

World's press condemns Brit govt's action against Guardian

PARIS, FRANCE / DARMSTADT, GERMANY / LONDON, UK: World's press protests against destruction of Guardian newspaper hard drives and apparent decline in press freedom of UK.

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum have protested to Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom against the actions of government officials that led to the destruction of computer hard drives belonging to the Guardian newspaper last month.

In a letter to Cameron, WAN-IFRA, the global organisation of the world's press, called on the United Kingdom to reaffirm its commitment to press freedom and "respect the rights of journalists to protect their sources and to create the conditions necessary to ensure the press can continue its crucial role in maintaining free and fair societies, without government interference or intimidation".

WAN-IFRA expressed its dismay at the government's decision to pursue the threat of legal action should the Guardian not hand over or destroy computer hard drives, in a bid to prevent the publication of reports based on the leaked files supplied by National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden.

"I am afraid the United Kingdom is progressively losing its place as a world leader in freedom of expression and a free press", said Vincent Peyrègne, CEO of WAN-IFRA. "That the government felt the need to threaten legal action to block reporting into issues of public interest is deeply distressing and will have a chilling effect on press freedom in the UK and beyond. This is especially pertinent given the information contained in the hard drives was stored elsewhere and destroying them was a symbolic gesture only".

WAN-IFRA also expressed concern regarding the detention of David Miranda, the partner of Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald, who has been instrumental in breaking the story on the NSA files, under the UK Terrorism Act of 2000. Miranda had his personal electronic items confiscated and was held for an unprecedented nine-hours without charges being brought against him.

Increase in number of journalists arrested

WAN-IFRA has seen an increase in the arrests of journalists under anti-terror legislation in recent years, particularly in countries such as Turkey and Ethiopia.

"It is extremely upsetting that the UK government has used anti-terrorism legislation to detain the partner of the Guardian

journalist associated with the Snowden files", Peyrègne said. "WAN-IFRA regards this as a complete misuse of anti-terror legislation."

"I am calling on the Prime Minister of the UK, in the strongest possible terms, to provide his assurance that the necessary inquiries will be made to ensure that any inference of association between journalism and terrorism is not part of official policy that puts the UK on the same level as Turkey and Ethiopia, whose governments misuse anti-terror legislation to silence critics".

This most recent protest letter follows a letter to Cameron in April 2013, regarding the proposed Royal Charter on Self Regulation of the Press and the serious questions that remain regarding the future direction of independent press regulation.

Reports suggest that since Lord Justice Leveson's inquiry into press behaviour, as many as 59 journalists have been arrested under three separate police investigations. None has been convicted and many have spent months on police bail.

The most recent letter can be read at <http://www.wan-ifra.org/node/84088>

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>