

Murders, repression characterise press dangers

Nearly 60 journalists have been murdered in the past months, and prosecution of journalists for “treason” and “extremism” are on the rise, according to the annual half-year review of press freedom by the World Association of Newspapers. The report, presented Saturday, 2 June 2007, to the Board of the Paris-based WAN on the eve of the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, painted a grim picture of attacks, imprisonment and murder facing journalists in many countries.

“The past six months have brought another disturbingly high death toll of journalists and media professionals, killed both in and outside of conflict zones. A quasi-total impunity still prevails throughout the world and most notably in Central and Latin America, but also in the war-torn Iraq and in Russia,” said the report.

“Administrative and legal harassment, arbitrary arrests and detentions have remained a pattern to suppress press freedom in countries as diverse as Belarus, Egypt, Zimbabwe, China or Vietnam. As for death threats, they continue to reach investigative reporters, whether they work in Haiti or in Croatia.”

“Whereas criminal defamation was still broadly used against journalists over the past six months, cases of prosecution on the severe charges of ‘treason’ or ‘extremism’ seemed to be on the rise,” it said. “New court and search cases throughout Europe and in the US came to confirm the urgency to provide for a clear legal protection of journalists confidential sources.”

Fifty-nine journalists have been killed since November 2006. Iraq remains the most deadly place country, with 26 killed.

The report, with region-by-region details, is available at www.wan-press.org/article14321.html.

The Paris-based WAN, the global organisation for the newspaper industry, defends and promotes press freedom world-wide. It represents 18 000 newspapers; its membership includes 76 national newspaper associations, newspaper companies and individual newspaper executives in 102 countries, 12 news agencies and 10 regional and world-wide press groups.

For more information on the 60th World Newspaper Congress and 14th World Editors Forum, go to www.capetown2007.co.za.