreign journalists also face numerous restrictions, foreign publications are

occasionally censored and foreign websites blocked (eg, the BBC's Vietnamese language service). Internet use is taking off, but new regulations seek to restrict access and ban 'subversive' material. Vietnamese websites must be registered with the government and their content vetted before being posted. As well as blocking 'subversive' websites, ISPs are required to allow security services to monitor usage. Even individuals are encouraged to inform on those 'violating rules'. Another well-known cyber-dissident is Nguyen Vu Binh sentenced in December 2003 to seven years prison plus three years probation for 'espionage'.

Manuel Vazquez Portal - RELEASED

Vazquez Portal received 18 years for allegedly endangering Cuba's independence under law 88 by contributing articles to CubaNet website and Radio Martí. He is a well known poet and author who started his career writing for the government press before falling out of favour. He continued to write from prison. He was born in Ciego de Avila.

Cuba has been described by Reporters Without Borders as 'The world's biggest prison for journalists'. There are no legal independent newspapers and those who seek to provide alternative information are heavily punished. A new crackdown on internet access looks to restrict access to independent news sources further. A third of those arrested in the March 2003 crackdown in Cuba were independent journalists. They were sentenced under Law 88 which specifically prohibits the passing of information to foreign media outlets. Law 88 is in itself a breach of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which includes the right 'to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers'. The government have made it clear that they are prepared to use this law again in the future to crackdown on the independent press.

Siamak Pourzand

Siamak Pourzand, a freelance journalist for several independent newspapers, has been imprisoned since 24 November 2001. In May 2002, he was convicted of having undermined state security through having links with monarchists and counter-revolutionaries and sentenced to eleven years in prison. There are credible reports that Mr Pourzand, now 72-years old, was forced to make a confession under duress. Despite worsening health problems, he remains in solitary confinement in the basement of Evin Jail.

Iran. In November 2003, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression visited Iran. He noted that the actual exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression has deteriorated over the past few years. The number of publications closed down and the number of people arrested, prosecuted and sentenced for the peaceful expression of their opinion has increased. He also underlined that a climate of fear induced by the systematic repression of people expressing critical views against the authorized political and religious doctrine and the functioning of institutions, coupled with the severity and disproportion of the sentences imposed, led to self-censorship on the part of many journalists, intellectuals, politicians, students and the population at large.

Ruslan Sharipov - RELEASED ON PROBATION

The journalist and human rights activist Ruslan Sharipov was arrested with two colleagues on 26 May 2003 for homosexuality (under article 120 of the criminal code) and for allegedly having sex with minors (article 128). The FCO believes that the accusations were politically motivated and were linked to Sharipov's criticisms of the Uzbek government and his accusations of widespread police corruption. In a letter of 5 September to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Sharipov explained that his guilty plea on 8 August had been the result of physical and psychological torture. On 25 September, Sharipov's earlier conviction was upheld on appeal and he was sentenced to four years in prison. On 22 December the Uzbek authorities announced that Sharipov would not be pardoned in a general amnesty announced by President Karimov. However, under the amnesty, his sentence was reduced to just over three years. On 13 March he was reportedly transferred to a detention centre near Tashkent best described as an open prison. Sharipov was reportedly allowed to live with a relative who lived close by but was effectively under house arrest. On 23 June a district court in Khamzincki sentenced him to community service in Bukhara, approximately 600 kilometres away from the capital and where he has no family, for the remainder of his sentence. However, Sharipov cannot leave the city without prior police permission.

Uzbekistan. Since Uzbekistan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the development of a free press has been stifled. A system of self-censorship effectively silences criticism of government policies. Defamation and libel of the president remain criminal offences and carry long terms of imprisonment. The Uzbek authorities also physically harass, threaten and assault journalists. A system of annual registration of media bodies has further helped the authorities to control both domestic and international media.

Jiang Weiping

Jiang is a high-profile journalist who has won a number of international awards recognising his work. A former northeast China bureau chief for the Hong Kong based "Wen Hui Bao" newspaper, he was arrested in December 2000 after writing a series of articles for the Hong Kong publication "Qianshao" exposing corruption among senior officials in northeastern Chinese cities. He was sentenced to eight years imprisonment on 25 January 2002 for "revealing state secrets" and "inciting to subvert state power". His sentence was reduced to six years on appeal in December 2002. As of December 2003 he has served half of his sentence and is now eligible for parole.

China. The Chinese authorities put severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and information. Strict internet regulations came into force in August 2002. The Chinese authorities have the technology to scan websites and emails for subversive or obscene content and have blocked over 19,000 websites including those of the BBC and other international organisations. Censorship of print and broadcast media is carried out both through official state censorship and, more widely, through self-

ensorship. There are as many as 30 people jailed for expressing their views on-line as well as a number of media professionals imprisoned.

Abdallah Zouari - RELEASED

Abdallah Zouari was a journalist with the unofficial Islamist newspaper "Al Fajr". He had been under house arrest since his release from prison on 6 June 2002, after 11 years in prison. On 18 July 2003, he was sentenced to four months in prison for libel. He was sentenced to a further nine months in prison for "failing to obey an administrative order" in August 2003. Two appeal hearings upheld the earlier sentences.

Tunisia. Freedom of expression remains curtailed in Tunisia. A provision of the new electoral law criminalises access to foreign media by political figures during the forthcoming election campaign. Authorities use the broad provisions of the press code prohibiting subversion and defamation to prosecute people who express dissenting opinions. Independent and opposition newspapers and magazines exist, but printers and publishers must provide copies of all publications to the Tunisian authorities in advance. The state maintains a monopoly on radio and television. The internet is available but the monitoring regime is one of the strictest in the world. Tunisia will be hosting the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2005.

Ram Krishna Adhikari - RELEASED

A journalist with the weekly Sanghu and the radio station Times FM, Ram Krishna Adhikari went missing on 10 December 2003 shortly after attending a meeting held by the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal (HURON). Colleagues say that he was arrested by plain-clothes police who accused him of supporting the Maoists. He was released after 15 days in detention.

Nepal. There are at least 15 journalists currently being detained in Nepal. Since November 2001, the security forces have been arresting journalists accused of supporting the Maoist rebellion without regard for national and international law. Dozens have been detained, some of them tortured for writing articles in pro-Maoist newspapers or for criticising the authorities. Up until 15 July 2004, the Nepalese authorities were responsible for the death of eight journalists, 13 journalists have disappeared and their whereabouts are still unknown, and 68 journalists have been arrested once or several times and later released. The Maoists have killed three journalists and a further two have disappeared in areas under their control.

Fesshaye Johannes

Fesshaye Johannes, editor of the weekly Setit, was jailed without charges in September 2001 along with other prominent members of the Eritrean press. Setit was the country's the largest-circulation newspaper, covering social problems including poverty, prostitution, and Eritrea's lack of facilities to care for handicapped war veterans. Just nine days before his arrest, Johannes published an open letter to the government in which he wrote, "People can tolerate hunger and other problems for a long time, but they can't tolerate the absence of good administration and justice." Johannes and the other journalists have been held incommunicado since their arrest.

Additionally, their bank accounts have been frozen and their assets seized by the state. Johannes was the 2002 recipient of the CPJ International Press Freedom Award.

Eritrea's record on respecting freedom of expression has not improved in recent years. The 1997 constitution which provides for an independent press and free speech has not come into force and there is no evidence that it will come into force in the near future. The media commission, set up to prepare for an independent media, has still not reported and the independent press remains closed. The government does not allow independent NGOs to operate.

Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury

Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury is the editor and publisher of the tabloid weekly "Blitz". He was arrested on 29 November 2003 on his way to travel to Israel and charged with passport violations. On 24 February 2004 he was formally charged with sedition. Evidence used against him included articles that he had written about the rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh. His family claim that he has been denied essential medical treatment.

Bangladesh is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a journalist. In 2003 Reporters Without Borders recorded at least 210 journalists who were assaulted or received death threats. Fifteen journalists were arrested by the authorities. Collusion between local politicians and organized crime has created a culture of fear that prevents the open reporting of key subjects, including corruption. The government has not done enough to curb the violence and in many cases, members of the ruling party have been implicated in the assaults.

Update on Previous Lists:

The FCO published its first list of ten journalists of concern in July 2001. Below are the journalists whose names have featured on previous lists. We have taken action in each case and will continue to do so until every journalist on the list is released.

Bangladesh	Saleem Samad	<i>Released</i>
Belarus	Viktor Ivashkevich	<i>Released December 2003</i>
Belarus	Nikolai Markevich	<i>Released</i>
Belarus	Pavel Mzaheiko	<i>Released</i>
Burma	Aung Pwint	<i>still in prison</i>
Burma	Ko Sein Ohn	<i>still in prison</i>
Burma	U Sein Hla Oo	<i>still in prison</i>
China	Huang Qi	<i>still in prison</i>
China	Qi Yanchen	<i>Released October 2003</i>
China	Liu Jingsheng	<i>still in prison</i>
Cuba	Marta Beatrice Roque	<i>Released June 2004</i>
Cuba	Raul Rivero	<i>still in prison</i>
Cuba	Oscar Chepe	<i>still in prison</i>
Cuba	Bernardo Arevalo Padron	<i>Released November 2003</i>
Cuba	Carlos Brizuela Yera	<i>still in prison</i>
Cuba	Lester Tellez Castro	<i>still in prison</i>

DRC	Raymond Kabala	<i>Released</i>
DRC	Delly Bonsange	<i>Released</i>
Eritrea	Medhanie Haile	still in prison
Eritrea	Simret Seyoum	still in prison
Ethiopia	Tewodros Cassa	awaiting update
Iran	Akhbar Ganji	awaiting update
Kazakhstan	Sergei Duvanov	<i>Released on parole January 2004</i>
Nepal	Govinda Acharya	awaiting update
Nepal	Om Sharma	<i>Released</i>
Russia	Grigori Pasko	<i>Released 2003</i>
Tunisia	Zouhair Yahyaoui	<i>Released November 2003</i>
Uzbekistan	Madzhid Abduraimov	still in prison
Uzbekistan	Jusuf Ruzimuradov	still in prison – penal colony 64/33 Shakhali, Karshi
Uzbekistan	Mamadali Makhmudov	still in prison – Chirlik prison
Uzbekistan	Muhammad Bekzhon	still in prison – penal colony 64/46, Navoi
Vietnam	Nguyen Xuan Tu	<i>(Scheduled for release March 2003 but whereabouts unknown)</i>
Vietnam	Nguyen Dinh Huy	Still in prison – Xuan Loc Detention Camp