

The deceit of Reporters Without Borders

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Global Research, November 07, 2007

7 November 2007

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

On October 16, 2007, the Paris based organization *Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) published its "Worldwide Press Freedoms Index 2007." RSF claims to be neutral, objective and solely interested in press freedoms. But this claim does not hold up to scrutiny. In reality the 2007 index, laden with contradictions, is nothing more than a fraud and demonstrates, to the contrary, that the association directed by Robert Ménard since 1985 defends a very specific interest and political agenda. (1)

To establish their 2007 index, which covers the period between September 1, 2006 and September 1, 2007, RSF uses 50 criterion divided into 7 categories, listed in order of importance. Under the first category "*PHYSICAL ATTACKS, IMPRISONMENT AND DIRECT THREATS*," the number of journalists and media assistants murdered, imprisoned, tortured or ill-treated, kidnapped or disappeared, attacked or injured, and threatened is given the highest priority. The presence of *Armed militias or secret organizations targeting journalists*," as well as *whether or not journalists had to be accompanied by bodyguards or use security measures (bullet-proof jackets, armoured vehicles etc) while doing their work* is also deemed of utmost concern.(2)

The next category RSF considered was "*INDIRECT THREATS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION*" and defines this as *attacks on or threats against press freedom activists, surveillance of journalists, problems of access to public or official information, restricted physical or reporting access to any regions of the country and problems getting journalist visas for foreign media*. (3)

The French organization then listed "*LEGAL SITUATION AND UNJUSTIFIED PROSECUTION*," which was outlined as *unjustified legal actions against journalists, cases of violating the privacy of journalistic sources, as well as failure to prosecute those responsible for seriously violating press freedom*. Censorship and self censorship, state monopoly of media, free access to Internet, and economic and administrative pressure are also included in the classifications. (4)

Using these standards, RSF establishes their annual index that includes 169 countries. According to the organization's figures, 105 journalists were murdered over the year. Iraq were at least 62 were killed was the most dangerous place, followed by Mexico (8), Somalia (7), Pakistan (4), Afghanistan (4), Sri Lanka (2) y Eritrea (2). It would be no surprise if these countries ended up with the lowest scores. However, with the exception of Eritrea ranking 169th, this is not the case. In the end, Robert Ménard's political and ideological criterion overshadowed the rest. (5)

How is it that Eritrea, where only two journalists were murdered, ended up ranked below Iraq (157), Mexico (136), Somalia (159), Pakistan (152), Afghanistan (142) and Sri Lanka

(156)? Perhaps because that nation is on Washington's black list and RSF receives funding from the CIA front *National Endowment for Democracy, NED*? (7)

Likewise what is the explanation for Cuba ranking 165 when not one journalist has been killed there since 1959? Why is this nation ranked below Iraq, Mexico, Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Brazil (84), China (163), United States (48), Haiti (75), Nepal (137), Paraguay (90), Peru (117), Democratic Republic of the Congo (133), Turkey (101) and Zimbabwe (149), where at least one journalist has been killed? RSF explains that Cuba's poor ranking is due to journalists being imprisoned. Just supposing the organization is correct on this point -which is actually far from being the case-, wouldn't killing journalists still be more serious than imprisoning them? (8)

RSF is so obsessed with Cuba that it does not hesitate in blatantly contradicting itself. For example RSF considers China -where one journalist was killed - to be "largest journalist prison in the world" with 33 media professionals in detention and 50 "cyber dissidents" imprisoned, all figures according to the organization, is ranked above Cuba. How can RSF expect to be taken seriously? Perhaps this malice could be explained by the fact that RSF receives financial support from the extreme right Cuban organization *Center for a Free Cuba* (which itself is abundantly financed by Washington) whose president, Frank Calzón, is a former leader of the terrorist organization Cuban American National Foundation. (9)

In addition, how can Venezuela's rank of 114 be explained? Even though not one journalist was killed there, Venezuela ranks below Brazil, United States, Haiti, Paraguay and Turkey where at least one journalist did lose their life. How can this rank be justified when in Venezuela the press enjoys a freedom that would not be tolerated in even the largest western democracy (some private media have openly called for the assassination of President Chávez on various occasions)? Perhaps it is just part of RSF's propaganda war against President Hugo Chávez, the U.S.'s central target in Latin America. (10)

What has happened in Bolivia to cause this nation to fall from 16th in 2006 to 68 a year later? Where journalist killed? Where private media sources closed? Nothing of the sort. But President Evo Morales, who has launched spectacular economic and social reforms, is now in Washington's sites. RSF, faithful to its principals, follows the lead of its sponsors and vilifies all the progressive and popular governments of Latin America. (11)

Likewise, how can the classification of Iran (166), where not one journalist was killed, be explained except by the fact that this country is part of the axis of evil designated by Bush? Why is the U.S. (48 and 111) separated into two categories (national territory and extra-territorial)? What other reason could RSF have to make this distinction other than the obvious objective of exonerating the U.S. for violations committed in territories it occupies? (12).

As one can easily see, Reporters Without Borders is not a reliable source. Its hidden political agenda has become all too evident and its malice toward certain nations that are on the U.S. blacklist is hardly a matter of coincidence. The generous contributions received from the NED explain RSF's alignment with the White House. Robert Menard does not direct an organization that defends press freedoms, but instead a propaganda office financed by economic and financial conglomerates at the service of the world's powerful.

Article in french, "[La supercherie Reporters sans frontières](#)", October 30th 2007.

Translated by Dawn Gable.

Notes

(1) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. L'Erythrée en dernière position pour la première fois; les membres du G8 regagnent du terrain, sauf la Russie», 16 de October, 2007. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24011 (site consulted 17 de October, 2007).

(2) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. Critères pour l'établissement du classement mondial 2007 de la liberté de la presse», 16 October, 2007. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24018 (site consulted 17 October, 2007), criterion 1 to 12.

(3) *Ibid.*, criterion 13 to 19.

(4) *Ibid.*, criterion 20 to 50.

(5) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Baromètre de la liberté de la presse 2006», 2006. http://www.rsf.org/tues_2006.php3 (site consulted 17 October, 2007); *Reporters sans frontières*, «Baromètre de la liberté de la presse 2007», 2007. http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=73 (site consulted 17 October, 2007).

(6) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. L'Erythrée en dernière position pour la première fois; les membres du G8 regagnent du terrain, sauf la Russie», *op. cit.*

(7) Robert Ménard, «Forum de discussion avec Robert Ménard», *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 18 April, 2005. www.nouvelobs.com/forum/archives/forum_284.html (site consulted 22 April, 2005).

(8) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. L'Erythrée en dernière position pour la première fois; les membres du G8 regagnent du terrain, sauf la Russie», *op. cit.*

(9) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Baromètre de la liberté de la presse 2007. Journalistes emprisonnés», 2007. http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=76 (site consulted 17 October, 2007); *Reporters sans frontières*, «Baromètre de la liberté de la presse 2007. Cyberdissidents emprisonnés», 2007. http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=79 (site consulted 17 October, 2007); *Reporters sans frontières*, «Lettre ouverte à ses détracteurs», *Réseau Voltaire*, 12 September, 2006. http://www.voltairenet.org/article143413.html?var_recherche=Reporters+sans+fronti%C3%A8res?var_recherche=Reporters%20sans%20fronti%C3%A8res (site consulted 12 de septembre de 2006); Salim Lamrani, «La Fondation nationale cubano-américaine est une organisation terroriste», *Mondialisation*, 27 July, 2006.

(10) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. L'Erythrée en dernière position pour la première fois; les membres du G8 regagnent du terrain, sauf la Russie», *op. cit.*

(11) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2006. Corée du Nord, Turkménistan, Erythrée: le trio infernal», October, 2006. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19318 (site consulted 17 October, 2007).

(12) *Reporters sans frontières*, «Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2007. L'Erythrée en dernière position pour la première fois; les membres du G8 regagnent du terrain, sauf la Russie», *op. cit.*

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