

A HIGH PRICE |

Status Report 2019



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A High Price for Important Journalism

Across the globe, an increasing number of states are cracking down on freedom of expression. In many places, it is virtually non-existent. Writing, speaking or in any way expressing opposing views on a given topic entails enormous risks. Threats, persecution, arrest, imprisonment and torture are only a few of the horrors facing those who speak out.

This status report addresses the situation in five countries in which freedom of expression is limited. In it, journalists and human rights defenders will testify to how severe the consequences are. What unites them is the high price they have had to pay for doing their job. Not only have they been arrested, imprisoned and threatened with their life; they have been rejected by their friends and families, slandered and harassed. The consequences of their work and dedication have severely impacted their social lives.

Living in constant fear has pushed journalists and opinion makers toward self-censorship. The silencing of these voices is harmful to a democratic society. We must work together to change this.



Anders L Petterson
Executive Director
Civil Rights Defenders

More Dangerous Than Ever

To openly report about the situation in Azerbaijan has never been as dangerous as it is right now. The government's control over the media and civil society has increased. As a result, the situation for journalists is becoming more and more dangerous and vulnerable.



The Situation in Azerbaijan

In 2014, plummeting oil prices and governmental concern for the rebellions of the Arabic Spring led to rigorous restrictions on the civil society in Azerbaijan. The state's control over the country tightened and leaders within the civil society were arrested, international organisations were forced out of the country and media that had raised their voice against the government was shut down. Ever since, freedom of expression exists only on social media, partially operated from abroad. Journalists, as well as private individuals, are not allowed to express their opinions on the personal life or finances of the ruling family, the Aliyev's, as well as any negative opinions directed towards the military.



Khadija Ismayilova

Khadija Ismayilova is a prominent investigative journalist from Azerbaijan. She was awarded the Right Livelihood Award in 2017 but was not able to receive it in Stockholm since the Azerbaijan regime imposed a travel ban on her. Khadija investigates corruption, and in 2014 she took part in exposing the corrupt dealings between TeliaSonera and the Aliyev's. Later that year, she was arrested and imprisoned for 537 days before finally being released on probation.

 @khadija_ismayil



In Azerbaijan, there is no massmedia that is not controlled by the regime.

Under Military Control

Despite the transition from a military to a civilian government in 2016 and the promises of democratic reform, the Burmese military retains control of the country. Human rights defenders are increasingly subjected to arrests and other attempts to silence their voices.



The Situation in Burma

The hopes of increased freedom of the press were shattered to pieces as two Reuters reporters were imprisoned in 2017, convicted of violating laws of state secrecy. Journalists and editors testify that their reporting often results in trials, arrests and censorship. Articles and social media posts about the military are met with slander charges. In October 2019, five young members of the satirical poetry group Peacock Generation were sentenced to one year in prison for “undermining the military” in one of their theatre performances.



Esther Htu San

Journalist Esther Htu San, born and raised in Kachin State, is the author of the world’s most expensive article, to be found behind the paywall in our campaign. Esther has been a correspondent for the Associated Press, AP, since 2013. In 2016, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her reports on human trafficking and slavery in the South Asian seafood industry. A year later, she was forced to flee her country due to repeated threats as a result of her revealing report on the Burmese government’s treatment of minority groups such as the Rohingya people.

 [@estherhtusan11](#)



During the first six months of 2019, eleven journalists and editors were prosecuted on eight different charges due to their journalistic efforts.

*According to Athan, a Burma activist organisation fighting for freedom of speech.

The Country Where Time Stands Still

Since the 1960s, freedom of expression in Cuba has been severely limited. The country lacks both the legal and the practical tools required for people to be able to form opinions on political issues, and it is very difficult for journalists to report on the situation in the country.



The Situation in Cuba

Following the revolution in 1959, the Cuban government consecutively shut down all independent media. For decades, reaching nonpartisan media was essentially impossible. In the past few years, an increasing number of independent media have taken up reporting on the situation by establishing themselves online. However, it is in vain. These media outlets are considered illegal and can therefore not be reached by the Cuban population. In Cuba today, it is impossible to start or establish an independent newspaper, TV channel or radio station by legal means. There is not a single independent organisation or political party in the country. Although the Cuban constitution ensures the population freedom of expression, legislation can still be turned against those who criticise the government. Therefore, raising your voice in Cuba is risky.



María Elena Mir Marrero

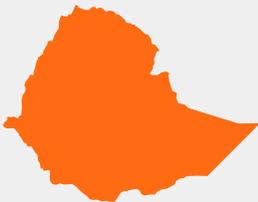
María Elena Mir Marrero is a human rights defender who has been fighting for freedom of expression and association in Cuba for many years. She is the leader of a movement working for democratisation. Because of her commitment, she has been arrested several times, banned from leaving the country and repeatedly threatened and harassed. In September 2019, the police broke into her home and seized all her valuables.



The only national Cuban newspaper is also the official organ of the Communist Party.

A Critical Situation

Ethiopia is facing major challenges. Despite recent years' positive changes to improve a critical situation for journalists and opinion makers in the country, the situation is still very uncertain.



The Situation in Ethiopia

For decades, Ethiopia has been one of the countries with the highest number of imprisoned journalists, with many domestic journalists living in exile. In 2018, the country initiated reforms to increase the freedom of expression and media. By releasing journalists, giving amnesty to those previously convicted and to banned media, Ethiopia managed to improve their score on the 2019 Global Freedom Index.

But the reforms are facing major challenges. On one hand, online and offline media is overflowing with hate speech promoting ethnic tensions and violence. On the other hand, the state is starting to arrest journalists and threaten media. In many parts of the country, the fragile security situation poses a serious threat to the freedom of expression.



Befekadu Hailu Techanie

Befekadu Hailu Techanie is an Ethiopian journalist and award-winning human rights defender. As a founding member of the blog collective Zone 9, he was imprisoned for more than a year, falsely accused of terrorism. Since his release, Befekadu has continued his activism and journalism, including being the leader of a human rights group in Ethiopia.

 [@befeqe](#)
[@CARDEthiopia](#)



At least four journalists were imprisoned in Ethiopia in the beginning of 2019.

No Space for Freedom of Expression

According to many human rights defenders, the situation in Turkey is worse than ever. The number of detained journalists is growing at the same time as the censorship laws are becoming stricter. This combination leaves very little space for freedom of expression.



The Situation in Turkey

In the last few years, Turkey has been ranked as the country with the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world. The country has received severe criticism both for the high number of arrests, but also for the inhumane methods used to punish those whose opinions do not correspond with those of the government. Moreover, Turkey takes the lead in terms of internet censorship, making it immensely difficult for citizens to spread the word about their situation. Doing so would be “an insult to the Turkish nation”, and thus a violation of Turkish law, which is specifically aimed at limiting freedom of expression. The legal system is using this and other legal provisions to silence any critical voices.



Nurcan Baysal

Nurcan Baysal is a Kurdish journalist and human rights defender. Nurcan has reported on war crimes and human rights violations committed by the Turkish regime for years. Because of her journalism, she has been threatened, smeared, arrested and accused of spreading terrorist propaganda. Nurcan has been involved in founding several organisations and is an important voice for peace in the region.

 @baysal_nurcan



In the three months between the 1 July and 31 September 2019, Turkey brought 212 journalists to trial.