

IFEX members survey global press freedom

The war in Iraq, which claimed a high number of journalists' lives, overshadowed press freedom worldwide in 2003, according to annual reports recently released by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontières, RSF) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) registered 36 journalists killed worldwide in 2003, including 13 in Iraq. The death toll in Iraq was the highest recorded in a single country since 1995, when 24 journalists were killed in Algeria at the height of the civil conflict, CPJ notes.

CPJ only records journalists killed in the line of duty or deliberately assassinated because of their reporting or their affiliation with a news organisation. It includes neither cases under investigation nor other media staff such as translators and drivers.

Despite the high death toll in Iraq, war and civil conflicts were not the greatest threats to journalists in most countries, CPJ said. "Nearly all the journalists killed outside Iraq were deliberately targeted, often in direct reprisal for their critical reporting. Those who carried out or ordered the killings did so with impunity." The Philippines lead all countries with five journalists killed, followed by Colombia with three.

IFJ recorded 83 journalists and media staff killed in 2003, 13 more than the previous year. Its tally includes 18 cases under investigation. After Iraq, IFJ also cited the Philippines and Colombia as countries where the highest number of killings occurred (a total of 15).

Meanwhile, RSF termed 2003 a "black year" for journalists, with the largest number of journalists killed worldwide (42) since 1995. The war in Iraq accounted for 14 deaths. RSF said the high death toll indicated that safety conditions for journalists covering wars are becoming increasingly hazardous.

"Added to the traditional dangers of war are the unpredictable hazards of bomb attacks, the use of more sophisticated weapons - against which even the training and protection of journalists is ineffective - and belligerents who care more about winning the war of images than respecting the safety of media staff."

RSF also noted that censorship of the media and the arrests of journalists reached a record high in 2003. This was due to the adoption of anti-terrorism laws in some countries after the September 11 attacks on the United States.

The group counted at least 501 cases of media censorship and 766 arrests. Meanwhile, 124 journalists remain imprisoned around the world, including 30 in Cuba and 17 in Burma, RSF said.

Read the full reports here:

- CPJ: http://www.cpj.org/news/2004/killed_release02jan04.html
- IFJ: <http://www.ifj.org/pdfs/Journalists%20and%20Media%20Staff%20Killed%202003.pdf>
- RSF: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=8969

For annual reports from previous years, visit: <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/archivereports/240/>

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