

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/jordan-attack-on-afp-s-amman-bureau-media-18-06-2011,40482.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Yemen

Media hounded

Attack on AFP's Amman bureau, media counter-offensive by Syrian regime

18 June 2011

JORDAN

Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns an attack on the *Agence France-Presse* bureau in Amman on 15 June by a dozen men armed with clubs, who stormed into the office, smashed furniture and telephones and threw files to the ground. The raid was preceded by threats against chief Randa Habib because the agency reported in a 13 June dispatch that stones and bottles had been thrown at King Abdallah's motorcade.

"I received a phone call threatening me and warning me that we would pay dearly for what we had done," she told Reporters Without Borders. "This attack is a new warning, with the aim of scaring, but Agence France-Presse will continue to operate as normal."

In a letter to Jordan's prime minister, *AFP* chairman and CEO Emmanuel Hoog wrote: *"Such behaviour is totally incomprehensible in a country that claims to follow the rule of law. These acts of physical and verbal violence have a serious impact on the work of journalists and therefore impact on the freedom of expression and information."*

Police carried out an investigation immediately after the attack, taking finger prints and journalists' statements. Many journalists and politicians took part in a sit-in outside the bureau on 16 June in protest against the attack.

This is not the first time that *AFP* has been the target of attempts to pressure or intimidate it. After the agency reported on 9 February that Bedouin tribes had accused Queen Rania of corruption, it found itself the victim of discriminatory measures by the palace. Unlike other media and news agencies, *AFP* is no longer sent copies of the programmes of senior officials, announcements of official visits or speeches by the king.

AFP's years of experience in Jordan and familiarity with the terrain make it a valuable news source in the country. Reporters Without Borders hopes its work will not be subject to further obstruction.

YEMEN

Reporters Without Borders is concerned to see that the press freedom situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate.

"An all-out campaign against media freedom has been waged ever since February, when the protests calling for President Ali Abdullah Saleh's departure began," the press freedom organization said. "Journalists have been physically attacked and kidnapped, while newspaper distribution has been blocked. These abuses, now part of the daily routine for Yemeni officials, are meant to prevent media coverage of what is happening. This is unacceptable. We urge the authorities to stop hounding journalists."

A pro-government group called the Yemen and President Saleh Revenge Brigades recently posted a statement online threatening to murder all of the president's opponents and to

attack pro-opposition newspapers and websites. This was followed by a first attack on 14 June, when gunmen stormed the Sanaa headquarters of the independent daily *Al-Adhwa*, ransacking offices, assaulting journalists and seizing several computers and a generator. The newspaper's website was also the target of an attempted cyber-attack, the third in a month prompted by articles criticizing the ruling party and its policies.

Faysal Makral, the editor of the newspaper *Al-Ghad* and correspondent of the pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat*, received telephone threats on 15 June. He reported them to the interior ministry.

The Yemeni Union of Journalists reports that on 8 June a soldier threatened **Abdul Karim Al-Khaiwani**, a leading journalist who used to edit the online pro-democracy newspaper *Al-Shoura* and won Amnesty International UK's award for Human Rights Journalism under Threat in 2008. Khaiwani found himself trapped in a Sanaa street that had been blocked by soldiers near the vice-president's home. One of the soldiers guarding the home refused to let him pass and threatened to arrest him. He was able to get away. *Al-Hurra's* correspondent and cameraman were physically attacked by security forces the same day as they were covering a sit-in outside the vice-president's home.

SYRIA

Reporters Without Borders condemns the media campaign that the Syrian government has launched with the aim of undermining the credibility of the protest movement. During a carefully staged media visit to the northwestern town of Jisr Al-Shaghur on 15 June, the authorities showed journalists a "second mass grave" containing bodies of members of the security forces. They also invited journalists to cover a pro-government demonstration in Damascus.

The government has also tried to repair its image by making a few concessions, including a presidential amnesty on 31 May. **Ali Al-Abdallah**, a journalist and writer who was serving a three-year jail sentence on a charge of "trying to harm Syria's relations with another state," was freed under this amnesty on 4 June (<http://en.rsf.org/syria-already-imp...>).

Reporters Without Borders continues to be concerned about the blogger **Kamal Sheikhou**. Freed on bail on 10 May, he was due to appear in court on 30 May on a charge of "publishing information liable to defame the nation." It is not known what happened to him.

LIBYA

Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that **Majdi Hilal**, a 43-year-old Egyptian cameraman working for *MBC*, was freed on 12 June after being held for more than two months. He was arrested with *MBC* reporter **Hassan Zeitouni**, an Algerian, in Ajdabiya on 9 April as they were heading to the front at Brega. Zeitouni was freed on 9 April and left Libya a few days later.
