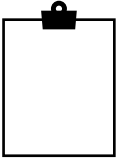


ROUND-UP

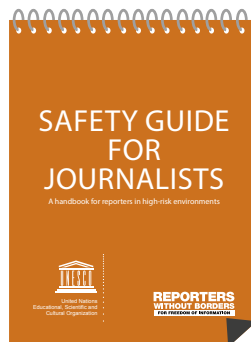
of journalists detained,
held hostage or disappeared in
2015

**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

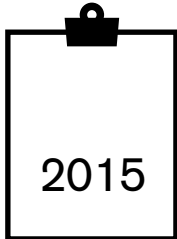


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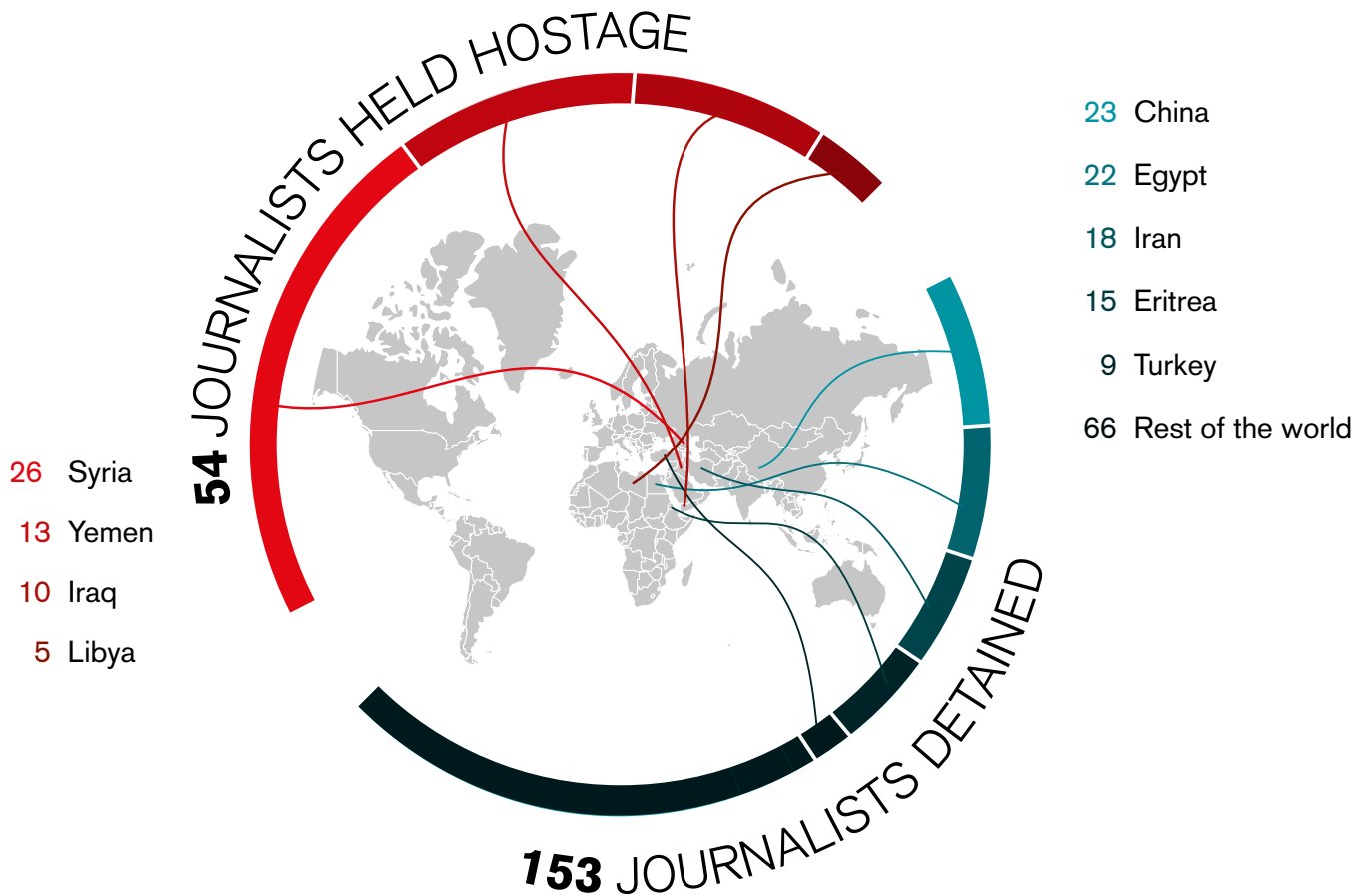


To help protect journalists, RSF launches its new Safety Guide in partnership with Unesco.



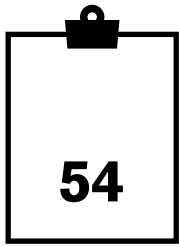
ROUND-UP OF JOURNALISTS DETAINED, HELD HOSTAGE OR DISAPPEARED

Round-up at 15 december 2015



**8 JOURNALISTS
DISAPPEARED IN 2015**





JOURNALISTS CURRENTLY HELD HOSTAGE

+ 35% ↗

+ 3 citizen-journalists

+ 4 media workers

100%
in conflict
zones



91%
in the
Middle East



9%
in
North Africa

81%
nationals



19%
foreigners

98%
men



2%
women
(1 woman)

Fifty-four journalists are currently held hostage worldwide, compared with 40 at the same time last year. This is a 35% increase. To this appalling figure should be added the three citizen-journalists and four media workers who are also currently held by non-state groups.

It is no surprise that Syria tops the list of countries with hostages. Journalists represent easy targets for radical groups such as Islamic State (Daesh) or Al-Nusra Front, which not only obtain ransoms or use hostages as leverage, but also and above all use hostage-taking to impose a reign of terror and reduce critics to silence. As a result, entire regions of the country have become news and information black holes.

Abducting journalists has become a common occurrence in Yemen ever since Houthi militiamen seized control of the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. With 13 professional journalists (plus one citizen-journalist and one media worker) currently held by kidnappers, Yemen now has the second-biggest total of hostages. It is closely followed by Iraq and Libya.

Biggest hostage-takers of professional journalists



Concentration in four countries



New abductions of journalists fell in 2015

79

professional
journalists were
abducted

- 34% ↘

70%
in conflict
zones



30%
not in conflict
zones

95%
nationals



5%
foreigners

The number of journalists kidnapped for more than 24 hours (and subsequently freed, killed or remaining hostage) fell in 2015. Part of the reason is Ukraine, which saw the biggest number of journalist abductions in 2014 and saw none in 2015. This was due to the fact that, although the Donbas separatists still act in a completely arbitrary manner in the areas they control, the front-line has frozen, the fighting has let up and there are fewer international reporters. RSF also monitors abductions in every other continent, including Africa (Nigeria), Asia (Pakistan) and Latin America (Mexico).



5

HOSTAGE CASES

2015

SYRIA, THE MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRY FOR JOURNALISTS



Ángel Sastre, José Manuel López and Antonio Pampliega :

Three Spanish journalists still held by Al-Nusra

Spanish journalists Ángel Sastre, José Manuel López and Antonio Pampliega – all experienced war reporters – were kidnapped in the Syrian city of Aleppo on 13 July together with their fixer, Usama Ajjan. According to RSF's information, the three Spaniards are currently held by the Al-Nusra Front, while their fixer has been freed. The information is nonetheless patchy.

In the “hostage-industry” developed by non-state groups, foreign journalists are especially prized because they offer the possibility of much more leverage. Their governments can be pressured to pay ransoms and the media usually devote more space to their abduction than to the abduction of national journalists.



John Cantlie

British hostage held by Islamic State

British journalist John Cantlie is not a run-of-the-mill Islamic State hostage. Kidnapped in 2012 along with fellow journalist James Foley (who was murdered in August 2014), Cantlie is being used by his abductors for their media propaganda and has appeared in several of their carefully-staged videos. Their latest exploitation of Cantlie is an 18 November article under his supposed by-line in the Islamic State online magazine *Dabiq* about the Paris attacks. It says more attacks, worse than 9/11, are being prepared.



Obaida Batal

Syrian journalist held by Islamic State

Syrian reporter Obaida Batal, 28, was kidnapped along with two colleagues, sound engineer Hosam Nizam Al-Dine and technician About Al-Atik, during an attack on the bureau of opposition broadcaster *Orient TV* in Tel Rifaat (40 km north of Aleppo) on 25 July 2013. According to RSF's sources, he is being held by Islamic State and his last known location was Raqqah. Gunmen ransacked the TV station's offices during the attack, taking computers, videos and its broadcast van.

JOURNALISTS ALSO TARGETED IN YEMEN AND IRAQ



Salah Al Qaidi

Yemeni hostage held by Houthis (Yemen)

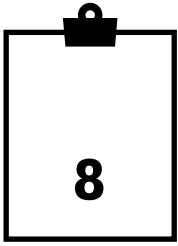
Houthis kidnapped the journalist Salah Al Qaidi in Sanaa on 28 August because he worked for a media outlet that supports the Sunni rival party Al-Islah. According to our information, he was tortured and then taken to a detention centre in the Sanaa district of Habra in October. No other information has emerged since then. Media outlets have been ransacked in Sanaa and few independent journalists are still there. At least 15 professional journalists, citizen-journalists and media workers are thought to be currently held by the Houthis. Their fate is very worrying because the Houthis do not respect the Geneva Conventions and do not hesitate to use hostages as human shields in the conflict that is devastating Yemen.



Zakir Khalil

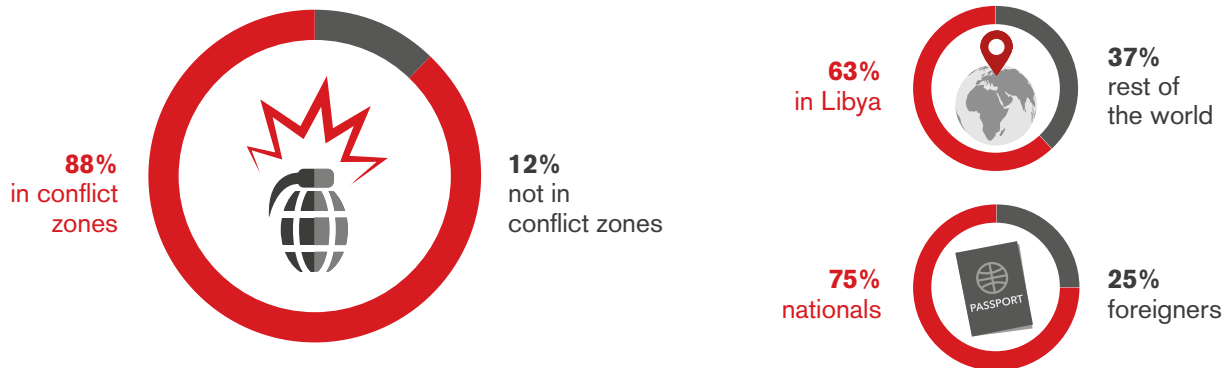
Iraqi hostage held by Islamic State in Mosul (Iraq)

The editor of the local newspaper *Al-Mizan*, Zakir Khalil was kidnapped by Islamic State in the northern city of Mosul on 3 February after being accused of “treason and espionage” in connection with his coverage of Islamic State’s takeover of Mosul on 10 June 2014. RSF has no information about his current status. Since seizing control of Mosul, the jihadi group has kidnapped at least 48 journalists and citizen-journalists and executed 13, while around 60 journalists, media workers and citizen-journalists have fled the city, which has become an information black hole.



JOURNALISTS REPORTED MISSING

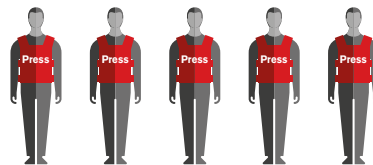
2015



Journalists are regarded as disappeared when there are insufficient indicators to determine whether they have been killed or taken hostage and no credible claim of responsibility has been made. Most of the disappearances of journalists occurred in the Middle East and North Africa in 2015 but for years there have also been disappearances in Latin America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Uncertainty about the fate of missing journalists acts as a major deterrent for fellow journalists who are contemplating a visit to a high-risk region.

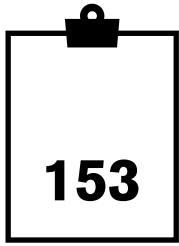
Disappearances occur mainly in conflict zones where instability compounds the difficulties of investigations aimed at locating the missing journalists, if indeed there are any investigations. Libya, where it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain reliable information, is the country most affected by this problem.

Five *Barqa TV* journalists missing in Libya



A crew working for privately-owned *Barqa TV* – Egyptian cameraman Mohamed Galal and Libyan colleagues Khaled Al-Subhi, Younes Al-Mabrouk, Abdussalam Al-Maghrebi and Youssef Al-Qamoudi – never returned from a reporting trip in northeastern Libya in August 2014. Nothing was said publicly about their disappearance until the Tobruk-based government announced on 25 April 2015 that they had been murdered.

But the Tobruk authorities provided no details and no evidence to support this claim. In the absence of any transparency, RSF regards the five journalists as disappeared and has repeatedly pressed the Libyan authorities and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to shed light on the case. RSF has also been pressing for information about Tunisian journalists Sofiane Chourabi and Nadhir Ktari, who disappeared in Libya in September 2014 and who, according to a similarly unsupported claim by the Tobruk authorities, were also murdered.

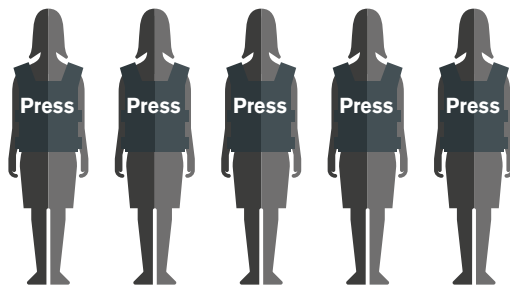


153

JOURNALISTS CURRENTLY DETAINED

- 14% ↘

- + **161** citizen-journalists
- + **14** media workers



5 women professional journalists
currently detained (3%)

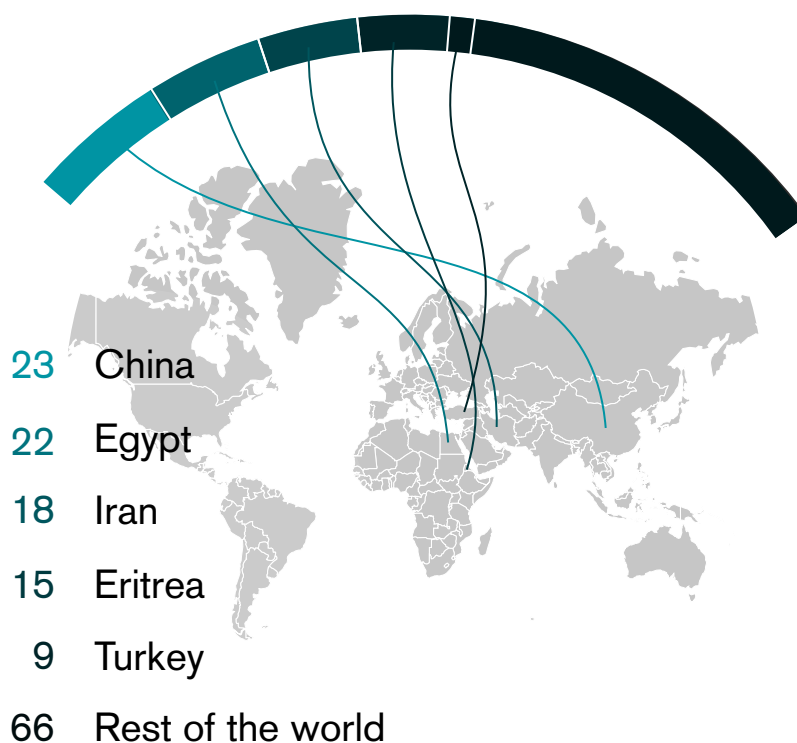


1 foreign professional journalist
currently detained (0,7%)

A total of 153 professional journalists, 161 citizen-journalists and 14 media workers are currently detained in connection with the work. This is fewer than in 2014, when 178 journalists and 178 citizen-journalists were held. China, Iran, Egypt and Eritrea are still the world's biggest prisons for journalists. Those held in Iran include several arrested in November, the latest of many journalists to be accused of membership of "espionage networks," and *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian, who has US and Iranian dual nationality. He has been held for the past 18 months.

Worldwide, the journalists currently held include five women and one foreigner. The foreigner is Mohammed Rasool, an Iraqi journalist arrested on 27 August 2015 while helping *VICE News* cover the Kurdish issue near the Syrian border in Turkey. The Turkish authorities accuse him of terrorism.

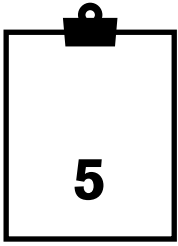
The five countries holding the most professional journalists



Turkey rejoins the ranks of the world's biggest prisons

In yet another indication of the spiralling oppression in Turkey, the country has reentered the ranks of the world's five biggest prisons for professional journalists. Not even foreign reporters were spared, as seen in the arrest in August of a *VICE News* crew, whose Iraqi fixer is still held.

The latest example of the Turkish government's interference in the workings of the justice system is the 26 November arrests of Can Dündar, the editor of *Cumhuriyet*, a daily that was awarded the 2015 RSF Press Freedom Prize, and Erdem Gül, his Ankara bureau chief. They are facing a possible life sentence on charges of membership of a terrorist organization, spying and divulging state secrets because of a story in May about possible arms deliveries to Syria by the Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT).



5 DETAINEES

2015



Rauf Mirkadyrov (Azerbaijan)

The Azerbaijani authorities finally began trying independent journalist Rauf Mirkadyrov on 4 November, after letting him fester in pre-trial detention for a year and a half. Turkey facilitated Mirkadyrov's arrest in April 2014 on an absurd charge of high treason and spying for Armenia. A prominent critic of the Azerbaijani, Turkish and Russian governments, he had been based in Turkey for the previous three years, but the Turkish authorities rescinded his work visa without explanation and put him on a flight to Baku, where he was arrested on arrival. Since then, his detention has been extended every month despite his declining health. His family is barred from attending his trial, which is being held behind closed doors. Like Khadija Ismayilova, another well-known journalist now in prison, Mirkadyrov is a victim of President Ilham Aliyev's two-year-long crackdown on independent media and journalists.



Wang Xiaolu (China)

Business reporter Wang Xiaolu has been held arbitrarily since 25 August because the authorities blamed a story he wrote about the China Securities Regulatory Commission for the dramatic fall in share prices on the Shanghai stock exchange at the end of July. There has been no information about his fate since his arrest. In China, the world's biggest prison for journalists, any reporting on a sensitive subject can run afoul of the regime's all-powerful censorship system.



Narges Mohammadi (Iran)

A journalist and spokesperson of the banned Centre for Human Rights Defenders, Narges Mohammadi was arrested on 5 May so that she could resume serving a six-year jail sentence. Since then, she has been in Tehran's Evin prison, where she is denied access to the medical treatment she needs, and denied any contact with her husband and children, who now live in France. RSF is very concerned about her state of health.

In October she was taken to a Teheran hospital, where she spent ten days handcuffed to a bed before being returned to prison against the advice of her doctors. Newly charged at the time of her arrest with "activities against national security" and "anti-government publicity," she has been arrested, convicted, hospitalized and released many times since 2010. Her case is typical of judicial practices in Iran, the world's second biggest prison for journalists, where the judicial system is controlled by the Supreme Leader and is manipulated by the Revolutionary Guards in order to gag reporting critical of the regime.



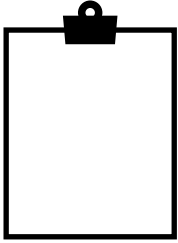
Abdullah Al Fakhrani (Egypt)

A young reporter and co-founder of the *Rassd* news website, Abdullah Al Fakhrani was arrested for covering the August 2013 demonstrations in Cairo's Rabaa Adawiya Square in support of deposed President Mohamed Morsi. After being held for nearly two years without trial, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in April on charges of supporting a terrorist organization and being part of an "operations room" aimed at orchestrating attacks against the government during the protests. Five other journalists received life sentences at the same trial. On 3 december, the court decided to re-examine the case. Egypt was one of the world's biggest prisons for journalists in 2015.



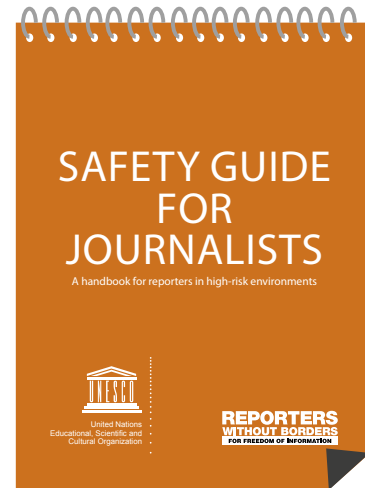
Egide Mwenero (République démocratique du Congo)

Burundian radio technician Egide Mwenero was arrested on 14 October in Uvira, a town near the Burundian border in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, during a raid on a local radio station, Radio *Le Messenger du Peuple*, by members of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR). He had been working on a Burundian political news programme produced by the staff of *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA), a radio station banned in Burundi since 27 April. He was transferred on 2 November to Kinshasa (2,500 km from his home in Bujumbura), where he is currently held in a secret location, probably one controlled by the ANR, which is known for mistreating its detainees. Not content with harassing Congolese journalists and media, the DRC is now providing the Burundian government's censorship with strong-arm assistance. This does not bode well for the run-up to the DRC's election in late 2016. Since the start of 2015, at least ten media outlets have been censored in the DRC, ten journalists have been physically attacked and other journalists have been arbitrarily arrested by the ANR.



SAFETY GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

2015



RSF publishes new version of its [Safety Guide for Journalists](#)

In response to the growing dangers for journalists, RSF has released an updated version of its *Safety Guide for Journalists* in French, English, Spanish and Arabic. Produced in partnership with UNESCO, it offers practical advice to journalists going to high-risk areas.

Reporters have to be ready for a wide range of dangers including armed conflict, epidemics, natural disasters and street protests. In the era of Internet communication and smartphones, cyber-security is also a challenge for journalists visiting conflict zones or countries with authoritarian governments. The guide includes tips on protecting sources, data and communications.

It stresses the importance of being well prepared before setting off, both physically and psychologically, and the need for debriefing and psychological support if any signs of post-traumatic stress are noticed after returning home. The guide includes advice on health precautions and coping with red tape, and reminds news organizations sending reporters into the field that they must be well trained and briefed in advance so they are confident they know everything they need.

The online version of the guide includes accounts by roving foreign correspondents of some of their experiences while travelling to high-risk areas.