



# JOURNALISM IN HOSTILE REGIONS

AKE SPECIAL REPORT: JUNE 2017

## OVERVIEW

Journalists travelling to hostile regions to cover conflict and humanitarian crises, or to expose corruption and human rights violations, face a myriad of threats. Not only must they consider numerous logistical issues and medical risks, but increasingly must prepare for the threats of intimidation, harassment and violence. Indeed in 2017 to date, at least 15 journalists were killed according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Moreover, as the lines between journalist and citizen reporter become increasingly blurred with more widespread adoption of social media and use of smartphones, even those not typically identifying as journalists can find themselves exposed to heightened risks. In particular, governments have resorted to comprehensive surveillance measures and means of intimidation in an attempt to thwart freedom of expression and undermine democracy.

These increasingly complex and serious risks underscore the importance of appropriate training, communications and intelligence when planning and deploying to hostile environments.

This AKE Special Report highlights some of the key risks facing journalists operating in Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Mexico, Sudan, South Sudan and Ukraine. It also provides some mitigation advice, useful for all journalists and those conducting fieldwork ahead of and during their trip.

15

Journalists  
killed in 2017  
to date

259

Journalists  
imprisoned in  
2016

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## ABOUT US

For over 25 years AKE has supported media organisations operating in challenging, remote and hostile environments worldwide, including deployments to Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria and Syria. Our Surviving Hostile Regions (SHR) training course is an indispensable tool for journalists to learn about preparation and planning, threat identification and risk mitigation, including first aid training. AKE also provides 24/7 crisis response and in-country support services. Together with bespoke reports prepared by regional experts from AKE's Intelligence department, journalists are provided with tailored risk analysis and mitigation strategies.

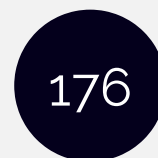
# AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is amongst the highest risk countries in the world for foreign and local journalists. The operating environment is likely to remain extremely dangerous for the foreseeable future. Hostile action from the government is relatively rare, largely due to institutional weakness, but powerful political figures have sought to see foreign journalists stripped of accreditation and overtly pressured them. The primary risk stems from the Taliban and Islamist extremist groups, which have often engaged in kidnap, both for ransom and propaganda purposes. This risk is very high for all media personnel, regardless of their employer, religion, politics or country of origin. The Taliban and other armed groups are increasingly attacking softer targets that include private villas and compounds used and frequented by foreign media. Other criminal groups are also likely to sell their victims on to more hostile groups and/or political actors. Outside Kabul, the risk of kidnap and other hostile action is extremely high. Travel after dark should be avoided and heightened security measures adopted across the country.

# CHINA

While foreign journalists working in China face a low risk of violence compared to other countries covered in this report, there are several challenges concerning journalistic freedoms. These include government surveillance and the denial of journalist visas. The economy, the Communist Party's leadership and anti-government protests are amongst the most sensitive reporting subjects.

Journalists outside China planning to report on such subjects and who apply for a J-2 journalist visa are unlikely to have their application granted. Journalists working for news outlets with bureaus in China and who are writing for more established titles tend to gain better access to officials. However, they may nevertheless face discrimination if their media house publishes a politically-sensitive piece. Foreign journalists are more likely to face repeated searches, be harassed, followed and even be denied access to interviewees if travelling to the sensitive regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. Intrusive surveillance, including hacking and digital intrusion is also possible.



/180 RSF World Press  
Freedom Index

# EGYPT



Egypt has long been a difficult environment for journalists and media professionals. What some heralded as a new age for journalism as the world's cameras closely followed events in Tahrir Square in January and February 2011 was never to be. Even during the protests the security services specifically targeted journalists, including visibly foreign personnel, who subsequently suffered beatings, arbitrary detention and arrests on security-based charges. Under President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the government has tolerated even less dissent than under

his predecessor Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, the security services' crackdown against journalists has become increasingly politicised. Over 20 local news websites were blocked in late May 2017 due to a regional political rift. Even after securing the relevant permissions and permits, foreign personnel should not assume they will be granted entry on arrival at Cairo International Airport, so blatant is the attempt by the authorities to manage the flow of information.

# MEXICO

Mexico presents one of the deadliest operating environments for journalists, behind only Syria and Afghanistan according to Reporters without Borders' 2016 report. Developments in 2017 have seen this trend continue, and perhaps even worsen alongside drug cartel fragmentation and in the lead up to the July 2018 general elections. Most reporters murdered for their work are locals, and criminal gangs tend to be behind the majority of attacks. However, foreign journalists are also at risk, particularly when covering organised crime and corruption-related stories in high-risk areas or states where government collusion with criminal structures has been a longstanding issue. Impunity prevails, with powerful groups silencing critics. Foreign journalists are also more often exposed to robberies, road ambushes and express kidnappings, although the risk of more violent incidents should not be overlooked. Six targeted killings have taken place so far in 2017.

6

Journalists killed  
in 2017 to date

# SUDAN & SOUTH SUDAN

The media environment in Sudan and South Sudan is repressive. Intimidation, censorship and violence against journalists, both foreign and domestic, is prevalent and facilitated by a culture of impunity and the widespread use of hate speech against journalists. President Salva Kiir typified this in 2015 when he warned journalists "if anybody among [journalists] does not know that this country has killed people, we will demonstrate it one day, one time... Freedom of the press does not mean you work against the country". South Sudanese reporter Moi Peter Julius was shot just four days later. South Sudan and Sudan restrict access to territories worst affected by violence, and the repercussions for travelling into such areas are grave. In December 2016 a British journalist who had crossed into Darfur from Chad was captured and

**"if anybody among [journalists] does not know that this country has killed people, we will demonstrate it one day, one time"**

President Salva Kiir

handed over to the intelligence services. He was mentally and physically tortured for several weeks before being handed to the British authorities. In May 2017 Al-Jazeera's offices in South Sudan were closed, allegedly over reporting from rebel-held Kajo Keji.

# UKRAINE

Ukraine has a highly-politicised media environment. Restrictions on Russian-based social media websites were put into place in May 2017 and the state continues to be openly hostile towards journalists from Russian-state media outlets. Western journalists, on the other hand, are highly unlikely to be subject to pressure from law enforcement or the public. In Russian and separatist-controlled portions of Ukraine – half of the Oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk and the entirety of Crimea – the situation is reversed. In particular, journalists reporting on corruption may provoke resistance from state and de facto authorities. There is precedent for violence against journalists, particularly those seen as either overtly pro- or anti-Russian. Prominent media figures have been murdered in recent years in Kiev, Donetsk and Luhansk, while in the early years of the ongoing conflict Russian covert forces secretly ordered the detention of many Western journalists.



# MITIGATION ADVICE

- 1:** Identify and understand threats. Bring adequate medical and security equipment to mitigate against risks.
- 2:** Ensure visas, filming permits, insurance, medical prescriptions and vaccinations are organised beforehand. Take photocopies of each document to produce at checkpoints and border crossings if required.
- 3:** Develop a robust communications plan that includes overlapping means of communications and emergency reporting procedures.
- 4:** Pre-establish contingency plans and identify evacuation routes, medical facilities and safe havens.
- 5:** Stay up-to-date with national news and local developments which could give rise to unrest or affect your trip at short notice.
- 6:** Always use trusted, pre-arranged fixers and drivers. Vehicles should be checked prior to departure to ensure they are roadworthy and suitable for the operating environment. Avoid travel after dark.
- 7:** Consider the use of throwaway wallets, keep valuables out of sight and large amounts of cash or data in a secure location. In the event of a robbery, comply with demands and do not antagonise the assailant(s).
- 8:** Avoid large gatherings and minimise time visiting high profile locations. If you are caught up in an incident, attempt to remove yourself from the immediate danger. If that is not possible, seek shelter.
- 9:** If the topic you are covering is sensitive, avoid non-essential discussion of filming projects or itineraries.

## How can AKE help?

**Training:** Surviving Hostile Regions (SHR) course designed to prepare for, manage and respond to risk while operating in complex and hostile areas.

**Risk evaluation:** Pre-deployment risk assessment providing tailored advice by country experts on the key country and task specific risks.

**Field support:** 24/7 crisis response services, tracking devices, and in-country Security Risk Specialists (SRS).

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