

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/russie-rwb-launches-sochi-2014-campaign-01-03-2013,44155.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Sochi campaign

## RWB launches Sochi 2014 campaign

1 March 2013

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With just under a year to go until the Sochi Winter Olympic Games, Reporters Without Borders activists gathered outside the Russian embassy in Paris today and unfurled a 70-metre-long banner showing the Olympic rings transformed into a bloody knuckleduster to draw attention to the impunity largely enjoyed by those who have attacked and killed journalists in Russia.

Today's demonstration marked the start of an international campaign that will continue until the opening of the Winter Olympics on 7 February 2014.

"We are doing this in order to renew our support for Russia's journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders at a crucial moment for freedom of information in that country," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

"Twenty-eight journalists have been murdered in connection with their work since 2000. The fight against impunity for those who attack and kill journalists is unfortunately still absolutely

essential. But, as cracks begin to appear in the Putin regime, monstrous new laws are placing civil society under permanent threat. The authorities now have a repressive legislative arsenal ready to be used when the time comes.

"We have no desire to deny Russia the right to project the image of a proud, dynamic and modern country, but we must not be deceived by the universal consensus that surrounds Olympic events. The real events are not those that will be taking place on the ski slopes and, in this other struggle, Russian civil society has more need than ever of our help.

"We are also launching this campaign because the challenge extends far beyond Russia's borders. Russia is a regional model and Moscow's voice reaches the international stage. Many governments are waiting to see the outcome of the battle under way in the world's biggest country. Some, such as Azerbaijan, welcome the growing crackdown in Russia as a legitimization of their own repressive measures."

## Avalanche of repressive laws

Ever since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency last May, the government has had a spate of repressive laws passed in order to prevent the growth of more freedom of information. At the same time that legislation on human rights NGOs and unauthorized demonstrations was made much harsher, defamation was [reintroduced into the criminal code](#) after being decriminalized in November 2011.

In the name of "protecting minors," a federal government agency has been given the job of compiling a blacklist of "pernicious" [websites that can be blocked](#) without reference to a court and without any right of defence.

In recent months, the Duma has been working on [draft laws that will serve as large-scale gagging tools](#). The scope of what is regarded as "high treason" and a "state secret" is to be vastly extended. Tools for circumventing online censorship are to be banned. "Offending the feelings of believers" is to be penalized drastically. The desire to control is plain to see.

## No "return to normal" for reporting in the Russian Caucasus

Despite the Kremlin's boasts and the now deafening silence from the international media, the situation in the Caucasus is unfortunately anything but "back to normal." The relative stability imposed in Chechnya has been accompanied by a deathly silence based on fear of a police state and the fatigue of a population traumatized by war.

The violence has just moved elsewhere and neighbouring republics such as Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria have been corroded for the past decade by a latent, undeclared civil war in which an Islamist insurrection and human rights violations by the security forces feed on each other to the detriment of the civilian population caught in the crossfire.

Enforced disappearances, bombings, extrajudicial executions and every kind of trafficking are all highly sensitive subjects for news providers. The list of murdered journalists continues to grow. To the well-known **Anna Politkovskaya** must be added **Natalia Estemirova**, **Abdulmalik Akhmedilov**, **Khadzhimurad Kamalov** and many others, whose killers are almost never caught.

[Read the Reporters Without Borders report on the state of freedom of information in the Russian Caucasus](#)

## Persistent impunity

More than a year after **Khadzhimurad Kamalov**, the influential founder of the independent weekly Chernovik, [was murdered in Dagestan](#), the investigation has produced no results. Why is that? Why has the [instigator of Anna Politkovskaya's murder never been identified](#)? Why have the violent [attacks on Oleg Kashin](#) and **Mikhail Beketov** never been solved, despite firm assurances by senior officials?

This state of affairs just perpetuates the violence. At least two journalists were killed and 33 were physically attacked in connection with their work in 2012.

On the same subject, read this September 2012 op-ed by Christophe Deloire on *Huffington Post*: "[Prison bars cannot hold back the wind of freedom](#)".

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