

CIRCUMVENTING Cyber Censorship

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In some countries, a journalist can be thrown in prison for years for a single word or photo. Jail-ing or killing a journalist removes a vital witness and threatens the right of us all to be informed. The year 2011 took a heavy toll on media freedom, with the Arab Spring at the centre of the news. Of 66 journalists killed in 2011, 20 were killed in the Middle East – twice as many as in 2010. A similar number were killed in Latin America, where the media is highly exposed to criminal violence. For the second year running, Pakistan was the single deadliest country for journalists with a total of ten killed. China, Iran and Eritrea continue to be the world's biggest prisons for the media.

Today, the battle for freedom of expression and information has moved to the Internet where thousands of journalists, bloggers, net-citizens and human rights defenders risk their lives disseminating free and independent information with the click of a mouse. The forms of repression and cyber censorship put in place by a significant number of states are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and violent.

An EU project supports Reporters Without Borders (RWB) in its fight against internet censorship and laws that undermine internet freedoms. The project defends an Internet that is unrestricted and accessible to all by providing the victims of censorship with the means of protecting their online information.

RWB helps improve the safety of journalists, especially those reporting from war zones, and defends journalists and other media workers imprisoned or persecuted for doing their job on-line. It also supports hundreds of journalists and media outlets in difficulty by paying for lawyers, medical care and equipment as well supporting the families of imprisoned journalists.

This project has set up the world's first "Anti-Censorship Shelter", a physical and virtual space in Paris for use by foreign journalists, bloggers and dissidents who are refugees or just passing through. They can learn how to circumvent Internet censorship, protect their electronic communications and maintain their anonymity online at a time when online filtering and surveillance is becoming more widespread.