

### **Close-up on Maghreb / Middle East**

The same six Middle East champions of repression that are near the bottom of the world press freedom index every year have confirmed their status this year again. Free expression continues to be no more than a dream in Iraq (158th), Syria (159th), Libya (160th), Saudi Arabia (161st), the Palestinian Territories (163rd) and Iran (166th). Journalists are subjected to relentless censorship and in some cases incredible violence in these countries. The Palestinian Territories have never before fallen so far in a year. The power struggle between the main factions has taken a disastrous toll on press freedom. The political split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has been accompanied by a division of the media. The Israeli military's responsibility for the death of a Palestinian cameraman employed by Reuters in April and the impunity granted to the soldier who fired the fatal shell account for Israel's fall (149th outside its own territory) in the ranking.

In the Maghreb, Morocco (122nd) continues the fall it began two years ago. The decline in relations between government and press increased significantly with the jailing of journalist Mostapha Hurmatallah. A series of prosecutions of journalists and Internet users has shown that press freedom in Morocco stops at the doors of the royal palace.

Lebanon (66th) has risen 30 places as no journalist was on the list of victims of this year's bombings. The Hezbollah-orchestrated offensive against certain media affiliated to the anti-Syrian opposition left no victims and triggered a wave of indignation in Lebanese society.