

MEDIA REPRESSION IN 2009

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**
Aotearoa New Zealand



Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 19 – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Freedom of the media is an essential element of the protection of human rights. Despite many issues and challenges, a fully functioning free media operates as the “fourth estate”, exposing abuses of power and holding the other pillars of society to account.

UNESCO places the media above all forms of communication and defines it as “an essential component in the building of a world at peace.”

In reality, the media in most parts of the world is not completely free. Different situations present different threats and restrictions on press freedom, some more deadly than others, but there are few places where journalists are fully free to seek out and expose the truth.

PROTECTING MEDIA WORKERS

Journalists and other media workers pay a high price for their human rights work.

In Amnesty’s eyes, media workers are human rights defenders: they promote and protect human rights through peaceful and non-violent means. Their actions depend on, and fuel, freedom of expression.

Because of their activities, human rights defenders can become a target of abuse. Governments, security forces, business interests, armed groups, religious leaders and sometimes even their own families and communities can try and silence their dissenting opinions or actions.

Amnesty International works to protect journalists from harassment and death threats, free them from unjust imprisonment and guarantee them their right to freedom of expression.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY – MAY 3

World Press Freedom Day provides an opportunity for people around the world to celebrate the fundamental human right to freedom of expression, defend the media from attacks on their independence and honour the memory of journalists who have lost their lives because of the peaceful exercise of their right to speak and write freely.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed May 3 to be World Press Freedom Day in 1993, and it has been recognised on that date every year since then.



A man reads a newspaper outside his home in Dhinkia village, Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, India, 2008.

2009 FACTS AND FIGURES

76 journalists killed

33 journalists kidnapped

573 journalists arrested

1456 journalists assaulted

157 journalists fled their countries

1 blogger died in prison

151 bloggers and cyber-dissidents arrested

2009 deaths – Regional breakdown

- **Asia-Pacific – 44**
- **Africa – 12**
- **Europe – 7**
- **Middle East – 7**
- **America – 6**

MEDIA WORKERS UNDER ATTACK: SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, reporting the truth can be fatal. Journalists have been killed, physically assaulted, abducted, and harassed by both government personnel and members of armed groups. At least 15 journalists have been killed since 2006 and more than 20 have fled the country. The perpetrators of such human rights violations have never been brought to justice.

These attacks take place against a backdrop of official government statements accusing dissenting journalists or human rights activists of treason or supporting the armed group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The government's frequent vitriolic responses to any criticism only serve to erode its legitimacy in the international arena. But in Sri Lanka, such rhetoric serves to implicitly support, if not actually encourage, physical attacks on government critics.

CASE FILE: LASANTHAN WICKREMATUNGE

Lasantha Wickrematunge, outspoken critic of the Sri Lankan government and editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper, was shot and killed on his way to work on 8 January 2009. He died a few hours later of his injuries.

The Sunday Leader newspaper is known in Sri Lanka for its articles exposing political corruption in privatisation deals and for drawing attention to human rights abuses in connection with the war between the government and the LTTE.

Shortly before he was killed, Lasantha Wickrematunge wrote an obituary predicting his own death. "People often ask me why I take such risks and tell me it is a matter of time before I am bumped off," he wrote. "Of course I know that: it is inevitable. But if we do not speak out now, there will be no one left to speak for those who cannot"



An Amnesty International activist at a vigil held in support of Sri Lankan journalists, Parliament Square, London, March 2008.

"In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too"

- Lasantha Wickrematunge

TAKE ACTION – JOIN THE MEDIA NETWORK

Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand's Media Network brings together media workers who are interested in human rights. The Media Network works to promote freedom of expression; raise awareness of human rights issues within NZ and the Pacific media sectors; and offer members the opportunity to take action on behalf of journalists and media workers who are imprisoned or at risk.

To join the Media Network, or receive the latest issue of Media Network e-News, please email media@amnesty.org.nz



Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.8 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.