

# CJFE

## reporter

2000 – Issue 2

## Security forces target media at Windsor protest



KEVIN FRAYER/CP PHOTO ARCHIVE

RCMP hit eight photographers with pepper spray at a protest on June 4 against the Organization of American States meeting in Windsor, Ontario. "The first row of police advanced with shields. Then a second row ... sprayed from between the shields so you couldn't see where it was coming from," said Rob Gurdebeeke of the *Windsor Star*. Also sprayed: Chris Bolin (*National Post*), Taras Kovaliv (*Globe and Mail*), Jeff Kowalski (AFP), Kevin Frayer (CP), and Ted Rhodes (*Windsor Star*). CJFE wrote to the prime minister and issued an IFEX alert protesting the incident (see [www.cjfe.org](http://www.cjfe.org)).



TED ANDKILDE

"I think they just didn't want us to take more photos," said freelance photographer Ted Andkilde (above). "He aimed the thing right in my eyes and blasted it." Covering his eyes with one hand, Andkilde then took a photo (right) of the officer with the other.

## Cuban independent journalism struggles to survive

by *Brendan Howley*

The phone line to Havana crackles and hums like an old sewing machine, but Tania Quintero's voice cuts through the static. She is as tough as her gravelly speech.

She has to be to survive as one of three Cuba Press correspondents still transmitting stories of daily life in the island's capital to Miami, Mexico City, and

San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Daughter of the bodyguard to the head of the Cuban Communist Party, Quintero is on first-name terms with the party elite and was a party member herself until 1995. She was once a woman-in-the-street investigative reporter who appeared to hounded municipal bureaucrats and party officials on air, but actually followed a script.

Disgusted with the lies and

unable to report what she saw daily around her, she quit state television.

"I am not a capitalist or pro-American. But what the revolution has become is a tragedy for the Cuban people," she says.

Quintero began to write for the Cuba Press group, supported by a sparse monthly stipend from Reporters Sans Frontières in 1995. Some 30 journalists reported via collect phone calls abroad or

smuggled reports with friendly foreign embassy staffers bound for the United States or Spain. Offshore media rarely paid them and if they did, the money was often seized at the island's only hard currency bank by the Cuban secret police, the DSE, which assigned a special section to the journalists. Cuba Press reports caused a sensation on the island when broadcast back on U.S.-

— continues on page 7

**Sikh journalists continue to work under threat in Canada** p 3

**IFEX annual meeting shows global fight for free expression** p 4-5

**Algérie: la presse souffre toujours malgré la démocratisation** p 6

**Smuggled magazines and shortwave radio in Burma** p 8

# Journalists in distress turn to CJFE fund



Daniel Békoutou helped bring a dictator to justice, then needed help himself.

by Lisa Roberts

Daniel Békoutou was key to helping a coalition of local and international non-government organizations bring charges of torture against former president of Chad Hissene Habré, who has lived in Senegal since his 1990 overthrow. Originally from Chad himself, Békoutou had moved to Senegal in 1995 to work as a journalist with the Dakar daily *Walfadjri*.

On January 26, he published an article that chronicled the disappearance of two Senegalese nationals amongst the some 40,000 Chad citizens who perished during Habré's rule. More important, he co-ordinated media relations for the NGOs bringing forth the

charges. He convinced local and international media to embargo the story until the day after the indictment was filed, to catch the former leader unaware. Habré was put under house arrest in wake of the charges filed against him in early February.

Following this success, Habré's strongmen threatened Békoutou at his residence and in the *Walfadjri* office. Some NGOs involved in the Habré case helped him get to France, but they couldn't afford his lodging during the three months he planned to stay while things cooled off in Senegal.

That's when CJFE's Journalists in Distress Fund stepped in. A \$2,000 grant sent to Paris kept Békoutou from suffering even more as a result of his dedication to human rights and journalism.

CJFE's Journalists in Distress Fund is being called on more than ever to help journalists in difficulty as a result of their work. CJFE is able to respond to those calls with funds raised through member donations and the International Press Freedom Awards banquet held each fall.

Sometimes the initial contact comes from an affected journalist. On occasion, a Canadian journalist contacts CJFE after hearing of a colleague's trouble. Most often, one of CJFE's fellow IFEX members initiates a request, and staff verify information with journalist contacts and organizations. Then CJFE's Board of Directors decides whether to approve the grant.

So far this year, 12 journalists from eight countries have received almost \$14,000, with several more requests in the pipeline. Journalists have been helped with legal fees, medical treatment subsequent to torture while in custody, and support for family members left behind when the journalist flees into exile or is sentenced to a long prison term.

Békoutou has now overstayed his initial three-month visa in France. With Habré's henchmen still threatening his friends in Dakar, he's applying for refugee status. Meanwhile, a Senegalese court is due to decide whether Habré should face trial on torture charges.

**CJFE's work is made possible** through the efforts and donations of many individuals and organizations. Our sincere thanks to our members for their continued support, and special thanks to the following: Canadian Media Guild, CHUM Charitable Foundation, Dascon Investments Limited, Donner Canadian Foundation, *The Globe and Mail*, Jackman Foundation, *The Toronto Star*, and R. Howard Webster Foundation.

## Annual meeting September 12

Calling all CJFE members and prospective members! The 2000 Annual General Meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2000, at Metro Hall in Toronto. This is your chance to ask questions about CJFE's activities, and suggest what programs and issues we should tackle.

An election for positions on the Board of Directors will be held. Nominations in advance to the CJFE office, or Sept. 12 from the floor, are welcome. New members can join at the meeting. Members living out of Toronto will receive a proxy form to vote.

More information will be posted at [www.cjfe.org](http://www.cjfe.org) and circulated by e-mail.

## CJFE awards under way

Preparations for the third annual CJFE Press Freedom Awards are under way.

Presentation of two international awards and the Tara Singh Hayer Memorial Award for Canadian Press Freedom will be a highlight of the gala banquet in November.

A student award will be presented at CJFE's annual general meeting September 12.

**CJFE is now soliciting nominations for the awards.** For information, contact the office or go to [www.cjfe.org](http://www.cjfe.org).

The recipients of the 1999 CJFE International Press Freedom Award, editor Mark Chavunduka and reporter Ray Choto of Zimbabwe, had charges against them dismissed by the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe on May 23. The charges were laid after they published a report alleging a military coup plot against President Robert Mugabe in January 1999. Chavunduka and Choto have filed civil and criminal charges against the police and military for wrongful arrest, detention, assault and torture. The court ordered Zimbabwe's police chief to investigate the charges.

## Three new members join CJFE board

CJFE's board of directors welcomed three new members in May: journalists Paul Knox and John Stackhouse, and lawyer Brian MacLeod Rogers.

Long-time CJFE member **Paul Knox** is a Toronto-based international affairs reporter for *The Globe and Mail*. He was staff correspondent in Mexico for six years from 1985, and retains his interest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Knox covers global issues, foreign policy and the United Nations, and is a regular commenta-

tor for the Spanish-language service of Radio Canada International.

**Brian MacLeod Rogers** practices media law and civil litigation in Toronto, acting for various newspapers and other media. He is president of Advocates in Defence of Expression in the Media (*AdIDEM*), a national organization of media defence lawyers that advocates for freedom of expression. He is co-author of *Journalists and the Law*, and teaches media law at Ryerson University's journalism school.

**John Stackhouse** recently returned to *The Globe and Mail's* Toronto offices after seven years based in New Delhi focusing on development issues in Asia and Africa. He has reported from more than 40 countries for the *Globe*, and won five national newspaper awards as well as Amnesty International-Canada's award for human rights reporting from East Timor in 1996. His first book, *Out of Poverty and Into Something More Comfortable*, was released in April 2000.

2

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#### Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

(formerly the Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists) is an independent, non-profit association of journalists, writers, producers, editors and publishers promoting freedom of expression.

CJFE membership costs \$25. For a tax-creditable donation of \$50 or more, the membership fee is waived.

CJFE administers a Clearing House for the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (*IFEX*), which operates an Action Alert Network and globally disseminates information to organizations and individuals.

# Sikh journalists in Toronto receive death threats

By Joyce Smith

It sounds like a story from far away. A journalist gets an anonymous phone call warning that if he doesn't back off reporting on questionable money dealings, someone will pick up his son from school before he does.

But Baltej Pannu lives on the outskirts of Toronto. And the person making the threat against his now eight-year-old son is someone from his own Sikh community.

Canada's journalists have tangled previously with some Sikhs. Tara Singh Hayer, the British Columbia publisher of the *Indo-Canadian Times*, was killed in the second attempt on his life in November 1999.

Kim Bolan, reporter for the *Edmonton Sun*, continues to receive death threats for her coverage of Sikh issues, notably the Air India investigation. The founder of the (currently closed) English-language *Sikh Press* in Toronto, Irvinderpal Singh Babra, has also received threats.

It's all about money and power, common themes in any community. But violence is what journalists fear.

"In the Sikh community," says Babra, "threats really mean something."

Babra and Pannu have both received anonymous calls suggesting they will suffer the same fate as Hayer if they don't stop reporting on the leadership of local



**Baltej Pannu resists pressure to stop writing about the Sikh community in Canada. "We should cover what's happening here, where our children are growing," he says.**

temples – *gurdwaras* – and their use of funds.

Pannu, who publishes the Punjabi weekly *Nagara*, says some local leaders have told him to concentrate instead on issues "back home" in India. But stories on temple doings are popular. The free pick-up disappears soon after it's distributed at stores each Friday, despite a call by *gurdwaras* to boycott the paper.

According to the two journalists, the temple committees at the Malton, Pape, Mississauga and

Weston *gurdwaras* are collecting funds from the Sikh community under false pretences. In at least two cases, Babra says tax receipts issued to donors carry bogus charitable numbers.

Both Pannu and Babra have alerted the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (formerly Revenue Canada), as well as police forces. They are dismayed that no charges have been laid yet – which is also the case in the Hayer assassination and the threats against Bolan, Pannu and

Babra. Babra says he sometimes thinks the police are helping his tormenters. While saying one member of the Peel police force has been "very helpful," Pannu is also frustrated at the lack of action, and moved house last year to keep his family safe.

The risks aren't just physical. Both men talk of the deep pockets of the temple committees, which can fund high-powered lawyers. Babra is being sued for \$35 million by the Malton temple.

Unable to get legal aid, he has prepared his own defence. Since his paper folded in February for financial reasons, he has been unemployed and "reinventing himself."

Another high cost exacted from Babra is exclusion from his community and spiritual practice. He used to worship at a *gurdwara* just minutes from home. But he stopped attending last fall after he began writing about financial mismanagement there.

Asked what they want to happen next, neither man calls for an end to the threats as his first desire. Instead, they want proper elections for leadership of the temples, and some accountability for the collection and use of money.

As Babra puts it, "I am a journalist. What can I do about a flying bullet than can come from anywhere?"

*Joyce Smith is a member of the CJFE board of directors, and works as an online editor for globeandmail.com.*

# Researcher battles Health Canada for access to public health information

By Beth Asher

Ken Rubin, a public interest researcher in Ottawa, is putting a lot on the line to test Canada's access to information legislation.

Rubin wanted to review an internal Health Canada report on the use of calcium channel blocker (CCB) drugs in Canada. The safety of CCB drugs has been called into question in recent years in light of evidence of fatalities and adverse side effects.

Rubin filed an access request with Health Canada for the report, which contains data from studies by six multinational drug com-

panies that manufacture the CCB drugs. The application ran into numerous roadblocks in the form of exemptions as the drug companies claimed that the report contained confidential and commercial information.

Rubin, a self-described "persistent bugger," appealed Health Canada's refusal to release the reports. "I don't like the idea of fatalities or injuries, particularly where the public does not know about them."

Rubin, a lay litigant, will soon find himself in Federal Court, arguing that Health Canada must go further to cross-check drug companies' claims for exemptions in light of the public interest in accessing information on vital health and safety issues.

Though he anticipates a tough court battle, he feels the risks are worth it. He wants drug companies and government regulators to have greater responsibilities and duties.

Rubin has been involved in more than 50 freedom of information cases before the Federal Court. He is currently fighting a denial by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of access to records pertaining to environmental screening for the sale of two CANDU nuclear reactors to China.

The court could order him to pay the

government's legal costs, but Rubin is standing his ground. "Unless you go all the way and demonstrate your belief in openness and the issues at hand, you risk being a patsy."

Rubin is counting on members of the journalism community and stakeholders in health and safety issues to support him. CJFE contributed \$1,000 to his ongoing fight for access to information, an issue in which the organization sees itself becoming more involved.

CJFE board member and *Toronto Star* national editor Bob Hepburn says Rubin has broken ground for a lot of journalists in their struggles to access government information. Due in large part to Rubin's efforts, "the door is now ajar" for journalists, says Hepburn.

CJFE participated in the founding conference of Open Government Canada (OGC), a network promoting greater access to information. Since its March founding, OGC has been taking steps to establish a budget, hire an executive director and become fully operational.

**To join an active discussion list on access to information, go to [www.opengovernmentcanada.org](http://www.opengovernmentcanada.org).**

*Beth Asher is a lawyer and CFJE member.*



**Ken Rubin, ready for a fight.**

BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER / OTTAWA CITIZEN



**Clearing House staff, including CJFE executive director Sharmini Peries, relax with the Latin American contingent of IFEX after the meeting.**

*By Rebecca Nelems*

From May 20 to 25, free expression organizations from around the globe assembled in New York City for the International Freedom of Expression eXchange's (IFEX) annual general meeting. Created in 1992 by 10 organizations, the IFEX network

## IFEX meeting draws free exp

is committed to protecting and promoting freedom of expression and challenging those who deny it.

CJFE, one of the founding members, manages the IFEX Clearing House, which puts out international action alerts and a weekly *Communiqué*, and manages an outreach program on behalf of IFEX's now 50 organizational members (visit [www.ifex.org](http://www.ifex.org)).

Representatives of 10 IFEX member organizations are elected to the IFEX Council on a rotating basis for three-year terms; CJFE holds an ex-officio position on the council.

Hisham Kassem of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and editor of the *Cairo Times*, was elected as IFEX Convenor and president of the IFEX Council at the New York meeting. The Egyptian group has a long working relationship with CJFE, and Kassem visited Canada in September 1999 as our guest for the "Enemies of the Press" speaking tour.

Accorded an ambitious agenda, participants discussed and debated a wide range of issues.

Representatives from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Egypt spoke on reporting in times of war and crisis. All the speakers noted that with local media often paralyzed by armed conflict, the international community plays an essential role in focusing attention on rights violations in these coun-



**Participants in the annual meeting gather for a group photo. The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) was created in 1992 by 10 organizations and now has more than 50 members and affiliates from around the world.**

tries through action alerts and other lobbying. Participants listed cases in Congo and Ghana in which journalists' lives were saved due to such international efforts.

Speakers from Russia and Ghana assessed the difficulties of journalists working in newly

## IFEX Alerts open jail doors for Ghanaian journalist

*By Phinjo Gombu*

For Kabral Blay-Ammihere, the IFEX annual meeting was a chance to remind those present that the network is alive and well.

The veteran journalist and editor from Ghana told delegates how a seemingly innocuous story published by his newspaper – about a protest by soldiers who hadn't been paid for United Nations peacekeeping duties – nearly landed him in jail.

It all began last January 13 with a routine "invitation for a conversation" with military officials, which he knew meant trouble. Outraged that the military was trying to strong-arm him instead of lodging a complaint with the Ghanaian Media Commission, Blay-Ammihere decided to play hardball. He met with his lawyer to prepare a public statement.

But while returning home that same night through a dark stretch of road, Blay-Ammihere was ambushed by several people in four cars. Blay-Ammihere said he tried to flee but they gave chase, and he was arrested and taken to a military holding cell.

The arrest of Blay-Ammihere,

president of the West African Journalists Association was a clear warning to other media in Ghana: if one of the country's most prominent journalists could be arrested, others thinking of rocking the boat had better beware.

Events unfolded quickly. Blay-

By 8 a.m. the next morning, news of his arrest was all over the local radio, and by 9 a.m. letters from IFEX members had begun to pour in.

"Letters were coming to the president of Ghana protesting my arrest," Blay-Ammihere said. "And

what contributed to his quick release.

"Our governments try to appear to be impervious to international opinion," Blay-Ammihere said. "But their economic support also comes from the West."

"They know that if anything happens to me, it will be picked up by the international community. That is my protection."

With the Ghanaian government embarrassed by local and international protests, the military pursued Blay-Ammihere through the local police. They interrogated him on February 10 and then formally charged him with sedition, which carries a five-year jail sentence.

Once again the protests poured in, giving the government the same message again: the world was watching.

It now seems the case will not be pursued.

"For me, I'm able to do so many of the things I do not because I'm that courageous, but because I know that I'm not working alone," Blay-Ammihere said. "That means a lot to me."

*Phinjo Gombu is a member of the CJFE board of directors, and a reporter with the Toronto Star.*



**Kabral Blay-Ammihere of Ghana tells story of his arrest to a workshop.**

Ammihere said that shortly after he was arrested, around 10 p.m., fellow members of WAJA and friends in Ghana were notified. An alert was immediately sent to the IFEX Clearing House in Toronto.

the beauty was that when those letters came in, they were released to the (local) media."

Local media gladly reported the international outrage. Blay-Ammihere was released around 11 a.m., and he has no doubts as to



# expression groups from around the globe



...er outside the Columbia School of Journalism, the IFEX network now has members from every region of the world.

stricted access to newsprint – that can make it impossible for them to carry out their work.

Media ownership concentration was discussed as a trend that is silencing many voices and opinions. IFEX members commissioned at last year's annual meeting to research media ownership in Africa, North America, and South America reported that concentration is increasing in each region. The ad hoc committee will continue to monitor media concentration in each of these regions, and will put forward some conclusions in the coming year.

Groups also shared ideas and strategies about promoting free expression. Protest letters and international action alerts were seen as necessary and effective. The Internet, while it has engendered new forms of censorship, is also a new tool for free expression work, said Robert Ménard of Reporters Sans Frontières.

Groups also noted the international media's important role in drawing attention to regimes and leaders that grossly violate their citizens' rights to free expression. Building on the effectiveness of the IFEX network, groups in each of the world's regions resolved to fortify their local and regional alliances.

In the course of the IFEX meeting, disturbing developments around the world underlined the gravity and urgency of free expression work. IFEX's outgoing convenor, Nina Ratulele of the Pacific Islands News Associa-

tion (PINA), regrettably had to leave early due to the coup and ensuing crisis in Fiji. Two journalists were murdered in Sierra Leone during the week of the meeting.

While reminded of the amount of work still ahead of them in fighting for free expression worldwide, participants also left the meeting reassured that they would not be fighting alone.

**Individuals can subscribe to IFEX information services by e-mail for free or by voluntary donation. To regularly receive IFEX information, write to [ifex@ifex.org](mailto:ifex@ifex.org). The IFEX Clearing House has subscribers from 125 countries.**



emerging democracies and countries in transition. Presenters agreed that establishment of electoral democracy is only the first step in a long process and does not guarantee free expression. Media in these regimes sometimes face economic measures – such as re-

PHOTOS: KRISTINA STOCKWOOD / CJFE



**Bhagirath Yogi (foreground) of the Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies, Nepal, participates in an Internet workshop.**



**(From left) Kavita Menon of the Committee to Protect Journalists, Azer Hasret of Journalists' Trade Union, Azerbaijan, and M'Baya Tshinmanga of Journalist in Danger, Democratic Republic of Congo.**



**Jorge Salazar of the Institute for Press and Society, Peru, with IFEX Alerts Coordinator Marianna Tzabiras. The annual meeting gives staff a chance to meet IFEX members whom they work with daily by e-mail.**



**(Left to right) Carl Morten Iversen (Norwegian Forum for Freedom of Expression), Steve Buckley (World Association of Community Broadcasters), Khaled Mahrez (International Federation of Journalists Algeria Centre), Hisham Kassem (Egyptian Organization for Human Rights).**

## Quebec group joins IFEX

The Professional Federation of Quebec Journalists (FPJQ) is a new IFEX member following a positive vote at the annual meeting in New York.

The FPJQ was founded in 1969 to defend freedom of the press, journalists' professional interests and the public's right to information. The FPJQ created the Quebec Press Council, negotiated an agreement with the Quebec Bar to protect journalists' sources and material, and ensured that the public's right to information was included in the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In 1999 on May 3, World Press

Freedom Day, the FPJQ launched the Quebec Committee for Freedom of the Press. CJFE has worked closely with the committee to co-

sponsor events in Montreal. Committee chair Jane McElhone, a CBC Radio journalist, represented the FPJQ in New York.

The IFEX Council also approved membership applications by the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (IFLA/FAIFE) based in Denmark.



**Jane McElhone**

# La presse algérienne toujours gardée en otage

par Barnabé Élouna

Il y a quelques semaines, les autorités algériennes refusaient d'accorder une autorisation de séjour au journaliste tunisien Taoufik Ben Brik en grève de la faim, et qui protestait contre la répression policière instaurée en Tunisie depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du président Ben Ali en 1987. L'attitude du gouvernement algérien à cet effet a permis de lever toute équivoque sur sa duplicité en matière de la liberté de la presse.

Après trente ans de dictature socialiste, la presse algérienne n'a toujours pas réussi à obtenir la bouffée d'oxygène tant recherchée et ceci malgré le processus de démocratisation en cours depuis peu. La presse algérienne doit faire face à une triple oppression incarnée par les autorités politiques, les islamistes et les patrons des groupes de presse.

La période allant de 1989 à 1996 aura été la plus sanglante, où plus d'une vingtaine de journalistes ont perdu la vie. Ils ont été tués par balle, égorgés ou déchiquetés par des explosions de bombes. Ces sacrifices suprêmes n'ont pas contribué à améliorer les conditions de vie et de travail des journalistes en Algérie.

Certes depuis l'avènement de l'intégrisme religieux, le pouvoir

algérien a déployé des moyens impressionnants de sécurité pour protéger la vie des journalistes. La Maison de la Presse d'Alger, où sont localisés les 2/3 des journaux, a été offerte par le gouvernement, elle ressemble d'ailleurs à une caserne militaire qu'à tout autre chose; policiers encagoulés, cameras de surveillance, etc. ... Cela n'a pour autant pas empê-

Celle-ci est obligée de s'abstenir de critiquer ouvertement les actes gouvernement. La violation de cette loi tacite et implicite est souvent la cause réelle des innombrables procès en diffamation intentés contre des éditeurs et où les amendes sont légions.

Cependant, la question des assassinats des journalistes demeure une nébuleuse pour bien

les humeurs des patrons des médias privés, parmi lesquels de nombreux officiers généraux en retraite, et dont les accointances avec le pouvoir en place sont un secret de polichinelle. Les lignes éditoriales des divers organes de presse dépendent de leurs affinités politiques, et toute attitude libertaire est sanctionnée par un licenciement pur et simple. En 1999 trois journalistes travaillant pour un quotidien algérien ont ainsi été abusivement licenciés pour des motifs similaires. Malgré la décision de la justice qui a dû prendre fait et cause conformément à la loi pour les journalistes, rien n'y fut fait.

La naissance en 1998 du SNJ (Syndicat National des Journalistes) et l'ouverture d'un bureau de la FIJ (Fédération internationale des journalistes) ont permis de restaurer l'espoir parmi les journalistes. Et c'est aussi grâce au dynamisme du SNJ que le gouvernement algérien a consenti à subventionner la presse indépendante.

La presse algérienne compte aujourd'hui plus de 152 titres avec un tirage quotidien de plus 1,500,000 exemplaires.

**Pour les consulter, voir: [www.algeriainfo.com](http://www.algeriainfo.com)**

*Barnabé Élouna est un journaliste exilé de Cameroun qui vive à Montréal.*

MICHEL CAMBON / REPORTERS SANS FRONTIÈRES



ché l'explosion gigantesque d'une bombe en 1996 qui a soufflé en entier un immeuble de trois étages, causant la mort de six journalistes. En conséquence, la presse algérienne doit payer chèrement cette protection que lui apporte le gouvernement.

des observateurs. Car même si la plupart des soupçons sont dirigés contre les islamistes, dans bien des cas, la responsabilité des autorités algériennes n'est pas à exclure. L'autre obstacle majeur auquel doivent faire face les journalistes algériens est le diktat et

## Intimidation and violence muzzle the news in Colombia

by Mariana Vilnitsky

Despite various attempts at a peace process, the chaos and violence of Colombia shows few signs of abating. Aggression against journalists continues, and it seems to be a cornerstone of the civil war.

"The majority of journalists are convinced that the point is arriving where we can no longer inform the public," says reporter Clemencia Medina of the Colombian daily *El Tiempo*.

"For starters, the newspapers won't publish any story that isn't backed up by overwhelming evidence. And evidence is extremely difficult to get, when so much is happening illegally in the country," she says.

"Then, if a journalist does uncover proof for a story after intense work, she can be killed. So the newspapers choose not to publish the article because the lives of the reporters and their families come first."

According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Colombia has the most murders in Latin America, and the

most kidnappings in the world. Most crimes go unreported and unpunished.

Journalists are particularly targeted. They are threatened, extorted and attacked; more than 100 journalists have been murdered in the past 10 years. The situation is worsening. In the last few months, some of Colombia's best-known journalists have gone into exile. The World Association

of Newspapers reports that since October 1999, there have been seven assassinations and a long string of threats, kidnappings and attacks.

The fear paralyzes, and the pervasive impunity creates a feeling of vulnerability and impotence.

**"We are tired of burying heroes. We never know where the bullet is going to come from." – Clemencia Medina**

of Newspapers reports that since October 1999, there have been seven assassinations and a long string of threats, kidnappings and attacks.

The fear paralyzes, and the pervasive impunity creates a feeling of vulnerability and impotence.

"We are tired of burying heroes," Medina says. "Some journalists think that if they receive a threat it means, in fact, that no

one is going to hurt them. But then others of us are deciding to leave because of that risk. We never know where the bullet is going to come from."

Journalists are attacked by different groups: the army, drug traffickers, guerilla factions, and extra-legal armed groups that benefit from extensive army financial and logistic support. These paramilitaries are respon-

sible for up to 60 per cent of the illegal executions according to the IACHR. It is impossible to offer protection to all journalists. Even with bodyguards, investigative journalism is still difficult. "It is hard to move around with two men following your steps," says Medina. "And anyway, there is no guarantee that they won't kill the three people together."

Foreign journalists, who leave their families at home, are more able to do their jobs in Colombia. For local journalists, the risks to their loved ones are very hard to bear according to Medina.

"When you get a call at your house, and they tell you what time your kids leave school, and what their names are, and that you're working on a particular article – well, you don't want to write any more."

Many newspapers move any journalist who is repeatedly threatened to another city. If the threats continue, the journalist has to leave the country.

*Mariana Vilnitsky is a journalist from Argentina who volunteered with CJFE during a Toronto stay.*

*CJFE's Journalists in Distress Fund helped Colombian journalist Carlos Pulgarin, who moved to Peru after his life was threatened in Colombia. The threats continued in Lima, and Pulgarin went into exile in Spain in March. In late May, one of CJFE's main contacts in Colombia, Ignacio Gomez of the Foundation for a Free Press, was victim of a kidnapping attempt. He also fled the country.*

# Newspapers in exile focus on situation back home



PHOTOS: CHRIS HARBORD

**Mohamed Bangura with *Sierra Leone Watch*, the newspaper he plans to publish in Freetown as well as Toronto.**

By Kokila Jacob

By the time this issue of *CJFE Reporter* appears, Mohamed Bangura, a journalist from Sierra Leone living in Canada, will have committed a daring act.

He will have taken *Sierra Leone Watch*, his fledgling newspaper in exile published in Toronto since last October, to Freetown. Launching an edition in the heart of the country from which he has been exiled is like entering a ring of fire.

"Someone has to do it," says Bangura, calm determination in his voice. Such quiet courage is evident amongst many exiled journalists now living in Canada.

Access to mainstream media is usually difficult, so they have resorted to publishing newspapers and newsletters on their own, both in print and on the Internet.

These publications differ from multicultural publications, which focus more on community events in Canada.

The aim of newspapers in exile is to document human rights violations and to support reform in their home countries. They persist in telling the world about the problems gnawing at the political, social and economic innards of their countries.

"International media is concerned only with sensational stories, such as when 20 people are massacred, or foreign nationals are involved. After that their interest fades till the next calamity," says Bangura. "Because of the negative coverage of Africa, it is important to have our voice heard, to present the African perspective."

Mori Abdolalian and Isaac Ampadu echo that sentiment.

Abdolalian brings out *Iran Watch*, a monthly newsletter in English. His aim is "to let the voice of journalists in Iran be heard by the outside world, to generate as much support as we can get from the Canadian society – which Iranians need to achieve freedom and democracy in Iran."

Ampadu, a Ghanaian journalist in Toronto, hopes to rally support for journalists and others

persecuted by governments that want to impose a "culture of silence." He freelances for Radio Canada International and writes for the *African Observer*, a political newspaper published by a Ghanaian journalist living in exile in the United States.

For their efforts they receive threats, often indirectly. Abdolalian's family is in Iran.

"Sometimes my brother calls and tells me that they have been called by the governor's office and questioned about my activities. But this happens to all, not just me," he says.

When Bangura's second issue attacked the Sierra Leonean government for violating human rights, he got threatening e-mails from government supporters.

It's a struggle to bring out each issue, admit Bangura and Abdolalian. Threats apart, lack of financial resources limit the publications' frequency and distribution.

Bangura gets support from the small Sierra Leonean community to bring out the paper, an English-language tabloid. In June they opened a downtown Toronto office staffed by volunteers.

*Iran Watch* is on a shoestring budget from Abdolalian's own pocket. He produces the four-page newsletter at his Oakville home

and then makes photocopies.

Besides mailing to community members, international and national media houses, and human rights organizations, the publications are distributed at rallies and public forums. The Internet has been a boon, and both have online versions of their newspapers.

Bangura and Abdolalian feel their efforts have not been in vain. The publications' impacts are evident from letters of support they get from a cross-section of society.

"The paper is serving its purpose. We have to continue our work," says Bangura.

Abdolalian sees it as a life-long commitment too, and is determined to carry on "whatever the hardships."

***Iran Watch* and *Sierra Leone Watch* can be accessed at [www.systemsuniverse.com/jexile](http://www.systemsuniverse.com/jexile).**

Kokila Jacob moved to Canada last year. Previously she was based in the Middle East and India, where she wrote for the local and international press.



# Cuban journalists write in the shadow of prison

— continued from page 1  
sponsored Radio Martí.

Quintero's writing, based on informal diaries kept by her neighbours, focuses on women's issues. In Cuba this means the daily grind of simply finding adequate food, clothing and medicine for one's children.

"Supplies in the supermarkets are scarce, even for dollars. In the peso economy, it's unbearable," says Quintero.

Independent journalists have no legal means of earning a living, having abandoned state journalism to live in the shadow of the prison door. Repression includes incarceration in Soviet-style psychiatric wards for the criminally insane. In the midst of a crackdown that saw at least 28 journalists detained in the first months of 1999, a new law established sentences of up to 20 years for any individual in contact with the foreign media.

"When the U.S. softened its immigration rules in mid-1999, so many journalists were panicked by the new law against us that they went abroad, to the US and several to Europe," says Quintero.

Meanwhile, the DSE has penetrated the group of those who stayed, "trying to undermine morale, spy, and create problems."

"I will never leave," she says stubbornly, despite twice being the victim of *repudios*, demonstrations staged in front of her house by local Party loyalists. Her son Ivan, also a Cuba Press journalist, is a sports expert often called on by CBC and CNN reporters in Havana. His reports on the national Cuban game of baseball are used by U.S. scouts as tip

sheets.

Raul Rivero, internationally known for his poetry, heads Cuba Press. He refuses to travel abroad to accept awards for his work for fear of not being allowed to return.

Quintero believes Communist Cuba has reached its final crisis.

"The economic situation here is so desperate that human rights are now an issue for the government, because the regime needs to join international organizations and gain bank credit."

The May release of several political prisoners including dissident economist Marta Beatriz Roque, a close friend of Quintero, is significant, she believes.

"The government is trying to counter international opinion," she says, "But the releases are also a trap, because the DSE watches and tests people to see who speaks out when activists are released. But we independent journalists will continue to do our jobs."

Novelist and screenwriter Brendan Howley follows journalism-in-transition issues in Cuba and the Balkans from Stratford, Ontario.



**Tania Quintero breaks the law by contacting foreign media.**



# Burmese thirsting for a free press

By Moira MacDonald

Feeling info-jaded? Is the Internet interrupting your life? Flustered with getting through four newspapers a day?

Imagine a place where the Internet is just an exotic word, where media diversity – if it's to be had at all – is often smuggled in from outside. A month spent in Burma (renamed Myanmar by

away from education (teachers earn about \$10 a month plus a rice supplement) and literacy.

But literate people are hungry for media. On ferry trips magazine "rentals" are popular, with the material distributed at the start of the journey and then collected, along with a small fee, at the end. On the back streets of Rangoon, the country's capital, second-hand books about Abra-

items that discuss their country's political situation. One woman I met had a small, cherished library of such books, all imported by outsiders and all hidden whenever anyone possibly connected to the government came by.

One man showed me newspaper clippings brought by travellers about human rights cases in Burma. Well-worn fold marks showed the clippings had been read, re-read and shown around dozens of times.

Chinese transistor radios crackle around the country in the early morning and evening, when services such as the BBC, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America broadcast Burmese- and English-language programs. This emphasized to me the importance of international radio services in places waiting for democracy. For example, I met someone who knew about CJFE's 1998 International Press Freedom Award to Burmese writer Daw San Nwe from an outside radio report, but did not know anything about her current condition in prison.

Burma has been ruled by the military since a 1962 coup crushed a fledgling democratically elected parliament. In recent years the party line on human rights out of Rangoon is that freedom of expression is meaningless if citizens cannot first enjoy basic rights to food, water and shelter

as well as political stability and "national unity" among the country's diverse ethnic groups.

While the government press has played up the opening of multi-media computer centres in several public schools, no one outside government officials and some foreign enterprises has Internet access. Fax machine ownership is illegal without government consent. While citizens can and do publicly speak with foreigners (new since 1989), no one publicly discusses politics, even amongst themselves. Politics can include things as mundane as the price of rice, since it raises the issue of government control of inflation.

"You cannot talk about daily life," complained one man.

More than once people asked me to get the word out about the lack of freedoms in their country but "don't name the source."

The government's progress toward truces with insurgent groups, many ethnically based, may remove the excuse of unity before human rights. The death of Ne Win, the 89-year-old general who still holds significant influence over the government, may also bring about a change in direction.

"We have hope," said one man. "All Buddhists believe that nothing is permanent. The Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union collapsed – so we believe that this may happen here too."

Moira MacDonald is a former CJFE board member and freelance writer travelling the world for a year. She recently published a story on jailed Burmese comics Par Par Lay and U Lu Zaw in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

CHRISTINE HARMISTON / CANADIAN FRIENDS OF BURMA



Scores of Burmese risk arrest to listen to popular dissident Aung San Suu Kyi in front of her house in 1996. The military banned her Saturday morning speeches in 1997.

its military rulers) earlier this year left me feeling both embarrassed and grateful for the informational riches we enjoy.

"We are like sailors in a dark night where all we can see of the world are the stars," one man told me, describing Burmese people trying to find out what's really happening in their country and abroad.

Access to information is certainly not a priority for everyone in Burma; making ends meet is. Heavy spending on the military, which runs the country, also takes

ham Lincoln vie with Burmese romances for space on orange tarpaulins on the pavement. There are quite a few back issues of *Newsweek* too – a commodity for pinching in the country's post offices so they can be resold, I was told. Such magazines are otherwise available only in Burma's five-star hotels, frequented mostly by foreign businesspeople. Even there, any articles about Burma are censored.

English-speaking Burmese are grateful when tourists bring in books and magazines, particularly

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Burma has been ruled by the military since a 1962 coup crushed a fledgling democratically elected parliament. In recent years the party line on human rights out of Rangoon is that freedom of expression is meaningless if citizens cannot first enjoy basic rights to food, water and shelter

## Aboriginal Peoples Television Network broadcasts across Canada

By Emily Pohl-Weary

8

The world's only Aboriginal television network is a breakthrough in media diversity

New ground was broken last fall with the debut of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). For the first time, First Nations, Inuit and Métis people can share their stories across Canada with a national cable station dedicated to Aboriginal programming.

"This is the first Aboriginal-controlled television network in the world," says Ken Williams of the Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, Toronto correspondent for APTN's flagship news program *InVision*. CBC North and the Australian Broadcasting Corp. have allowed some Aboriginal participation and control.

"But this is the very first Aboriginal network to have an Aboriginal news show.

"If you went to school in Canada, you know more about China and Russia than you do about Aboriginal issues," he continues. "And most reporters don't know anything more than what they themselves see in the media

"Through our news program, we hope that people will start to pay more attention to Aboriginal news, and see how that news is presented by Aboriginal people."

*InVision* was launched on March 30. Hosted by Carol Adams Sundays at 8 p.m. (ET), *InVision* has bureaus in Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg, as well as journalists in other regions to cover local news stories. Vancouver and Yellowknife bureaus will soon be added to the list. The broadcast originates from APTN's

headquarters in Winnipeg, and the rest of the bureaus use CTV facilities for transmission.

"We are not working 35-hour weeks," says Williams. "We're doing the work of twice as many people as we have on staff. But



it's a necessary step .... It's not the easiest thing in the world to start a national news program."

*Contact*, a current affairs show, also began at the end of March and runs Thursdays at 3 p.m. (ET).

*Contact* is a forum to discuss national issues through interviews, panel discussions, national call-in segments and pre-packaged stories. Both it and *InVision* are overseen by news director and CJFE member Dan David.

"We wanted to even things out as much as possible by giving Aboriginal people a look at themselves from the perspective of Aboriginal newsmakers," says Williams. "The mainstream media tended to only examine the negative things in our communities – suicides, blockades, violence, despair, rich chiefs running off.

"We're not saying that those things don't exist. But they should be reported on fairly."

For more information about APTN, visit [www.aptn.ca](http://www.aptn.ca).

Emily Pohl-Weary is a writer and editor who works with IFEX Alerts.