

Brazil Falls to 84th Place in World's Press Freedom Index

Contributed by Newsroom
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Since 2002, the first year that the Paris-based press freedom organization Reporters without Borders (RSF for its acronym in French) released its Worldwide Press Freedom Index, Brazil has fallen from 54th place to 84th. Just from 2006 Brazil fell nine positions. The RSF has analyzed 169 countries.

In 2003, the survey showed Brazil in 71st place. The country had recuperated some terrain in 2004 (66th place) and 2005 (63rd). In South America, Brazil only loses to Colombia (126th), Peru (117th), Venezuela (114th) and Paraguay (90th) in lack of press freedom.

The study intends to be a portrait of the media between September 1st, 2006 to September 1st, 2007. It measures how many journalists were killed, wounded, taken into custody, threatened, taken to the courts as well as those who have their stories censored.

The RSF says that the organization is worried about the increase in the number of cases involving 'preventive censorship' in the Brazilian media. The measures are generally taken by local judges and do not allow any appeal.

Regarding the federal government, Reporters without Borders seems concerned with the consequences of the ruling PT (Workers Party) decision to summon the politicians to unite against media sectors that write stories against the party and the Lula administration.

As for the rest of the world Eritrea has replaced North Korea in last place in the RSF index. And Iceland once again appears as the country where freedom of the press is best respected.

After falling steadily in the index for the past three years, the G8 members have recovered a few places. France (31st), for example, has climbed six places.

There were slightly fewer press freedom violations in the United States (48th) and blogger Josh Wolf was freed after 224 days in prison.

But the detention of Al-Jazeera's Sudanese cameraman, Sami Al-Haj, since 13 June 2002 at the military base of Guantanamo and the murder of Chauncey Bailey in Oakland in August, says the RSF, "mean the United States is still unable to join the lead group."

Of the 20 countries at the bottom of the index, seven are Asian (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vietnam, China, Burma, and North Korea), five are African (Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Somalia and Eritrea), four are in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Palestinian Territories and Iran), three are former Soviet republics (Belarus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and one is in the Americas (Cuba).

Reporters Without Borders compiled its index by sending a questionnaire to the 15 freedom of expression organizations throughout the world that are its partners, to its network of 130 correspondents, and to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists. It contained 50 questions about press freedom in their countries. The index covers 169 nations. Other countries were not included because of lack of data.

The Brazil Report

The murder of journalist Ajuricaba Monassa near Rio de Janeiro in July and a bid to kill a community radio presenter in May continued the violence against local media. Threats and censorship of media outlets accompanied the general election campaign in October.

Freelance journalist Ajuricaba Monassa de Paula, 73, was beaten to death by town councilor Osvaldo Vivas in Guapiririm (Rio de Janeiro state) on July 24 because he had reported on financial irregularities in the town government.

Community radio presenter Camelo Luis de Sá escaped an attempt by the mayor's son in the northeastern town of Quiterianópolis to shoot him dead while he was on the air in May.

The risk of reprisal is still high in the country's media, especially for local radio stations and papers. Maria Mazzei, of the daily O Dia, had to go into hiding in late August for revealing a racket in corpses by organized crime in the Rio area. Local police and courts often react slowly and police are sometimes themselves involved in threats and efforts to intimidate.

A complaint filed on June 7 by environmentalist Vilmar Berna, editor of Jornal do Meio Ambiente, in Niterói (Rio de Janeiro state), after repeated death threats was not dealt with for more than a month and only after the national daily A Folha de S. Paulo carried an article about the case.

Three heavily-armed and hooded men broke into the newsroom of the São Paulo daily Imprensa Livre, roughed up seven staff members and burned 3,000 copies of the May 18 issue which contained an article about the riots in the city sparked by the criminal group First Commando of the City (PCC). About 40 cases of threats and physical attacks and the ransacking of four media offices were recorded during the year.

A Turbulent Campaign

The national press was also involved in a scandal just before the October general elections, when Gedimar Passos, an activist of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's Workers Party, was arrested on September 15 in a São Paulo hotel with a briefcase containing US\$ 600,000, which was to be used to buy a compromising file about the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and its leader, Geraldo Alckmin, who was beaten by Lula at the November 29 election.

Two days after this second round of the presidential vote, three journalists of the weekly *Veja* were summoned by federal police in São Paulo and pressured to reveal their sources in the matter. The daily *A Folha de S. Paulo* said on November 8 that phones in its Brasília offices were being tapped by federal police as part of the scandal over the file. Police wanted to know which journalists had had the slightest contact with Passos.

The election campaign also hit local journalists. *Diário de Marília*, based in Marília (São Paulo state) was physically attacked on October 1st by supporters of former mayor Abelardo Camarinha and his son, a local deputy. The two were already suspected of organizing an arson attack on the paper's offices on September 8, 2005.

Between August and October 2006, regional and federal election authorities gave in to demands by candidates for senator, deputy or governor to ban publication or seize material from media outlets or news websites in the states of Amapá, Minas Gerais, Paraná and the Federal District.

Despite these obstacles and the continuance of the 1967 press law inherited from the military dictatorship that allows imprisonment for media offenses, the federal government promised to respect freedom of expression.

President Lula signed the Inter American Press Association's Declaration of Chapultepec on press freedom on May 3. He vetoed on July 26 a proposed law to regulate journalism by requiring journalists to have a diploma and belong to a journalism institute.

The issue has divided the country's media and the two highest federal courts disagree on the diploma requirement. The High Court on November 8 voted for it and the Federal Supreme Court, which is above it, unanimously rejected it two weeks later.

Worrying Precedent

Brazil's blogosphere was furious at the closure of the blog "Repiquete no meio do mundo." Federal justice officials had ordered the editor of the blog on August 17 to remove a cartoon of a senate candidate.

The blog's Brazilian host, UOL, then decided of its own accord to shut down the blog, a worrying precedent because it may encourage local Internet service providers to censor online publications regardless of a court decision.

The ranking

Rank Country Note

1 Iceland 0,75

- Norway 0,75

3 Estonia 1,00

- Slovakia 1,00

5 Belgium 1,50

- Finland 1,50

- Sweden 1,50

8 Denmark 2,00

- Ireland 2,00

- Portugal 2,00

11 Switzerland 3,00

12 Latvia 3,50

- Netherlands 3,50

14 Czech Republic 4,00

15 New Zealand 4,17

16 Austria 4,25

17 Hungary 4,50

18 Canada 4,88

19 Trinidad and Tobago 5,00

20 Germany 5,75

21 Costa Rica 6,50

- Slovenia 6,50

23 Lithuania 7,00

24 United Kingdom 8,25

25 Mauritius 8,50

- Namibia 8,50

27 Jamaica 8,63

28 Australia 8,79

29 Ghana 9,00

30 Greece 9,25

31 France 9,75

32 Taiwan 10,00

33 Spain 10,25

34 Bosnia and Herzegovina 11,17

35 Italy 11,25

36 Macedonia 11,50

37 Japan 11,75

- Uruguay 11,75

39 Chile 12,13

- South Korea 12,13

41 Croatia 12,50

42 Romania 12,75

43 South Africa 13,00

44 Israel (Israeli territory) 13,25

45 Cape Verde 14,00

- Cyprus 14,00

47 Nicaragua 14,25

48 United States of America 14,50

49 Togo 15,17

50 Mauritania 15,50

51 Bulgaria 16,25

52 Mali 16,50

53 Benin 17,00

54 Panama 17,88

55 Tanzania 18,00

56 Ecuador 18,50

- Poland 18,50

58 Cyprus (North) 19,00

- Montenegro 19,00 n. c.

60 Kosovo 19,75

61 Hong-Kong 20,00

- Madagascar 20,00

63 Kuwait 20,17

64 El Salvador 20,20

65 United Arab Emirates 20,25

66 Georgia 20,83

67 Serbia 21,00

68 Bolivia 21,50

- Burkina Faso 21,50

- Zambia 21,50

71 Central African Republic 22,50

72 Dominican Republic 22,75

73 Mozambique 23,00

74 Mongolia 23,40

75 Botswana 23,50

- Haiti 23,50

77 Armenia 23,63

78 Kenya 23,75

79 Qatar 24,00

80 Congo 24,50

81 Moldova 24,75

82 Argentina 24,83

83 Senegal 25,00

84 Brazil 25,25

85 Cambodia 25,33

- Liberia 25,33

87 Albania 25,50

- Honduras 25,50

- Niger 25,50

90 Paraguay 26,10

91 Angola 26,50

92 Malawi 26,75

- Ukraine 26,75

94 Côte d'Ivoire 27,00

- Timor-Leste 27,00

96 Comoros 28,00

- Uganda 28,00

98 Lebanon 28,75

99 Lesotho 29,50

100 Indonesia 30,50

101 Turkey 31,25

102 Gabon 31,50

103 Israel (extra-territorial) 32,00

104 Guatemala 33,00

- Seychelles 33,00

106 Morocco 33,25

107 Fiji 33,50

- Guinea 33,50

- Guinea-Bissau 33,50

110 Kyrgyzstan 33,60

111 Cameroon 36,00

- United States of America (extra-territorial) 36,00

113 Chad 36,50

114 Venezuela 36,88

115 Tajikistan 37,00

116 Bhutan 37,17

117 Peru 37,38

118 Bahrein 38,00

119 Tonga 38,25

120 India 39,33

121 Sierra Leone 39,50

122 Jordan 40,21

123 Algeria 40,50

124 Malaysia 41,00

125 Kazakhstan 41,63

126 Colombia 42,33

127 Burundi 43,40

128 Philippines 44,75

129 Maldives 45,17

130 Gambia 48,25

131 Nigeria 49,83

132 Djibouti 50,25

133 Democratic Republic of Congo 50,50

134 Bangladesh 53,17

135 Thailand 53,50

136 Mexico 53,63

137 Nepal 53,75

138 Swaziland 54,50

139 Azerbaijan 55,40

140 Sudan 55,75

141 Singapore 56,00

142 Afghanistan 56,50

143 Yemen 56,67

144 Russia 56,90

145 Tunisia 57,00

146 Egypt 58,00

147 Rwanda 58,88

148 Saudi Arabia 59,75

149 Zimbabwe 62,00

150 Ethiopia 63,00

151 Belarus 63,63

152 Pakistan 64,83

153 Equatorial Guinea 65,25

154 Syria 66,00

155 Libya 66,50

156 Sri Lanka 67,50

157 Iraq 67,83

158 Palestinian Territories 69,83

159 Somalia 71,50

160 Uzbekistan 74,88

161 Laos 75,00

162 Vietnam 79,25

163 China 89,00

164 Burma 93,75

165 Cuba 96,17

166 Iran 96,50

167 Turkmenistan 103,75

168 North Korea 108,75

169 Eritrea 114,75