

Asia-Pacific area



Asian Communist regimes still hold the lowest rankings

Asia's four Communist regimes, **North Korea** (177th place), **China** (171st), **Vietnam** (165th) **Laos** (168th), are among the fifteen lowest-ranked countries of the 2010 World Press Freedom Index. Ranked just one place behind Eritrea, hellish totalitarian North Korea has shown no improvement. To the contrary: in a succession framework set up by Kim Jong-il in favour of his son, crackdowns have become even harsher. China, despite its dynamic media and Internet, remains in a low position because of non-stop censorship and repression, notably in Tibet and Xinjiang. In Laos, it is not so much repression which plagues this country of Southeast Asia as its single party's political control over the whole media. On the other hand, Vietnam's Communist Party – soon to hold its own Congress – and its open season against freedom of speech is responsible for its worse than mediocre ranking.

Among the last thirty countries of Reporters Without Borders' Index are ten Asian nations, notably **Burma**, where the military junta have decided that the prior censorship system will be maintained despite the upcoming general elections in November.

India's and Thailand's rankings drop due to a breakout of serious violence

Political violence has produced some very troubling tumbles in the rankings. **Thailand** (153rd) – where two journalists were killed and some fifteen wounded while covering the army crackdown on the “red shirts” movement in Bangkok – lost 23 places, while **India** slipped to 122nd place (-17) mainly due to extreme violence in Kashmir. **The Philippines** lost 34 places following the massacre of over

thirty reporters by partisans of one of Mindanao Island's governors. Despite a few murderers of journalists being brought to trial, impunity still reigns in the Philippines. Also in Southeast Asia, **Indonesia** (117th) cannot seem to pass under the symbolic bar separating the top 100 countries from the rest, despite remarkable media growth. Two journalists were killed there and several others received death threats, mainly for their reports on the environment. **Malaysia** (141st), **Singapore** (136th) and **East Timor** (93rd) are down this year. In short, repression has not diminished in ASEAN countries, despite the recent adoption of a human rights charter.

In **Afghanistan** (147th) and in **Pakistan** (151st), Islamist groups bear much of the responsibility for their country's pitifully low ranking. Suicide bombings and abductions make working as a journalist an increasingly dangerous occupation in this area of South Asia. And the State has not slackened its arrests of investigative journalists, which sometimes more closely resemble kidnappings.

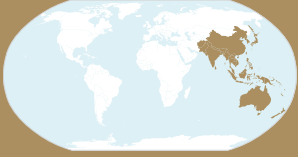
Democratic Asian countries gain ground

Asia-Pacific country rankings can be impressive. **New Zealand** is one of the ten top winners and **Japan** (11th), **Australia** (18th) and **Hong Kong** (34th) occupy favourable positions. Two other Asian democracies, **Taiwan** and **South Korea**, rose 11 and 27 places respectively, after noteworthy falls in the 2009 Index. Although some problems persist, such as the issue of the state-owned media's editorial independence, arrests and violence have ceased.

Some developing countries have managed to make solid gains, particularly **Mongolia** (76th) and **the Maldives** (52nd). As a rule, the authorities have been res-

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pectful of press freedoms, exemplified by their decriminalisation of press offences in the Maldives.

An occasional ranking in this Index can be deceptive. **Fiji** (149th), for example, rose three places, even though the government has passed a new liberticidal press law. The year 2009 had been so tragic, with soldiers invading news staff offices, that the year 2010 could only seem to be somewhat more tranquil. **Sri Lanka** (158th) jumped four places: less violence was noted there, yet the media's ability to challenge the authorities has tended to weaken with the exile of dozens of journalists.

In this Index based upon violations of press freedoms, Asia, has earned a low ranking for yet another year. Even when a country's press enjoys freedom, too often it also has to endure violence from non-governmental actors. When the press lives under the control of an authoritarian regime, it is obliged to censor and to self-censor. Chinese intellectual Liu Xiaobo was sentenced to eleven years behind bars for denouncing this situation – a struggle which was rewarded by the Nobel Peace Prize – bringing new hope to the Asia-Pacific area.

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Europe falls from its pedestal, no respite in the dictatorships

“Our latest world press freedom index contains welcome surprises, highlights sombre realities and confirms certain trends,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-François Julliard said as his organisation issued its ninth annual index today. “More than ever before, we see that economic development, institutional reform and respect for fundamental rights do not necessarily go hand in hand. The defence of media freedom continues to be a battle, a battle of vigilance in the democracies of old Europe and a battle against oppression and injustice in the totalitarian regimes still scattered across the globe.

“We must salute the engines of press freedom, with Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland at their head. We must also pay homage to the human rights activists, journalists and bloggers throughout the world who bravely defend the right to speak out. Their fate is our constant concern. We reiterate our call for the release of Liu Xiaobo, the symbol of the pressure for free speech building up in China, which censorship for the time being is still managing to contain. And we warn the Chinese authorities against taking a road from which there is no way out.

“It is disturbing to see several European Union member countries continuing to fall in the index. If it does not pull itself together, the European Union risks losing its position as world leader in respect for human rights. And if that were to happen, how could it be convincing when it asked authoritarian regimes to make improvements? There is an urgent need for the European countries to recover their exemplary status.

“We are also worried by the harsher line being taken by governments at the other end of the index. Rwanda, Yemen and Syria have

joined Burma and North Korea in the group of the world’s most repressive countries towards journalists. This does not bode well for 2011. Unfortunately, the trend in the most authoritarian countries is not one of improvement.”

European Union loses its leadership status

Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly expressed its concern about the deteriorating press freedom situation in the European Union and the 2010 index confirms this trend. Thirteen of the EU’s 27 members are in the top 20 but some of the other 14 are very low in the ranking. Italy is 49th, Romania is 52nd and Greece and Bulgaria are tied at 70th. The European Union is not a homogenous whole as regards media freedom. On the contrary, the gap between good and bad performers continues to widen.

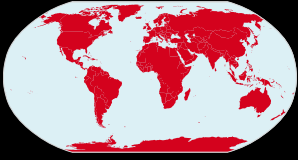
There has been no progress in several countries where Reporters Without Borders pointed out problems. They include, above all, France and Italy, where events of the past year – violation of the protection of journalists’ sources, the continuing concentration of media ownership, displays of contempt and impatience on the part of government officials towards journalists and their work, and judicial summonses – have confirmed their inability to reverse this trend.

Northern Europe still at the top

Several countries share first place in the index again. This year it is Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. They have all previously held this honour since the index was created in 2002. Norway and Iceland have always been among the countries sharing first position except in 2006 (Norway) and 2009 (Iceland).

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These six countries set an example in the way they respect journalists and news media and protect them from judicial abuse.

They even continue to progress. Iceland, for example, is considering an exemplary bill, the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI), that would provide a unique level of protection for the media. Sweden distinguishes itself by its Press Freedom Act, which has helped to create a particularly favourable climate for the work of journalists, by the strength of its institutions and by its respect for all those sectors of society including the media whose role in a democracy is to question and challenge those in positions of power.

Ten countries where it is not good to be a journalist

In recent years, Reporters Without Borders drew particular attention to the three countries that were always in the last three positions – Eritrea, North Korea and Turkmenistan. This year, a bigger group of ten countries – marked by persecution of the media and a complete lack of news and information – are clumped together at the bottom. The press freedom situation keeps on deteriorating in these countries and it is getting harder to say which is worse than the other. The difference between the scores of the “best” and worst of the last 10 countries was only 24.5 points this year. It was 37.5 points in 2009 and 43.25 points in 2007.

It is worth noting that, for the first time since the start of the index in 2002, Cuba is not one of the 10 last countries. This is due above all to the release of 14 journalists and 22 activists in the course of the past summer. But the situation on the ground has not changed significantly. Political dissidents and independent journalists still have to deal with censorship and repression on a daily basis.

Freedom is not allowed any space in Burma, where a parliamentary election is due to be held next month, and the rare attempts to provide news or information are met with imprisonment and forced labour.

Finally, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Mexico, countries either openly at war or in a civil war or some other kind of internal

conflict, we see a situation of permanent chaos and a culture of violence and impunity taking root in which the press has become a favourite target. These are among the most dangerous countries in the world, and the belligerents there pick directly on reporters such as French TV journalists Stéphane Taponier and Hervé Ghesquière, who have been held hostage in Afghanistan for the past 300 days.

Economic growth does not mean press freedom

The BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India and China – may all be at a roughly similar stage of economic development but the 2010 index highlights major differences in the press freedom situation in these countries. Thanks to favourable legislative changes, Brazil (58th) has risen 12 places in the past year, while India has fallen 17 places to 122nd. Russia, which had a particularly deadly preceding year, is still poorly placed at 140th. Despite an astonishingly vibrant and active blogosphere, China still censors and jails dissidents and continues to languish in 171st place.

These four countries now shoulder the responsibilities of the emerging powers and must fulfil their obligations as regards fundamental rights.

Heavy falls

The Philippines, Ukraine, Greece and Kyrgyzstan all fell sharply in this year's index. In the Philippines this was due to the massacre of around 30 journalists by a local baron, in Ukraine to the slow and steady deterioration in press freedom since Viktor Yanukovich's election as president in February, in Greece to political unrest and physical attacks on several journalists, and in Kyrgyzstan to the ethnic hatred campaign that accompanied the political turmoil.

The changes are unfortunately often deceptive. Some countries have risen sharply in the index this year but in fact all they have done is recover their traditional position after a particularly difficult if not disastrous 2009. This is the case with Gabon, which rose 22 places, South Korea (+27) and Guinea-Bissau (+25).

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World Press Freedom Index 2010

The rankings

Rank	Country	Note	
1	Finland	0,00	=
-	Iceland	0,00	↑
-	Netherlands	0,00	↑
-	Norway	0,00	=
-	Sweden	0,00	=
-	Switzerland	0,00	↑
7	Austria	0,50	↑
8	New Zealand	1,50	↑
9	Estonia	2,00	↓
-	Ireland	2,00	↓
11	Denmark	2,50	↓↓
-	Japan	2,50	↑
-	Lithuania	2,50	↓
14	Belgium	4,00	↓
-	Luxembourg	4,00	↑
-	Malta	4,00	↓
17	Germany	4,25	↑
18	Australia	5,38	↓
19	United Kingdom	6,00	↑
20	United States of America	6,75	=
21	Canada	7,00	↓
-	Namibia	7,00	↑↑
23	Czech Republic	7,50	↑
-	Hungary	7,50	↑
25	Jamaica	7,67	↓
26	Cape Verde	8,00	↑↑
-	Ghana	8,00	↑
-	Mali	8,00	↑
29	Costa Rica	8,08	↑
30	Latvia	8,50	↓↓
-	Trinidad and Tobago	8,50	↓
32	Poland	8,88	↑
33	Chile	10,50	↑
34	Hong-Kong	10,75	↑↑
35	Slovakia	11,50	↑
-	Surinam	11,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
37	Uruguay	11,75	↓
38	South Africa	12,00	↓
39	Spain	12,25	↑
40	Portugal	12,36	↓↓
41	Tanzania	13,00	↑↑
42	Papua New Guinea	13,33	↑↑
-	South Korea	13,33	↑↑
44	France	13,38	↓
45	Cyprus	13,40	↓↓
46	Slovenia	13,44	↓
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	13,50	↓
48	Taiwan	14,50	↑↑
49	Burkina Faso	15,00	↑
-	Italy	15,00	=
51	El Salvador	15,83	↑↑
52	Maldives	16,00	↓
-	Romania	16,00	↓
54	Paraguay	16,25	=
55	Argentina	16,35	↓
56	Haiti	16,38	↑
57	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States	16,50	nc
58	Brazil	16,60	↑↑
59	Guyana	16,63	↓↓
60	Togo	17,00	↑
61	Cyprus (North)	17,25	↓↓
62	Botswana	17,50	=
-	Croatia	17,50	↑↑
64	Bhutan	17,75	↑
65	Mauritius	18,00	↓↓
-	Seychelles	18,00	↑
67	Guinea-Bissau	18,25	↑↑
68	Macedonia	18,40	↓↓
69	Central African Republic	18,50	↑↑
70	Benin	19,00	↑
-	Bulgaria	19,00	↓
-	Comoros	19,00	↑↑
-	Greece	19,00	↓↓
-	Kenya	19,00	↑↑
75	Moldova	19,13	↑↑
76	Mongolia	19,42	↑↑
77	Guatemala	20,25	↑↑
78	Lebanon	20,50	↓↓
79	Malawi	21,00	↓↓
80	Albania	21,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
81	Panama	21,83	↓↓
82	Zambia	22,00	↑↑
83	Nicaragua	22,33	↓
84	Liberia	22,50	↓↓
85	Serbia	23,00	↓↓
86	Israel (Israeli territory)	23,25	↑
87	Kuwait	23,75	↓↓
-	Tonga	23,75	↕
-	United Arab Emirates	23,75	↓
90	Lesotho	24,00	↑
91	Sierra Leone	24,25	↑↑
92	Kosovo	24,83	↓↓
93	Senegal	25,00	↓
-	Timor-Leste	25,00	↓↓
95	Mauritania	25,38	↑
96	Uganda	25,50	↓↓
97	Dominican Republic	26,13	↑
98	Mozambique	26,50	↓↓
99	Georgia	27,00	↓↓
-	United States of America (extra-territorial)	27,00	↑
101	Armenia	27,50	↑↑
-	Ecuador	27,50	↓↓
103	Bolivia	28,13	↓
104	Angola	28,50	↑↑
-	Montenegro	28,50	↓↓
-	Niger	28,50	↑↑
107	Gabon	28,75	↑↑
108	Burundi	28,88	↓
109	Peru	30,00	↓↓
110	Djibouti	30,50	=
111	Samoa	33,00	↕
112	Chad	33,17	↑↑
113	Guinea	33,50	↓↓
114	Congo	33,60	↑
115	Tajikistan	34,50	↓
116	Madagascar	34,88	↑↑
117	Indonesia	35,83	↓↓
118	Côte d'Ivoire	36,00	↓↓
119	Nepal	36,38	↓
120	Jordan	37,00	↓
121	Qatar	38,00	↓↓
122	India	38,75	↓↓
123	Zimbabwe	39,50	↑↑
124	Oman	40,25	↓↓

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Rank	Country	Note	
125	Gambia	40,50	↑↑
126	Bangladesh	42,50	↓
127	Egypt	43,33	↑↑
128	Cambodia	43,83	↓↓
129	Cameroon	44,30	↓↓
130	Iraq	45,58	↑↑
131	Ukraine	46,83	↓↓
132	Israel (extra-territorial)	47,00	↑↑
133	Algeria	47,33	↑
-	Venezuela	47,33	↓
135	Morocco	47,40	↓
136	Mexico	47,50	↑
-	Singapore	47,50	↓
138	Turkey	49,25	↓↓
139	Ethiopia	49,38	↑
140	Russia	49,90	↑↑
141	Malaysia	50,75	↓↓
142	Brunei	51,00	↑↑
143	Honduras	51,13	↓↓
144	Bahrein	51,38	↓↓
145	Colombia	51,50	↓↓
-	Nigeria	51,50	↓↓
147	Afghanistan	51,67	↑
148	Democratic Republic of Congo	51,83	↓
149	Fiji	52,75	↑
150	Palestinian Territories	56,13	↑↑
151	Pakistan	56,17	↑
152	Azerbaijan	56,38	↓
153	Thailand	56,83	↓↓
154	Belarus	57,00	↓
155	Swaziland	57,50	↓↓
156	Philippines	60,00	↓↓
157	Saudi Arabia	61,50	↑
158	Sri Lanka	62,50	↑
159	Kyrgyzstan	63,00	↓↓
160	Libya	63,50	↓
161	Somalia	66,00	↑
162	Kazakhstan	68,50	↓↓
163	Uzbekistan	71,50	↓
164	Tunisia	72,50	↓↓
165	Vietnam	75,75	↑
166	Cuba	78,00	↑
167	Equatorial Guinea	79,00	↓
168	Laos	80,50	↑
169	Rwanda	81,00	↓↓

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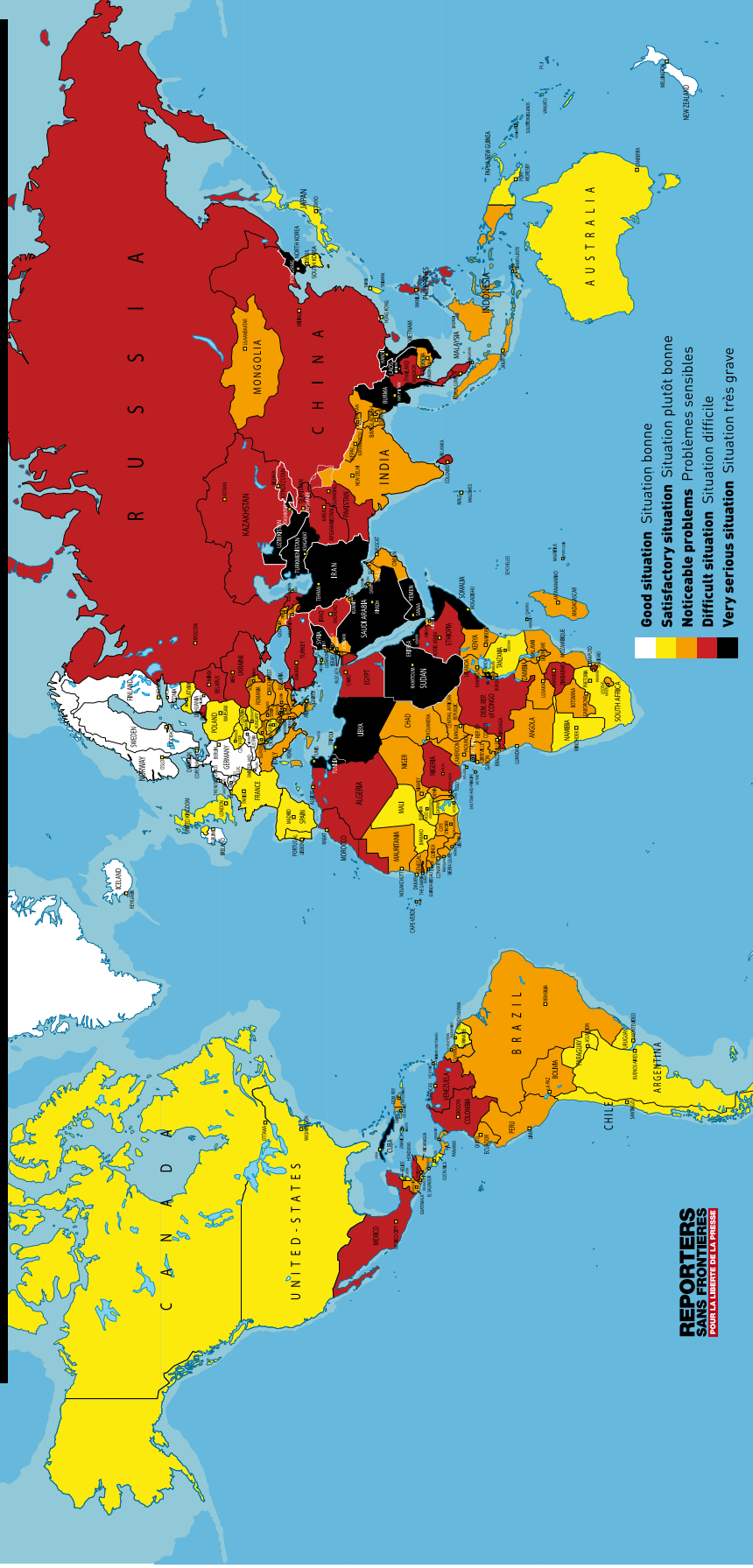


Rank	Country	Note	
170	Yemen	82,13	↓
171	China	84,67	↓
172	Sudan	85,33	↓↓
173	Syria	91,50	↓
174	Burma	94,50	↓
175	Iran	94,56	↓
176	Turkmenistan	95,33	↓
177	North Korea	104,75	↓
178	Eritrea	105,00	↓

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