

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/maldives-15-journalists-get-sms-threatening-06-08-2014,46765.html>

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Asia - Maldives

Intimidation

## 15 journalists get SMS threatening them about covering gangs

6 August 2014

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Threat follows media coverage of surge in gang violence

Against a backdrop of violence between rival criminal gangs, 15 Maldivian journalists [received an anonymous text](#) on 3 August threatening them about their coverage of the gangs. Although a tourist paradise, Maldives is no paradise for journalists, with 84 per cent saying they have been threatened at least once.

Journalists with *Haveeru*, *Raajje TV*, *Maldives Broadcasting Corporation (MBC)*, *VTV*, *Sun Online* and *Vaguthu* received the same threatening SMS, which follows extensive media coverage of a surge in gang violence in Malé, the capital, in late July.

"We will kill you if you keep writing inappropriate articles about gangs in the media," the message said.

"*Death threats lead to self-censorship*," said Benjamin Ismaïl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk. "*The authorities have a duty to guarantee the safety of journalists. This includes arresting those responsible for these threats. The authorities must end the culture of intimidation and impunity by ceasing to turn a blind eye to abuses by the rival gangs.*"

Death threats are common in Maldives even if rarely carried out. But a disturbing precedent was set in February 2013, when *Raajje TV* journalist **Ibrahim Award Waheed** was beaten with steel bars and left for dead. He was one of four *Raajje TV* journalists to receive the threatening text. The offices of this opposition TV station were destroyed in an [arson attack](#) last October.

The gangs often seek media coverage of their actions but turn against the media when the coverage is not to their liking, or when the media cover the activities of rival gangs. The gangs are also increasingly [used by politicians](#) to pressure journalists or people they regard as opponents. As a result, the gangs enjoy complete impunity.

### Threatening climate for journalism

According to an *MBC* [report in May](#), political parties are the main source of threats against journalists, followed by gangs and religious extremists. The threats encourage self-censorship, with 30 per cent of journalists saying they are afraid of covering gang activity and 43 per cent saying they do not report threats to the authorities.

And, as Malé is a small town, journalists have nowhere to hide when they are threatened.

Although the [authorities have promised](#) to defend media freedom, they have made little progress. [No one has been condemned](#) for either the arson attack on *Raajje TV* or the attack on Waheed.

Maldives is ranked 108th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

Photo : [Haveeru](#)

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