

# CJFE

## reporter

2003 – Issue 1

## No news is neutral: Venezuelan journalists caught in conflict



Supporters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez dumped television sets outside a private radio and television station in Caracas in December. Commercial media have been accused of openly backing opposition attempts to oust Chávez.

By Geoffrey Chan

It isn't easy being a journalist trying to report the news amidst a tense political conflict. Especially when both opposing sides pressure journalists to take sides and target them for what they perceive as political bias.

That's what's happening in Venezuela, where journalists are caught in a bitter standoff between President Hugo Chávez and his supporters, and private media owners who have joined the political opposition to oust the president.

In recent weeks, scores of journalists have been physically attacked or injured while covering demonstrations, report the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The press-freedom watchdogs say at least 20 journalists have been assaulted or targeted since December 2002.

They also say President Chávez's aggressive rhetoric against — *continues on page 6*

## CJFE promotes Thai democracy through journalism training

By Tariq Hassan-Gordon

Building on its past successes bringing media training to Thailand, CJFE is launching a new project for 2003 with support from the Canadian International Development Agency.

"Building Democracy Through Independent Journalism in Thailand" is a one-year \$100,000 project in partnership with the Thai Journalists Association (TJA). Three cities have been selected for the program: Bangkok, Rayong and Petchaburi.

Executive Director Joel Ruimy says CJFE wants to continue working in Thailand because of the opportunities that exist to improve the quality of media, and

to help Thai media strengthen its role as a cornerstone in building democracy.

"CJFE will be able to transfer both radio and newspaper training skills to Thailand so that future training can be done by Thais for Thais, and they won't be dependent on groups from other countries," Ruimy says.

"It is important that we get some experience from our Canadian counterpart," says Chavarong Limpattamapanee, TJA's secretary general and research editor at *Thairath Daily*, Thailand's largest daily newspaper.

"Thailand is in a transition period or so-called 'Reform Era' [in] which every sector in the society is under reform," Limpattamapanee says. "Media too, is

under reform, so we need to develop professional skills for the Thai journalists."

TJA, Thailand's main journalists' organization, represents 1,560 print and broadcast journalists, and is dedicated to promoting and monitoring press freedom/human rights as a fundamental component of good governance.

CJFE began working in 1993 with TJA, which was then known as the Reporters' Association of Thailand. In 1999/2000, CJFE worked with TJA to deliver a radio training program for Thai journalists.

Ruimy says this year's Thailand project is critical to protect the press-freedom gains of the — *continues on page 3*



ANDREW STRAUSS / CJFE

## Media buzz at banquet

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham faces a scrum of journalists before delivering the keynote speech at CJFE's annual press freedom awards banquet in Toronto last November. See pages 4-5 for stories and photos.

Living in danger:  
CJFE counts  
journalists killed

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# CJFE relaunches annual report of deaths

It's a grisly list, and a long one. Forty-six journalists, photographers, editors, proprietors – even two adult children of journalists – died violently in 2002, CJFE's new annual report shows.

That's down from the 2001 total of 57, including eight killed covering the war in Afghanistan.

The report, our first since 1998, offers brief biographies of each of the dead and available details about the victims' work. You can read the full report at [www.cjfe.org](http://www.cjfe.org).

In compiling the list, CJFE gathered material from several members of the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) and from media around the world.

The stories are, too often, starkly similar: a journalist on her way home from work, or another on his way to work, is ambushed and killed in a hail of bullets. Few of these cases are solved.

Among the report's "high-lights:"

\* **Colombia** continued to be the most dangerous place to be a journalist – 10 were murdered there last year, accounting for



Members of Venezuela's news media march through the streets of Caracas in memory of photojournalist Jorge Tortoza on April 25, 2002. Tortoza was killed two weeks earlier during disturbances that led to a failed coup.

about one-fourth of the global total;

\* **Russia** was in second place, with seven violent deaths in 2002;

\* Three journalists were killed in each of **India**, **Mexico**, **Nepal**,

the **Palestinian Territories** and the **Philippines**.

Death knows no season. The first casualty of 2002, **Ugandan** journalism student Jimmy Higenyi, was shot to death while cov-

ering a Jan. 12 demonstration in Kampala. On Dec. 22, veteran **French** journalist Patrick Bourrat was killed in Kuwait when, while covering military exercises, he was struck by a tank.

## CJFE, IFEX welcome new staff

CJFE's new Program Manager, **Tariq Hassan-Gordon**, started work on January 6. Tariq recently returned to Canada after two years in Cairo as correspondent for Middle East Times ([www.metimes.com](http://www.metimes.com)).

IFEX Development and Outreach Coordinator **Rebecca Nelems**, who oversaw the growth of the IFEX membership, has left to become an independent consultant in Ottawa. **Rachael Morten-Gittens** has moved over from the Action Alerts team to fill her shoes.

IFEX's other Outreach Coordinator, **Kristina Stockwood**, is going on maternity leave in April and will be replaced by **Maureen James**, who has considerable international and fundraising experience in the non-profit sector.

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## CJFE advocacy gets results

By Tariq Hassan-Gordon

A new protest letter writing strategy is already showing encouraging results.

On January 23, two days after sending a letter of concern to the Canadian High Commissioner to Malaysia regarding a Malaysian police raid on a local Internet publication, CJFE received a faxed response.

CJFE expressed grave concern over a January 20 police raid on the office of Malaysiakini.com, an independent Internet daily. The police seized about 20 computers and partially blocked access to the website after it published criticism of the government.

As of 2003, CJFE is sending letters of protest directly to the diplomatic representation in Ottawa of the offending government, in this case the Government of Malaysia. In addition, a

copy of the letter is sent to Canada's diplomatic mission overseas.

This new strategy replaces the former method of lodging protests directly with heads of state. We hope this new direction, lobbying the respective diplomatic missions directly, will be more effective.

The response from Canadian High Commissioner Jean C. McCloskey was overwhelmingly positive.

The high commissioner shared CJFE's concern and informed CJFE that two High Commission staff officers visited the office of Malaysiakini.com on January 22<sup>nd</sup> to investigate. The officers reported that "they were encouraged by the determination of Malaysiakini's management and staff to persevere in the face of the current difficulties."

During the visit the High Commission officers also distributed

copies of CJFE's letter of protest to the staff of Malaysiakini. The high commissioner also noted that the Canadian High Commission gave seed money to Malaysiakini under the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives on behalf of CIDA in the early stages of the website's development. McCloskey assured CJFE that the High Commission will "continue to monitor the situation closely."

CJFE is continuing to press the Malaysian High Commission in Ottawa for a response to our letter. However, as a Canadian organization, we are pleased with the intervention by Canada's representative to Malaysia.

### What you can do

Join CJFE's team of protest letter writers. Email Program Manager Tariq Hassan-Gordon at [tariqhgc@cjfe.org](mailto:tariqhgc@cjfe.org) to sign up to our protest e-mail list.

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**Canadian Journalists for Free Expression** is a Canadian non-governmental organization supported by Canadian journalists and advocates of free expression. The purpose of the organization is to defend the rights of journalists and contribute to the development of media freedom throughout the world. CJFE recognizes these rights are not confined to journalists and strongly supports and defends the broader objective of freedom of expression in Canada and around the world.

CJFE membership costs \$25 per calendar year. For any donation beyond that amount, a charitable tax receipt will be issued.

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.





The Outreach and Development Program of the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) network has recently secured funding for two exciting new projects to strengthen free-expression campaigning in some of the world's most conflict-ridden hot spots. CJFE manages the IFEX Clearinghouse in Toronto.

With support from Finland's foreign affairs ministry and the Netherlands Communications Assistance Foundation, IFEX member organizations in Pakistan, Nepal, Ethiopia, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo will be able to improve their monitoring of free expression violations in their countries, campaign against oppressive laws and help free imprisoned journalists. Journalists in these countries work under extremely difficult conditions.

In Nepal, where a brutal civil war has resulted in the detention of at least 150 journalists since January 2002, the Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies (CEHURDES) documents free-expression abuses and educates

# IFEX supports campaigning in free-expression hotspots

Nepalese journalists about their legal rights. CEHURDES will receive much-needed support to hold training seminars and distribute human-rights information in rural areas, and campaign against restrictive media laws.

In Pakistan, the funding will support the Pakistan Press Foundation and enable it to create a country-wide network of correspondents to report on free-expression violations. As well as being distributed in-country, these reports will be funneled through the IFEX Clearing House in Toronto for distribution all over the world.

Similar plans are under way in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the group Journaliste en danger (JED) is expanding its network of correspondents to report on human rights abuses. JED will be able to hire and train a new co-ordinator to prepare action alerts and reports, and lobby the government to improve

press freedom.

In Colombia, where up to 10 journalists were killed in 2002, the Fundación para Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) has become one of the most important press freedom organizations. Its journalists' protection network operates as a front-line defence against attacks on the press, using 14 correspondents across the country to report violations. FLIP also plays a central role in rescuing journalists from danger. If a journalist receives a death threat, for example, FLIP contacts police authorities to secure protection and

safe passage out of the region or country.

Underlying these funded activities is the long-term aim of strengthening the organizational capacity of these IFEX members.

"Sustainability is one of the most difficult issues facing most press-freedom groups in developing countries or countries in transition," says CJFE Director of Development Nick Fillmore. With this funding, the IFEX member groups will receive training to improve fundraising skills and strengthen organizational resources to carry out their work.

## How IFEX can keep you informed about press freedom world-wide

- Sign up for free Action Alerts according to the country or region of your choice by emailing: [communiqué@ifex.org](mailto:communiqué@ifex.org)
- Subscribe to the *IFEX Communiqué*, a free weekly newsletter of free-expression news from around the world, or search for alerts and reports on press freedom at the IFEX website: [www.ifex.org](http://www.ifex.org)

# Signs of crackdown won't deter Thai project

— continued from page 1

last decade. Until a few years ago, the military and government owned or strongly influenced much of Thailand's media.

During the 1980s, rapid economic development led to the creation of a middle class in Thailand that wanted independent journalism. A ground-breaking consultative process initiated by a democratically elected Thai government resulted in the adoption of a new constitution in 1997 that, for the first time, included press freedom.

However, after several years of progress, media independence is slipping away again. Although the government had promised to relinquish control over radio frequencies and radio stations, it has reneged on that pledge. More recently, a new government has cracked down on some journalists, using security laws and other measures.

Despite the setback, CJFE believes there are new opportunities to improve journalism and democracy in Thailand. Even with the current threats to media freedom, more Thai journalists than ever before can practise a degree of freedom of expression.

"CJFE's project will instill the values of a free press in many up-and-coming key journalists, preparing them to campaign for their rights under these more difficult conditions," Ruimy says.

Most Thai journalists, both radio and print, need improved skills to take advantage of the recent opening, Ruimy says. In addition to holding onto already-won free-



In the first phase of CJFE's training program in Thailand three years ago, a senior Thai radio journalist passes on skills to a younger counterpart.

doms, they need to be able to push for additional freedoms that Canadians often take for granted.

In radio, despite government pressures on the media, hundreds of government-owned radio sta-

tions are now more independent than before, and have the opportunity to provide better journalism for listeners.

For millions of people in Thailand, radio is the main source of information on politics, governance, human rights and community issues. However, few radio journalists have adequate training in basic journalism. And TJA sees a need for today's newspaper journalists to learn investigative skills.

Limpattamapanee says Canadian trainers will provide an important perspective on media. "Thai journalists will learn more from the Canadian journalists by sharing their experience, especially in radio broadcasting and investigative reporting skills," he said. "After the series of workshops, Thai journalists who participate in the program will go back to their communities to pass on the skills they gained."

## CJFE's training programs in Thailand

- **Training the trainers:** TJA staff will learn training skills by participating with CJFE in implementing a training-the-trainers program for radio journalists.
- **Investigative journalism:** Canadian and Thai investigative journalists will together design a training program suited to Thai needs.

CJFE members experienced in radio-skills training will travel to Thailand on two separate missions to work with TJA on the program.

During the project period, CJFE staff and trainers will work with TJA to design a permanent program in radio-journalism training, a natural outgrowth from the training-the-trainers program.

Two investigative journalists from leading Canadian newspapers will travel to Thailand to conduct a series of investigative reporting workshops and seminars with a senior Thai investigative journalist. This part of the project will target reporters with at least three years' practical experience, as well as senior editors from the country's 17 national newspapers. Journalists selected will have demonstrated the ability to carry out investigative journalism.



Award-winner Mohamed Elmi, co-founder of Somalia's HornAfrik radio and television network, shows his press freedom award with fellow Somali-Canadians.



Lira Bayseitova speaks about Leila with Russian interpreter.

ALL PHOTOS BY ANDREW STRAUSS / CJFE

# Somali, Kazakhstani journalists honoured at CJFE press freedom awards

By Joel Ruimy

**K**azakhstan and Somalia came to Toronto last November 13 for CJFE's fifth annual International Press Freedom Awards dinner.

More than 550 people gathered to honour the courage of Kazakhstani journalist Lira Bayseitova and Somali-Canadians Ahmed Abdisalam Adan, Mohamed Elmi and Ali Sharmarke. Bayseitova's daughter died in a jail cell after Lira published an exposé on the personal finances of senior Kazakhstani officials, while the three Somali-Canadians founded the first independent broadcaster in Somalia's post-civil war era.

## Fund benefits

Keynote speaker Bill Graham, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, reiterated Ottawa's support for press freedom and freedom of expression abroad – and at home.

Journalists, editors, publishers and photographers representing every major media company in Canada were present, along with supporters from some of Canada's biggest corporations. Most of the proceeds from the evening go to CJFE's Journalists-in-Distress Fund and to our press-

freedom work in Canada and abroad.

Graham opened the evening with an address praising the award winners.

"Lira Bayseitova, who is here with us tonight, has paid a terrible, indeed unimaginable, price for her dedication to the truth," he said. Bayseitova's 25-year-old daughter, Leila, died in a Kazakhstani jail cell a month after she published a story exposing the secret Swiss bank accounts of senior Kazakhstani government officials, including the president.

"Her fellow honorees," Graham continued about the three Somali-Canadians, "have returned to their war-torn and splintered homeland and, against many odds, continue to struggle to make their own contribution to building a nascent democracy by enabling

Somali citizens to hear a diversity of views from a credible source."

Graham surprised – and pleased – many in the audience when he addressed the controversy surrounding CanWest Global Communications Corp. and its handling of diversity of opinion at its newspapers.

At a time when "we contemplate what action to take in respect of the danger posed by Iraq today," he said, "we need journalists who can help us 'unpack the rhetoric,' help us judge whether we must take the firmest of action against a dangerous foe."

But then, in a clear reference to CanWest Global, the minister added: "We need the collaboration, not only of our journalists, but also of our editors, publishers and media owners, who bear a particularly heavy responsi-

bility in this day of media concentration, to ensure that a diversity of voices are available to our public.

"Can we lecture the rest of the world about the need for a free media when our own journalists speak of the chill prevailing in some of our own newsrooms?"

(CanWest Global did not renew its sponsorship of the dinner this year because of its disagreement with CJFE over the controversy. But several of its journalists attended in their own names.)

**Lira Bayseitova** won a standing ovation from the audience upon accepting the first award of the evening.

She spoke movingly of sleepless nights since her daughter's death in June. But in Toronto, she added, she had been able to sleep soundly for the first time.

## Direct appeal

Speaking through an interpreter, she addressed Canada's foreign affairs minister directly: "I appeal to you as a mother who lost my only daughter" to press Kazakhstani officials to allow an independent autopsy of her daughter's remains.

(Two Ontario coroners travelled to the Kazakhstani capital of Almaty in December. Though they did not exhume the body, they concluded from interviews with officials and from an examination of documents that Leila probably hanged herself in jail.

(CJFE says a host of questions surrounding her death remain unanswered and has called on Kazakhstani and Canadian authorities to help clear them up. They include why the coroners relied on interviews with Kazakhstani police, doctors and other officials, as well as official documents, for their investigation.



CTV's Lloyd Robertson (left) was master of ceremonies for the gala evening. Rob Prichard of Torstar and Ann Medina, co-chairs of the press freedom awards banquet, also spoke.





## ds banquet

CJFE says the the role of the Kazakhstani authorities in Leila's death remains unclear.)

The second winners of the evening were the three Somali-Canadians, who returned to their native country to open HornAfrik, a radio and television company that was the first independent media voice in the country since the end of the civil war.

**Mohamed Elmi** told the audience he wanted to share the award with his partners, his staff and with the "Somali public who suffered under the lack of freedom of expression."

Elmi added that HornAfrik was "a venture of risk ... in an environment where truth became the first casualty."

### Filling a void

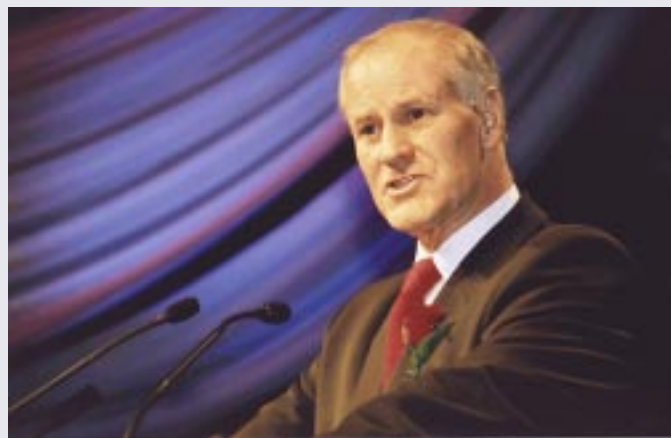
"We are proud we have filled a void for independent media in Somalia," he said, adding that there still are dangers today, including "repressive legislation, harassment, threats and even death."

(In January, HornAfrik was closed for a few hours when armed supporters of a local businessman unhappy with the broadcaster's coverage raided it.)

A special award also went to **Kathleen Kenna**, the *Toronto Star's* South Asia correspondent, who was injured last March while covering the war in Afghanistan.

Accepting the award on behalf of Kenna, who is still recovering, *Star* managing editor Mary Deanne Shears spoke briefly but movingly of the correspondent's approach to war reporting.

"She believed there was a different way to cover the war," she said. Kenna preferred to show the human side – and the human toll – of war, "giving voice to those who have no voice."



## 'Extraordinary challenges'

*The following is an edited transcript of a speech by Bill Graham, Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister, to the annual International Press Freedom Awards dinner on Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2002, in Toronto:*

"Too many governments around the world today do not accept the fact that their responsibility is to give priority to creating conditions where freedom from fear prevails for all. Instead they choose to live by fear; a fear for themselves and the fear they can generate in others.

"They fail to recognize, as Louise Arbour put it when she addressed this audience three years ago, that the suppression of freedom of expression feeds 'the extremist discourse that leads not only to war, but to genocide, extermination, murder, rape, torture, enslavement, deportation and prosecution on ethnic, racial or religious grounds.' They also don't realize, or choose to ignore, that the repressive actions they authorize today are likely to come back to haunt them and their societies in the future ....

"I would like to draw your attention to two areas to which I believe we must devote special attention.

"The first is what Reporters Without Borders characterized in its most recent annual report as 'the eternal and harrowing problem of the impunity enjoyed nearly all over the world by those who kill or attack journalists.' The Freedom of Expression Rapporteurs of the UN, the OAS [Organization of American States], and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] have all identified impunity as a major concern. They have noted that it is the duty of the state to prevent and investigate these occurrences, to punish the perpetrators and to ensure that the victims receive compensation....

"The second issue I would like to draw attention to is the need to nurture respect for the right to freedom of expression in newly emerging democracies. When I was Vice-President of the Parliamentary Association of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, we spearheaded efforts to assist the newly emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe to understand

the need, indeed the requirement, for these societies to fully respect the right to freedom of expression if they wish to be integrated politically and economically with the West ....

"Today's journalists face extraordinary challenges. Our citizens want information and guidance that will enable them to make informed choices about how to react to global issues that nonetheless impact their daily lives. They need to know about the asymmetric threats posed by terrorism on a global scale; what measures we need to take to repress such threats nationally and internationally and what measures risk threatening our own liberties; and how we need to engage moderate voices of Islam and others if we are to win the campaign for their hearts and minds and prevail over the voices of despair and extremism...

"In this we need the collaboration, not only of our journalists, but also of our editors, publishers and media owners, who bear a particularly heavy responsibility in this day of media concentration, to ensure that a diversity of voices are available to our public. Can we lecture the rest of the world about the need for a free media when our own journalists speak of the chill prevailing in some of our own newsrooms ....

"Ultimately we are called upon to work together so that political decisions will be made in the light of reason based upon hard information. In so acting, I believe that all of us must also work together to ensure that the respect for the right to freedom of expression becomes truly global, so that journalists everywhere can work and live without fear for themselves or their families."

"May 2003 be a better year for freedom of expression than this year has been and may we all work together, in our separate but interdependent spheres, to improve the conditions in that world upon which all our futures depend."



**ABOVE: CJFE President Arnold Amber accepts a \$50,000 cheque from CTV President Robert Hurst.**

**BELOW: Writer Margaret Atwood (left) with Random House editor Louise Denny and friend.**







**Protesters in a Caracas car caravan in December accused private TV stations of promoting violence (left). The banner urges a blackout on violence. Outside the privately owned Radio Caracas Televisión, students held a hunger strike “for Venezuelans’ mental health,” according to a placard.**

## Journalists on all sides in polarized Venezuela

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the private media, whom he calls escuálidos, or squalids, has worsened tensions by firing up hostility against them amongst his supporters. On several occasions, pro-Chávez supporters have physically assaulted news crews and attacked their vehicles and equipment, CPJ notes.

“Since being elected [in 1998], Chávez’s relationship with the media has been marked by confrontation,” says CPJ’s Americas research associate Sauro Gonzalez. “During his radio and television program *Aló, Presidente*, Chávez has lambasted his critics among the media [and] often used his nation-wide radio and television broadcasts to single out individual journalists and media owners for censure.”

On the other hand, media owners – who control all but one of Venezuela’s television stations – have taken an openly anti-Chávez stance, publicly backing the political opposition in its attempts to force the president from office.

“The media’s foray into the political arena only worsens the risks that Venezuelan journalists face,” Gonzalez says. “Some high-profile journalists have become

such ardent Chávez opponents that many Venezuelans say the media, in filling the void by discredited political parties, has become the opposition.”

The victims in this war are, of course, the journalists who are simply trying to do their jobs.

Some say that during the brief coup d’état in April 2002, in which

**“Some sections of media were clearly instigators – and some may even have been active participants – in the conspiracy to overthrow Chávez,” the IFJ concluded.**

Chávez was replaced by businessman Pedro Carmona, editors told them not to report on pro-Chávez demonstrations and re-wrote articles to put the opposition in a better light.

“Who is affected by this?” asks a local journalist interviewed by CPJ. “The journalist, because it’s his or her byline.”

Examining the media’s role during the April coup, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) concluded in a June 2002 report that “some sections of media were clearly instigators – and some may even have been active participants – in the con-

spiracy to overthrow Chávez,” leading to “harsh public criticism of media owners and rank-and-file journalists.”

During the crucial April 11-14 period in which Carmona replaced the deposed Chávez, many media outlets abandoned professional responsibility and censored vital information about the unfolding

Villegas, a journalist formerly with the daily *El Universal* and now with the state-run television station, *Venezolana de Televisión* (VTV).

The IFJ has proposed that media companies consider adopting a “clause of conscience” into collective agreements or self-regulatory mechanisms, giving journalists the right to refuse an assignment or perform any task that breaches recognized professional standards.

Such a clause would “provide a system of accountability to protect journalists from victimization or unfair treatment if they insist on maintaining ethical and professional standards in their work,” the organization says.

In the larger scheme of things, IFJ stresses that a dialogue between government and media is urgently needed to restore public confidence and respect for democratic values and human rights.

To see IFJ’s full report, called *Missing Link in Venezuela’s Political Crisis: How Media and Government Failed a Test of Journalism and Democracy*, go to [www.ifj.org/publications/mission/venezuelajuly02.pdf](http://www.ifj.org/publications/mission/venezuelajuly02.pdf)

**For free-expression alerts on Venezuela, see [www.ifex.org](http://www.ifex.org)**

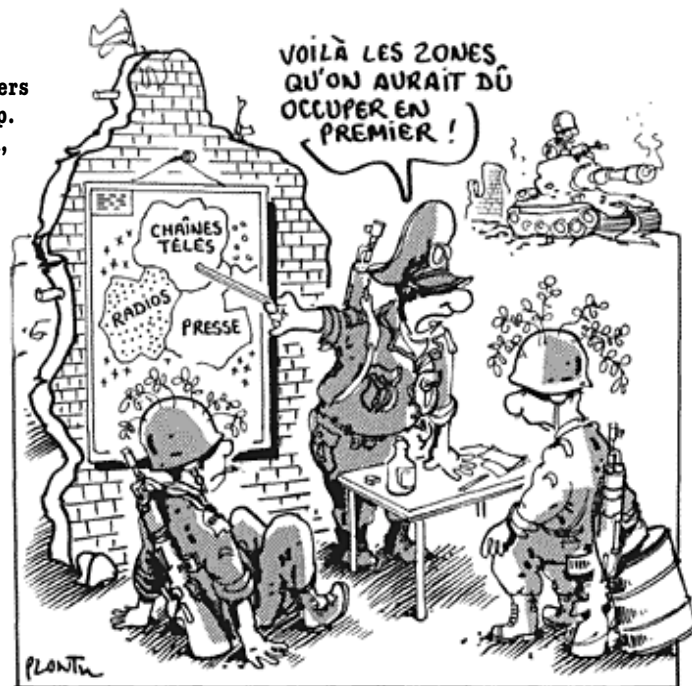
crisis, including coverage of large demonstrations in support of Chávez, IFJ says.

Journalists working for state-run media are not immune from political pressure either. A reporter for *Radio Nacional* told CPJ that journalists at the station are treated as either “Chavistas” (Chávez supporters) or squalids. Another journalist at *Venpres* says the state-run press agency doesn’t have a policy that journalists must cover both sides of a story.

“It can bring risks for journalists to maintain balance, because you may be considered a traitor by both sides,” adds Ernesto

## Cartoonists unite for their rights

A new member of IFEX, the Cartoonists Rights Network has members in more than 18 countries defending cartoonists against censorship. The network’s first East European Festival of Cartoons, in Ploiesti, Romania, in October 2001, awarded prizes to Leone Nastase of Romania (the press caught between power and the opposition, below) and Plantu of France’s *Le Monde* (“The first zones you must occupy are radio, television and newspapers”, at right).



# Burmese exiles ponder prospects for free expression

By Kristina Stockwood

Exiled Burmese journalists Tin Maung Than and Win Khet spoke at a Toronto gathering hosted by CJFE and the Burma Media Association in December on the state of free expression in Burma, a nation under a dictatorship of generals who call the country Myanmar.

Speaking at the University of Toronto's Massey College, they expressed some optimism about pro-democracy talks, but noted that conditions for journalists in Burma are tough these days, and have been for the last 40 years. Press freedom groups say 16 journalists are currently imprisoned in Burma.

Tin Maung Than, editor and publisher of the banned magazine *Thint Ba-Wa* (Your Life), has been exiled in the United States since fleeing in 2000 after publishing a critical speech by a former minister about the state of Burma's economy. He spoke about the 11 rules and regula-



**Tin Maung Than (left) and Win Khet say Burma's journalists have "no weapons to free ourselves."**

KRISTINA STOCKWOOD / CJFE

tions governing the Burmese media, including a requirement that media submit manuscripts to censors before publication.

"There is an elaborate process of prior censorship," explained Tin Maung Than, describing how journalists must write selectively about topics such as AIDS, or hide stories within stories and hope readers will see the true meaning where the censor did not.

All equipment in Burma, including computers and faxes, must be registered with the military government bi-annually, and foreigners are not exempt.

Win Khet, a former editor of several publications, fled Burma in 1989 after being jailed twice. Now exiled in Australia, he belongs to the National League for Democracy.

"We have no weapons to free

ourselves," he said, noting that the government had disbanded independent media associations. He has taken his campaign for a free Burma to 18 countries on 51 trips. Calling his exile a "golden opportunity," he said, "until my death, I'll be working for the new generation."

Win Khet expressed "great appreciation for the awards given by CJFE to prominent journalists in Burma." San San Nwe won a CJFE International Press Freedom Award in 1998, as did Myo Myint Nyein in 2001. Both journalists were in jail when they won, and have since been freed.

In Burma, "there is no freedom of expression.... In fact, there is no freedom at all," noted Brian John of Amnesty International, who also spoke at the event. "A climate of fear affects the whole country and the SPDC (the military junta) maintains its iron grip."

**For more information about the Burma Media Association, visit [www.bma-online.net](http://www.bma-online.net).**

## TAJIKISTAN

# Press freedom starting to take hold

In September, Tajikistan marked the 11th anniversary of its independence following the Soviet Union's break-up. Konstantin Parshin, Donner-CJFE Journalist-at-Risk Fellow at Massey College, gives an overview of his native country.

After the 1917 revolution, the Soviet government redrew internal political borders in Central Asia, creating Tajikistan as an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan. In 1929, it was made a full-fledged Soviet Socialist Republic.

In 1920, Dushanbe was a village of 3,000. Today, it is the capital and has 1 million people.

Following independence in 1991, the new Tajik ideologists turned to the nation's historical roots. Bobojohn Gafurov, a history professor and author of the key historical manuscript "The Tajiks," was almost canonized in 1992 when the new ideologists gathered for the first "Tajiks of the World" forum.

There was a strong craving for a new national ideal in Tajikistan and its Central Asian neighbors. Prior to the advent of the Soviet Union, the area had been under the influence of Iran, China, Turkey and Russia.

In the early 1990s, when the Soviet empire was coming apart, the newly emerging Islamic-oriented Tajik "democrats" – many of whom were former Communist Party apparatchiks – proclaimed



**Konstantin Parshin**

ANDREW STRAUSS / CJFE

Russia the enslaver and blamed the Communists for all the misfortunes and failures of the newly sovereign nation.

Religious and ethnic extremism threw Tajikistan into a protracted and savage civil war. Of the country's 6.25 million people, 100,000 were killed and 700,000 driven into exile. The war left the economy in ruins. According to the UN Human Development Report, more than 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, subsisting on less than US\$1 a day.

What has been achieved during 11 years of independence?

The nation has eventually reconciled. The government and the United Tajik Opposition signed the Peace Accord in 1997 and ratified all of its provisions.

And Tajikistan has become a full member of the United Nations, signing and ratifying numerous international pacts and conventions in a bid to show the

international community it wants to become a secular country.

Although the fighting has ended, however, the old Soviet thinking has not.

A huge monument now stands on the central square of Dushanbe – a big statue of Ismail Somoni, founder of the ancient Samanid dynasty from which contemporary Tajiks are believed to descend, according to Professor Gafurov. Somoni has replaced the Lenin statues of old, but the government has spent piles of money to erect that monument and the mausoleum next to it.

And while unemployed Tajik workers were leaving the country to seek jobs in Russia and Kazakhstan, Dushanbe's municipal office brought in craftsmen from Moscow to refurbish the façades of the capital's main buildings. Last year, on the eve of Independence Day, some façades were rebleached several times simply because officials were unhappy with the colours. This is a typical post-Soviet Central Asian way of thinking: "Why show our guests the post-conflict wounds? Let's show that the nation's doing just fine."

### Smart facade

Just like in good old Soviet times, the Tajik government uses any excuse to hold an anniversary party. But instead of May 1 (International Labour Day) or November 7 (Great October Socialist Revolution), it's the 1,100th an-

niversary of the founding of the Samanid State, the 10th anniversary of the first "Tajiks of the World" forum, or the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the city of Istravshan.

So the government celebrates the country's independence, downtown Dushanbe looks smart and tidy, all the fountains in the town centre work – and ordinary people wonder how to get running water into their apartments. Even in the city's downtown, some people are without water for weeks at a time.

People have grown used to the absence of even the most basic amenities in their homes. Some have become quite resourceful, building good heating systems in their yards, installing diesel generators, laying their own water-supply pipelines.

But despite these difficult conditions, there are indications that press freedom conditions are beginning to improve.

In July 2002, President Emomali Rakhmonov unexpectedly gave support to a private radio company, Asia Plus. It was unprecedented for the president to personally help a private media company get started.

Asia Plus and Radio NIC had sought for five years to gain a licence to broadcast in the capital. Asia Plus finally went on the air on September 9, and broadcasts freely every day from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.



# A crime reporter who won't be silenced

*The Biker Who Shot Me: Recollections of a Crime Reporter*  
By Michel Auger  
Translated by Jean-Paul Murray  
McClelland & Stewart  
218 pp, \$35

Reviewed by Joel Ruimy

**L**he investigative reporter gunned down outside his office by someone who didn't like his stories – it's happened in Colombia, Bangladesh, Russia, Mexico. On September 13, 2000, it happened in Canada.

Michel Auger, winner of the 2000 CJFE Tara Singh Hayer Memorial Award, tells his story in a chatty volume that's now available in English (this review is based on the French version).

What a story it is; crime reporter Auger, on his way into work on a sunny Wednesday morning, just back from holidays, thoughts already drifting to the weekend. "I had arranged to have a stress-free work week," he writes.

Fat chance. A gunman working for the biker gangs Auger had repeatedly exposed in *Le Journal de Montreal* was waiting in the newspaper's parking lot. The attacker fired seven shots from a silenced pistol within two seconds; six bullets hit their target. Remarkably, Auger was conscious long enough to call 911 on his cell phone. He even remembers joking with the doctor and the ambulance paramedics en route to hospital.

Auger's luck ran longer than that of the 46 journalists around the world killed last year. He survived and, although two bullets hit his spine, suffered no paralysis.

From his hospital bed, Auger contemplated the attempt on his life and whether he wanted to continue facing risks. He even considered retirement; he was 56 years old.

"Who could blame me for wanting to leave this business?"

he writes. "I worried that the people behind this attack must surely regret having missed their chance. I was afraid to go back to work and to the same life as before ...."

But in time, and with the support of his colleagues, his community and many free-expression organizations around the world, Auger came roaring back.

"On Sept. 13, 2000, criminals wanted to silence me and they succeeded, briefly. But my bosses and my colleagues at *Le Journal de Montreal* had understood that we couldn't fold in the face of intimidation ... stories about the bikers have been front and centre since."

Auger is back at his desk, having reclaimed his title of dean of

Quebec crime reporters. He deals with the attempt on his life at length. But that is not the only value of this book.

His knowledge of the players in the Quebec and Canadian underworld is encyclopedic – he has covered them for four decades for *La Presse*, the CBC and *Le Journal de Montreal*.

Auger describes in riveting detail how decades ago, Montreal's crime families helped to build bridges between U.S. and European criminal organizations.

He has a lot to say about the biker gangs that have infested Quebec, including the Hell's Angels – a curiosity when he encountered them in 1967 but now a bold and ruthless crime force.

## BOOK REVIEW



Michel Auger

## La libre expression mise à mal à l'Université Concordia de Montréal



CP / RYAN REMORZ

8

**Des manifestants ont protesté contre un discours de l'ex-premier ministre d'Israël Benjamin Netanyahu à l'Université Concordia.**

par David Cozac

**O**n considère généralement le libre échange des idées comme la pierre angulaire de la vie universitaire.

Ce principe est toutefois mis à rude épreuve à l'Université Concordia de Montréal lorsque surgit la question israélo-palestiniennne.

En septembre dernier, une manifestation de protestation contre un discours de Benjamin Netanyahu s'est terminée dans la violence lorsqu'une foule d'en-

viron 200 manifestants a affronté l'escouade anti-émeute, forçant l'annulation du discours de l'ancien Premier ministre d'Israël.

« Ce n'est pas à une manifestation que nous venons d'assister, a déclaré Netanyahu, mais à une émeute destinée à faire obstacle à la libre expression. »

Même si bien des gens peuvent être d'accord avec cet énoncé, le fond de l'affaire – tout comme le conflit israélo-palestinien – est plus complexe.

Sur le campus de Concordia, quand on en arrive à discuter de

la question du Moyen-Orient, les divisions ne sont pas nouvelles. Les associations qui représentent chacun des groupes – environ 5 000 étudiants musulmans (le cinquième de la population étudiante) et de 1 500 à 2 000 étudiants juifs – organisent des conférences, produisent des affiches, tiennent des expositions de protestation pour promouvoir leur cause et, dans certains cas, provoquer l'autre camp.

### Moratoire décrété

Face à une telle poudrière de vues opposées, il n'est pas surprenant que les tentatives des deux parties pour exprimer leurs opinions se heurtent souvent à des opposants irrités, voire à la censure.

Après la violence de septembre, l'administration de l'université a réagi rapidement et décrété un moratoire sur « toutes les activités étudiantes sur le campus qui ont trait au Moyen-Orient ». En annonçant sa décision, le recteur de Concordia, Frederick Lowy, a déclaré qu'on ne devait pas laisser se répéter un « événement honteux » comme l'émeute.

En novembre, on a tenté de contester le moratoire. Les députés fédéraux Svend Robinson et Libby Davies, du Nouveau Parti démocratique (NPD), et la militante et auteure Judy Rebick, ont accepté de l'Union des étudiants de Concordia (CSU) une invitation à prendre la parole sur la paix et la justice au Moyen-Orient. L'établissement a obtenu à la dernière minute une injonction in-

terdisant la tenue de l'événement sur le campus.

Dans son jugement, le juge Jean Guibault, de la Cour supérieure du Québec, a déclaré que l'université avait le droit de protéger les étudiants et le personnel. « La liberté d'expression ne s'exerce pas à tout prix », a-t-il déclaré.

En dépit de la décision du tribunal, environ 300 personnes se sont réunies hors campus pour entendre Rebick et les députés dénoncer le moratoire, la décision du tribunal et l'occupation des territoires palestiniens par Israël.

« On pense aux universités comme au symbole du débat et de l'échange des idées, de l'information et du discours politique », a déclaré Davies. « L'idée d'être dans une zone d'exclusion et d'être confrontés à un sujet interdit m'apparaît tout à fait ahurissante. »

### L'inquiétude persiste

Bien que le moratoire ait pris fin en décembre dernier, l'inquiétude persiste. Le vice-président de la CSU pour l'action sociale, Ralph Lee, a déclaré que son groupe était « extrêmement préoccupé » par ce qui pourrait se passer à l'avenir. Il a fait remarquer que l'administration universitaire a retenu les services d'un conseiller pour superviser les activités reliées au Moyen-Orient.

Lee s'est demandé ce que sera la politique de l'administration lorsque quelqu'un installera sur le campus une table qui présentera des critiques d'Israël.