

Special Reports

Faces of Exile

By Karen Phillips/Journalist Assistance Associate

Since 2001, CPJ has documented the cases of 340 journalists forced into exile after their reporting exposed them to harassment, violence, or imprisonment. They face many difficulties in their new homes, from language and cultural adjustments to emotional and economic hardships. Here are five snapshots of journalists in exile.

DINA YAFASOVA

Reporter, *Sygeplejersken* (The Nurse)

Country of origin: Uzbekistan

New home: Denmark

Date of exile: 2001

Reason for leaving: Yafasova fled after she was threatened with imprisonment during an interrogation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tashkent. She was questioned about a 2001 article in the Danish journal *Sygeplejersken*. Written under a pseudonym, the article described her experiences with government censorship. Two men also assaulted Yafasova on the street, taking her notes, tape recorder, and audiotape.

Life in exile: Yafasova won asylum in Denmark in 2002 and was joined by her family. She has continued writing but has suffered the effects of her persecution in Uzbekistan. Eventually, she spent 11 months at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims in Copenhagen. Her 2006 book "Diary from Sandholm" describes her experiences in a Danish refugee camp in 2001.

On the freedom of exile: "Exile freed me from shackles. In exile, I could achieve a much greater degree of human freedom, which never could be achieved under dictatorship in my homeland. And this feeling of being a free person has a much bigger value for me than a feeling of belonging to the place where I was born."

SALEEM SAMAD

Correspondent, *Bangladesh Observer*



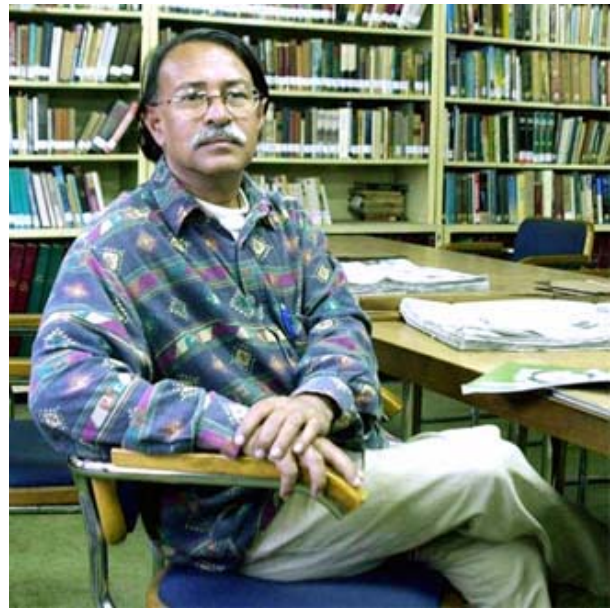
Yafasova (Courtesy Dina Yafasova)

Country of origin: Bangladesh

New home: Canada

Date of exile: 2004

Reason for leaving: Samad was under constant surveillance by military security forces following his January 2003 release from prison, where he had spent two months on antistate charges. The accusations stemmed from his work with a documentary crew for Britain's Channel 4 "Unreported World" series. In 2004, security agents raided his home, questioning his family about his whereabouts, and threatening to "greet" him at the airport if he returned from a conference in Canada.



Sameed (Courtesy Saleem Samad)

Life in exile: Samad opted to remain outside the country and to seek asylum, which he won in January 2005. His family joined him in Canada in 2006, and he has held various non-journalism jobs since—as a security guard, a concierge, and a salesman. Once a prominent voice in Bangladesh, he was met with closed doors when he tried to continue working for Bangladeshi papers while in exile. He now contributes pieces to expatriate news Web sites and runs the pro-democracy blog *Bangladesh Watchdog*.

On the professional cost of exile: "After I lost my steady job with the *Bangladesh Observer*, the international press stopped requesting contributions of articles about the region."

MESFIN TESFAYE

Editor-in-Chief, *Abay*

Country of origin: Ethiopia

New home: Kenya

Date of exile: 2007

Reason for leaving: Tesfaye fled from the harassment and threats that followed his release from prison in 2007. He had spent 18 months in custody on antistate charges stemming from critical coverage of a flawed 2005 election. Tesfaye was under regular surveillance and was receiving phone calls warning that if he "acted against the constitution," he would be killed.

Life in exile: Tesfaye has spent the past year in Nairobi, awaiting



refugee resettlement through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In November 2007, Tesfaye and two fellow exiled journalists were assaulted in their apartment by men they believe were Ethiopian government agents. Tesfaye and his exiled colleagues keep a low profile. Unable to find work, they rely on small contributions from international organizations and family members in the diaspora.

Tesfaye (Courtesy Mesfin Tesfaye)

On the hardest part of life in exile: “Survival. There is no work here in Nairobi. You ask: Where will I get money? You are worried so much. Then you are forced to ask somebody, forced to be a beggar.”

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ RAGA

Freelance reporter

Country of origin: Cuba

New home: Spain

Date of exile: 2008

Reason for leaving: González Raga boarded a flight to Spain immediately following his February release from prison, where he had served five years of a 14-year sentence on a charge of threatening “the territorial integrity of the state.” He was among 29 writers and editors jailed in the Cuban government’s March 2003 crackdown on the independent press. His release, along with that of fellow reporter José Gabriel Ramón Castillo, followed negotiations between the Spanish and Cuban governments. Prior to those talks, CPJ provided the Spanish government with information supporting the reporters’ release. **Life in exile:** González Raga is now publishing his prison writings, and he makes occasional contributions to Spanish media outlets. He struggles to provide for his seven family members in Spain, although he still seeks to have his father and a son, both of whom remain in Cuba, join him as well.



Gonzalez Raga (Agence France-Presse)

On the emotional adjustment after prison: “When you are unjustly imprisoned, when you are taken away from your family, there are no tools to mend the pain.”

ARASH SIGARCHI

Blogger and editor

Country of origin: Iran

New home: United States

Date of exile: 2008

Reason for leaving: Sigarchi escaped to the United States while on medical leave from prison in Rashat, where he was serving a three-year sentence on charges that included espionage, engaging in propaganda against the system, and undermining national security. The charges followed interviews he gave to BBC World Service radio and the U.S. government-funded Radio Farda.

Life in exile: Sigarchi lives outside Washington and has applied for political asylum. Unable to get employment while his work permit is being processed, and in need of assistance to cover living and medical expenses (he developed mouth cancer in prison), Sigarchi depends on help from friends and contributions from human rights organizations. He is learning English and hopes to further his media studies and to teach.

On the decision to go into exile: "Maybe you expect I'd complain about exile, but I'm satisfied here because this is my choice. I had two options: one, to stay in Iran and be in prison under torture, and two, to be in exile."

To help journalists in exile, go to [Journalist Assistance](#).

Karen Phillips is CPJ's journalist assistance associate.



Sigarchi (Courtesy Arash Sigarchi)