

# Independent Media in Exile

*A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance*

*By Bill Ristow*

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Center for International  
Media Assistance



National Endowment  
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**The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)**, a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development. The center was one of the main nongovernmental organizers of World Press Freedom Day 2011 in Washington, DC.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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Bill Ristow is a journalist and international journalism trainer based in Seattle, Washington. After beginning his career with weekly newspapers in San Francisco and rural Washington State, he worked at the *Seattle Times* for nearly 23 years, holding positions including metro editor and features editor. He was a Knight International Journalism Fellow in Uganda for nine months in 2007, training professional journalists at newspapers in Kampala and four towns, and he taught in the graduate school of journalism at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in the spring of 2009. He and his wife, Theresa Morrow, trained journalists in Uganda and Kenya in 2008 and 2010. He has authored three other reports for CIMA: *Sword and Shield: Self-Regulation and International Media* and *Under Attack: Practicing Journalism in a Dangerous World*, both published in 2009, and *Cash for Coverage: Bribery of Journalists Around the World*, published in 2010.

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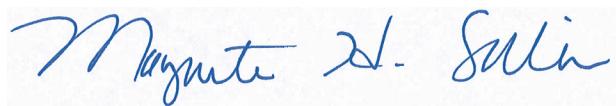
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# Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of journalism in exile. The idea for the report grew out of the first Independent Media in Exile Conference, organized by the World Press Freedom Committee and held in Stockholm in October 2010. The study is based on a survey of participating exile media outlets from around the world and follow-up interviews.

CIMA is grateful to Bill Ristow, a veteran journalist and journalism trainer, for his research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media development efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marguerite H. Sullivan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Marguerite" on the first line and "H. Sullivan" on the second line.

*Marguerite H. Sullivan  
Senior Director  
Center for International Media Assistance*

# Executive Summary

*A local reporter details allegations that a ruling party official had demanded bribes from local businesses; ten days later, police conduct their own interviews and arrest the official.*

...

*A radio reporter, suspicious about the mysterious disappearance of an opposition leader, finds an opportunity to corner the president and ask him directly—providing the nation, and the missing leader's family, the first news of his whereabouts in three months.*

...

*After an investigative website publishes a series of articles about the corruption of the country's attorney general, the U.S. State Department, which is known to follow the website's reports, revokes the official's visa to enter the United States.*

On the surface, they are simply three examples of the good work journalists do every day, digging to provide authoritative information and expose official misdeeds.

But what makes these three stories remarkable is that they involve countries with some of the worst press-freedom records in the world—and they were published by news outlets based as far away as 5,300 miles outside those countries, with all the logistical, financial and professional challenges that implies.

Scattered around the world, working in homes or in offices, using websites or shortwave radio or Facebook or the printed word, scores of people like these journalists are living in exile from repressive homelands. They are devoting all their available time and resources to sending news and information back into those countries, and telling the rest of the world about what is happening there. Many of them weren't even journalists until they found themselves in exile; many, in fact, were political activists, and had to learn about concepts such as balance and objectivity as they took on their new work.

Isolated as they generally are from each other, and from their countries, they often go about their mission in very different ways, and it is exceptionally hard to quantify their success—they are, after all, journalists trying to send their bulletins into countries with little or no press freedom.

But their successes are manifold. They include numerous examples such as those above, in which the exile organizations have had a direct impact on events in their homelands. Beyond that, many international journalism experts argue the importance of the exile media includes informing the outside world of what's happening to their countrymen, and nurturing a structure of independent journalism that someday could be re-established at home.

***Scattered around the world, working in homes or in offices, using websites or shortwave radio or Facebook or the printed word, scores of people like these journalists are living in exile.***

As for their impact, observers point to what may be the ultimate compliment from repressive governments: wave after wave of jamming, filtering, Internet shut-downs, and other forms of cyber attacks aimed to silence the exile media outlets.

They are supported by a broad range of governmental, non-governmental, and private donors, as well as, in many cases, their own personal funds. And in the past few years, there have been efforts to help them meet and coordinate with each other. Each time that has happened, it has energized and inspired the participants.

Any full-scale, ongoing coordination and sharing of ideas and resources, not to mention long-term solution to their challenges, remains very much a work in progress, its ultimate success far from certain. But the practitioners of this independent journalism, as scattered as they are, share a passionate commitment to their cause.

“I’m not scared,” said Wilf Mbanga, the London-based founder and editor of the *Zimbabwean*, which published the story about the ruling-party official above. “I know they can’t arrest me. I know they are equally determined to stop us as we are to continue publishing.

“To them I say loudly: we are not giving up.”<sup>1</sup>

This report offers four recommendations for addressing some of the complex challenges of independent media in exile:

- **Donor groups should expand and formalize coordination of their exile-media support.** This could solve some of the bureaucratic issues that have caused problems and improve the effectiveness of funding by targeting it more holistically. Donors should also look for more creative approaches, such as a small-grants program with multiyear funding.
- **Organizations providing international media training should actively seek to train exile-media journalists.** Training is badly needed, but is not widely enough available—sometimes due to policies of the training organizations themselves.
- **A formal international association of exile media should be established.** There are professional industry associations nearly everywhere in the world, at all levels of the media, and they provide invaluable services to their members. For this community of journalists, spread far and wide around the world, it could be a godsend.
- **The exile-media organizations themselves should take some of the initiative.** There’s no doubt that they are strapped for time and resources. But they should take advantage of the network they have gradually been building in recent years, and make their voices heard about what would help them the most.

# Introduction

*Khin Maung Win left Burma in the 1980s; he was one of four student activists who founded the Democratic Voice of Burma in exile in 1992 in opposition to the country's regime. Today, based in Oslo, Norway, his time is divided between editorial and administrative activities at a significantly professionalized enterprise—including trying to help the families of more than a dozen DVB journalists in Burmese prisons. “My work with DVB is full time,” he says, “or even more than full time because it has been our life and we do nothing else apart from this for our survival.”<sup>2</sup>*

...

*Gerry Jackson, fired from a longtime job with state-owned radio in Zimbabwe, eventually won a Supreme Court ruling allowing creation of independent radio stations in that country. But when she and some colleagues did just that, their effort was short-lived; President Robert Mugabe had it closed at gunpoint after just six days. They ended up in London, where they launched SW Radio Africa at the end of 2001. She hasn't been back to Zimbabwe since. She and her staff are on a banned list, she said, and “it's unknown how it would be” if they tried to return.<sup>3</sup>*

...

*Tesfaldet Meharennna left Eritrea at 16, fleeing war with Ethiopia. After making a successful career as a computer consultant in the United States, he began an effort to encourage open dialog in a number of African nations, including his own. His early idealism was shaken by the brutality of the Eritrean government, but with a staff of volunteers he still operates a website where the country's citizens and exiles around the world can speak their minds. Today, he looks back with gratification on a more open discourse that he believes his efforts have helped bring to his homeland. The work has taken a severe personal and financial toll. But, he said, “You do whatever you can to preserve a life.”<sup>4</sup>*

They have very different life stories, and they go about their work every day in very different ways. But these three share one core thing in common: They are dedicated to bringing news, commentary, and the free exchange of ideas to citizens of some of the most information-starved countries in the world.

Only one of the three had worked as a professional journalist before emigrating. But they all represent, in their varying ways, one of the most overlooked, beleaguered, but at the same time most dedicated communities in international journalism: independent media in exile.

They are scattered around the world, using every technology from printing presses to Facebook pages to distribute their work, and while their annual operating budgets range from less than \$1,000 to more than \$4 million, nearly all describe themselves as living a day-to-day struggle to stay afloat. They are often tired, lonely, frustrated, sad, and angry—but through all that, committed to their efforts with a deep passion.

They are also justifiably proud that even publishing from exile, with all the barriers they must face, they can mark the ways they have made a difference in their homelands.

## Roozbeh Mirebrahimi: Helping Iranians See How They Are Seen

This account is based on a Skype conversation with the author, March 2, 2011, from New York City.

Roozbeh Mirebrahimi worked as a journalist in Iran for more than 10 years, and except for his wife, all of his family is still there. But after spending two months in an Iranian prison—rounded up with a group of other online journalists—and then facing harassment for another two years, he finally left in 2006. Today, out of his home office in New York, he runs a publication aimed at showing Iranian citizens what others are saying about their country.

The name of his publication, *Iran dar Jahan*, means “Iran in the World” in Farsi, and that’s a good description of its content: opinion and analysis articles from all over the world that have something to do with Iran. He has a team of about 10 people, many of them former Iranian journalists like himself, around the world who translate the articles, and he posts them on his site. (He restricts himself to opinion and analysis because plenty of other sites cover news.)

*Iran dar Jahan* began as a monthly print publication in 2006; he began doing an online weekly version a year later, and moved to posting several articles daily in 2010. When that happened, he said, the government started to block the site, forcing him to employ proxy sites to keep the material available, and he also posts on a Facebook page that, he said, is often easier for people to access than his own site ([www.irandarjahan.net](http://www.irandarjahan.net)).

A quick look at his site recently showed scores of publications represented, as varied as *Der Spiegel*, *Cuba Socialista*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Jerusalem Post*, *Arabweek*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *Huffington Post*.

The pieces include all perspectives, he said—for or against the Iranian regime, for or against the U.S. position, etc. “We don’t want to judge the articles; we just want to bring these views to Iranians. They can read it and understand anything they want. The readers can judge.”

He can’t return to Iran; “I know they have a big problem with me.” But he keeps up connections inside the country, especially with journalists, he said, including a new generation he didn’t know when he lived there, but who keep getting in touch with him.

“My heart lives in Iran, and most of the time I’m very sad about things there. When I compare my life in the U.S. with what my family and friends experience, most of these things make me very sad about life there. We don’t get happy news from Iran. I’m more hopeful for the future than I was two years ago, or three years ago. But it’s very difficult.”

He and his wife, also an Iranian former journalist, are always looking for paying freelance or part-time work, but “unfortunately, we don’t have any other things” at the moment, so they have to rely on the grant money for the magazine. “It’s very hard,” he said – but it’s also worth it.

“This publication is my baby. As a person who lived in Iran I know how important this type of information is when you are there. Even though I don’t have weekends and sometimes I get tired, I enjoy this work, and I have to continue.”

Wilf Mbanga was a longtime journalist in Zimbabwe and even a self-described great admirer, at first, of Robert Mugabe. But as things changed for the worse, he told a conference of exile journalists last year, “I realized that my own position was becoming untenable as I became very critical of what was happening in my country.”<sup>5</sup> He started an independent paper in Zimbabwe – but it was closed after being bombed. He and others at the paper were arrested, and he went into exile, finally founding the *Zimbabwean* in London in 2005. The newspaper (and its website) have their headquarters there today, more than 5,000 miles from Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital.

The paper was originally aimed at the large Zimbabwean expatriate community, but Mbanga took advantage of a loophole in the country’s media laws and started sending truckloads of newspapers into Zimbabwe itself, reaching a circulation of 230,000 before the government reacted. One of his trucks was burned; new tariff regulations cut deeply into his circulation. But reporters from the *Zimbabwean* continue their work.

Asked about his paper’s impact, Mbanga points to stories such as those by reporter Zwanai Sithole, which revealed allegations that Mary Gaba, an official of the ruling party Zanu (PF), had been soliciting “protection fees” from rural businessmen, and also fraudulently promising villagers that she would get food aid for them if they would give her \$1 per household. After the stories were published, the police conducted their own investigations, and arrested Gaba.<sup>6</sup>

In Belarus, which has been rated in the bottom 15 percent of the world’s countries for press freedom, a correspondent for the Warsaw-based European Radio for Belarus (ERB) witnessed the beating of opposition candidate Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu before a rally on election day, December 19, 2010. The reporter knew that Nyaklyaeu had disappeared after leaving the hospital, but government officials refused to say what had happened to him.

Three months later, the reporter saw his chance. President Alexander Lukashenko was holding a post-election news conference. The reporter questioned the president repeatedly. Finally, according to an ERB staffer in Warsaw, Lukashenko “had to admit reluctantly, under pressure from our journalist’s questions, that Nyaklyaeu was in KGB jail. The interview was televised live, so the whole country (including the candidate’s loved ones) learned immediately that the ex-candidate was alive and in detention.”

The reporter, and the radio station, won an award from an independent Belarusian youth organization as a result of this coverage.<sup>7</sup> (For more on ERB, see sidebar, page 24.)

While both the *Zimbabwean* and European Radio for Belarus have correspondents who operate fairly openly in their homelands, Omoyele Sowore’s investigative website, *SaharaReporters*,

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relies primarily on authoritative, clearly highly placed, and almost always anonymous sources inside Nigeria for its groundbreaking work. Among many other things, its stories about Nigerian attorney general Michael Aondoakaa alleged that he had tried to extort a \$10 million bribe from the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, Inc., in order to drop criminal action against the company – part of a scandal that later aired in U.S. diplomatic communications released by WikiLeaks.<sup>8</sup> It was after a long string of articles in *SaharaReporters* that the U.S. decided to revoke Aondoakaa's visa.

Philip Shonon, a former investigative reporter at the *New York Times*, wrote in *the Daily Beast* last year that *SaharaReporters* "has many fans at the State Department," and he quotes one former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria that "my experience has been that its reporting has a very high level of accuracy." And a staffer at the Ford Foundation, which has given *SaharaReporters* major funding, told Shonon, "The impact it's having—holding political leaders to account – is very impressive."<sup>9</sup>

Impressive indeed, considering that *SaharaReporters* is a news site published in New York City, 5,300 miles from the Nigerian capital, Abuja.

These are not isolated cases of journalists in exile making a real difference in their coverage of their homelands. Additional examples were captured in a survey of exile journalists conducted for this report, in which respondents were asked to cite a success story.

- One of the best known examples of the impact of these journalists is the work Democratic Voice of Burma did covering massive popular demonstrations in 2007. A DVB staffer noted on his survey that a similar demonstration in 1988, though resulting in 3,000 deaths, had been poorly reported and was easily covered up. But in 2007, when video-journalists (VJs) from DVB filmed the events, including the killing of a Japanese journalist, "the image appeared on TV screens around the world within hours." The exile journalists' work resulted in the film *Burma VJ*, a 2009 Oscar nominee for documentary filmmaking.
- Tesfaldet Meharennna's *Asmarino Independent* ([www.asmarino.com](http://www.asmarino.com)) is devoted to Eritrea, the country with the lowest rating from the free-press index of Reporters Without Borders. He cites a success that was gradual, developing over a number of years. His site provides a platform where both supporters and opponents of the government could air their opinions, and visitors could offer their own comments. At first most people insisted on pen names; gradually, he persuaded individuals to start using real names, and eventually blogs, with pictures. It took years. But, Meharennna says, "One of the major things we did was to break that fear people had, the fear of speaking their opinions. As far as I'm concerned that has been done. You can't put money on that. The government has worked very hard to discourage that, but now it's normal for people to express opinions. A lot has changed—the government has lost its stranglehold. I am proud of that."<sup>10</sup>

## Hugo Landa: "We Want Their Voices to Be Heard"

This account is drawn from a telephone conversation with Hugo Landa, director of CubaNet News, from his office in Coral Gables, Florida, March 1, 2011.

Hugo Landa fell into journalism more or less by accident. An exile from Cuba since 1990, he had worked at a number of other jobs, including as an engineer and as a translator, and had never imagined working in journalism. But he was part of the audience of CubaNet News, and a friend of its founder, and when she died in 2006, family members and the president of the board asked him to take over as director.

Today, he and the two others on the staff oversee a network of independent correspondents in Cuba who file regular reports on life inside their country. Landa is the first reader, evaluating the material, and deciding whether or not to publish it ("Sometimes we're not very sure about the certainty of the report"), then passes it along to an editor, a Cuban journalist in exile, before it is posted on the website ([www.cubanet.org](http://www.cubanet.org)). But the editing is mostly restricted to grammar and style; they want their correspondents to dictate the content. "We want their voices to be heard, not ours."

There are 20 or so regular correspondents, and maybe another 20-30 occasional ones. They aren't professionals; more like citizen journalists, "but they have the [courage] ... to do what they do," Landa said.

Things have changed in Cuba since the infamous "Black Spring" in March 2003, when authorities arrested 75 people, among them 29 independent journalists, and jailed them for up to 20 years for offenses as minor as having a computer at home, Landa said. Ten CubaNet correspondents were among those imprisoned, he added.

Widespread protests from the European Union and individual countries caused Cuba to change tactics. Over the years, it has released jailed journalists, with the final one freed in March 2011. Now, Landa said, government actions against the independent correspondents is more likely to take the form of daily harassment. Police might see one of them on the street, pick him up, drive him around or take him to the station for most of the day, then drop him off somewhere in the middle of nowhere. There's lots of that sort of thing, he said. It can be different every day, and nobody knows if the long jail terms might return.

The government's repressive efforts also point to another serious issue, Landa noted. One of the people who served as a "witness" against some of those imprisoned during Black Spring had himself worked as a CubaNet correspondent—a stark reminder that they must have a certain level of suspicion that anyone could be a plant, Landa said. "We have to be very careful with the information we get."

That even has caused them to be late on a big story. Last year CubaNet received a story about 26 people dying in a Cuban mental institution. "It looked too sensational to me," Landa said, and the story didn't have great sourcing, so they held it. The next day, it was in the *Miami Herald* and other media, and turned out to be accurate. But CubaNet's people just thought that in their situation, they had to be especially cautious.

The editor gives the correspondents tips about the craft by phone or e-mail, "kind of training them daily" in journalism, and CubaNet sends financial support monthly, based on the reporters' work and expenses such as Internet cafes.

One thing Landa says he would advise others involved in exile journalism, especially over the very long haul, as with Cuba, is to be sure your reports speak with a voice that has credibility within the country. “You have to understand that in a case like Cuba, with a half century of dictatorship, there are many different groups of exiles, with different perspectives,” he said. “Those who left in 1959, many of them don’t have any idea of what is going on in Cuba today. If you disconnect from the reality of what is happening in your country, and then you try to talk to people in your country, they won’t understand.”

After such a long dictatorship, for example, he said that some people in Cuba have no idea what the concept of “human rights” means, and journalists have to recognize that people might just be more interested in food on the table than in high principles. The CubaNet model, with journalists working in-country, helps avoid the disconnect.

CubaNet has had its struggles with funding, but it’s in a better position now than many exile media, with funding approved (some of it from the National Endowment for Democracy) for three years. It’s a “very, very lean budget,” Landa was quick to add – a tiny staff, and a 400-square-foot office in a building “that is falling apart.”

But he has never regretted his career switch.

“I love it. I have never been poorer—or happier,” he said. “It’s the first time I really have felt I was doing something for people, for a cause.”

- “In 2007, during a 27 day farmer protest in Saigon, our radio station was one of the first that broke the news about the protest,” wrote a staffer for the U.S.-based Radio Chan Troi Moi/Radio New Horizon. “We were the only Vietnamese media on the ground, given the state control of the media; the state apparatus did not report on it. It is considered one of the best-reported protests in the country’s recent history. We used cellphones and SMS to receive hourly updates and report from the ground.”

But the very best measure of impact, say people who know the most about exile media, might be the reactions of the governments exile media cover. As Biljana Tatomir, deputy director of the Media Program for the Open Society Foundations (OSF), a leading funder of exile media organizations, put it, “You can measure their influence by the extent of the attacks on them by the regimes.”<sup>11</sup>

Khin Maung Win described how the Democratic Voice of Burma website was “heavily attacked in September 2008 for the first time, on the eve of the first anniversary of the monks’ demonstration, also known as the Saffron Revolution. We could not resist it, so our site was totally down for a couple of weeks.” Later, DVB got support from a U.S. company, and the site has stayed up. But the attacks keep coming, particularly in September each year; the one in 2010 was strong enough to concern DVB’s service provider in Oslo, so they decided to file a complaint with the Norwegian cybercrime police.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the exile organizations have similar stories of Internet attacks. And the dangers aren't all just virtual—as Mbanga knows very well: A truckload of copies of the *Zimbabwean* was hijacked and burned in Zimbabwe.

Sharon Hom, executive director of Human Rights in China, assesses her organization's effectiveness with online traffic analysis and other metrics, and also points to incidents in which the Chinese authorities try to “scare off potential funders or supporters.” But she also adds a caveat. “You have to be able to do this work—human rights work—knowing that even if you don’t see the result, now, today, or in the past decade, it doesn’t mean it’s not effective. It’s just hard to measure. You just have to do what you can in the time you’re given to make some difference.”<sup>13</sup>

# Overview of the Exile Media Community

For purposes of this report, the word “exile” incorporates both aspects of the primary definition of the word in leading dictionaries, such as the *American Heritage Dictionary*: “a. Enforced removal from one’s native country; b. Self-imposed absence from one’s country.” While many of these individuals would face imprisonment or worse if they were to return home, others are able to go back and forth—though almost certainly not to practice the sort of unfettered journalism in their own countries as they’re able to do in their self-imposed exile.

The community to be described in this report, further, is restricted to “independent” media in exile, as used in a conference by that title in Stockholm in October 2010. It does not, in that definition, include journalists who may be in exile but who work for large, government-sponsored organizations such as Voice of America, Radio Marti, or Radio Free Europe.

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There is no comprehensive census of these independent journalists in exile. This is partly due to how diffused they are. A journalist from Yemen is working in Sweden; one from Burma, in Australia; one from China, in New York; one from Iran, in Switzerland. Many operate out of their homes or tiny offices. And it’s important not to confuse this community of independent media in exile with the much larger population of journalists who have gone into exile but are no longer practicing their craft. Many in the independent exile media outlets weren’t even journalists in their home countries.

Eric Johnson, who works in Shanghai as a consultant and director of Internews International, has worked with exile media in a number of countries, and, for the organizers of the Stockholm conference, he cataloged the countries that have journalists operating from outside their borders. He estimates there are “maybe 50 serious exile media [outlets], with an average of 10 journalists each, some paid, some not.”<sup>14</sup>

The online survey conducted for this report included a total of 36 individuals, representing 33 exile media organizations and 18 countries. Not surprisingly, there’s one big similarity among these countries: They mirror the world’s most repressive regimes, both of their people and of the free press. On the press-freedom index Reporters Without Borders compiled for 2010, here’s how the 18 countries covered by the survey rank:

- Eight are in the bottom 10 on that index
- One of them, Eritrea, is dead last at 178<sup>th</sup> position
- Ten are in the bottom 15
- Just two of the 18 countries are even in the top half of the index—and Bhutan, the one with the “best” press-freedom index number, is ranked 64<sup>th</sup> in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Considering the often brutal nature of these regimes, it is perhaps a tribute to the bravery, and commitment, of the independent media in exile that the great majority of them—nearly three quarters in this survey—have reporters or stringers working from inside those countries. Some can work more or less openly, but much more often, at great risk. A report by the Committee to Protect Journalists described the cat-and-mouse game in Burma, where “in-country journalists have their own clandestine procedures. One undercover [Democratic Voice of Burma] reporter secretly reported on the trial of a popular political prisoner by using his mobile phone to record the detainee entering the courthouse. Later that day, he used the Internet to transmit the footage in time to meet DVB’s production deadline.”<sup>16</sup>

But if exile media face a multitude of challenges, from funding to cyber attacks to isolation, they do have something going for them.

“One area where exiled journalists have an advantage is that they are much more skilled when it comes to technology, to social media, than traditional reporters are,” said Marie Kronmarker, who works as a trainer with the Fojo Media Institute in Sweden, and helped organize the Stockholm conference. “They are in the front line as far as new technologies.” The reason for this is simple, she added: “they need mobility.”<sup>17</sup>

Trinh Nguyen knows this because she lives it. Now in her early 20s and one of the youngest of the exile journalists, she’s bringing the consciousness of the Twitter generation to her work with Radio Chan Troi Moi, a Vietnamese exile station.

Responding on the survey to a question about what advice she would share with new exiles who want to practice journalism, Nguyen included this: “Turn to using open-source digital tools to produce media; one can be a media mogul with free tools offered online. It is important to train yourself on being a digital activist; i.e. knowing how to protect yourself online, knowing how to circumvent firewalls, knowing how to produce media on the cloud.” Social media and electronic communication are essential to her work, she said in an interview. In Vietnam, where people aren’t allowed to congregate publicly, “we feel like Facebook is our town square.”<sup>18</sup>

There is no Audit Bureau of Circulation for this scattered community of media outlets, and even the power of Google Analytics is problematic for outlets using proxy sites to avoid Internet attacks. Still, self-reported figures provided on the survey offer some hint at audience size (although not necessarily the audience’s location). For instance:

- European Radio for Belarus reports a stable audience of about 260,000.
- The Zambian Watchdog reports 12,000 unique visitors per day.
- Bhutan News Service reports 20,000 per day.
- Boxun News, serving China, reports 100,000 per day.

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Fojo Media Institute

- The *Zimbabwean* reports selling 30,000 copies twice a week and estimates that 15 people read each copy.
- *Tibet Post* reports 1,500-5,000 per day online.
- Burma's Mizzima News Service reports 30,000 per day.

Johnson, who helped catalog the exile media for the conference, believes an outlet's audience is tremendously important. "I think donors need to demand accountability on this point, even if it takes some time and resources to get data. If an exile medium is mostly consumed outside of the target country, they need to be clear about that, and make the argument why that's still worth supporting, in their own particular context."<sup>19</sup>

But experts on international media issues add that in-country penetration isn't the only mark of success for exile media.

"We are deeply convinced that it is extremely important, for a variety of reasons," said Tatomir of OSF. In addition to their primary role, serving people inside their homelands, she said, exile media have two other significant impacts: "In most cases, these media are providing a unique view of what is happening inside their country to an international audience," and, just as important, "they are preserving a professional capacity: these people are educating the new generation of journalists in their media."<sup>20</sup>

## A Rich History of Journalism from Exile

Journalists, of course, were practicing their trade in exile long before the first tweet ever flew across the Internet.

Exile journalists based in London in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century provided a counterpoint to the French revolution, gaining significant readership both in England and on the continent, one researcher found.<sup>21</sup> Syrian-Lebanese journalists operating in exile from Cairo in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century "were in the avant-garde of modern Arab journalism and launched newspapers which in turn became models for the Arab press," according to a historical account by Said Essoulami, a press-freedom expert for the region.<sup>22</sup> And no less a figure than Leon Trotsky was a journalist in exile in the early 1900s, one of several Russian revolutionaries with the London-based newspaper *Iskra*, where he used the pseudonym "Pero," meaning "feather" or "pen" in Russian.<sup>23</sup>

Even the United States has a history of exile journalism.

In the 1890s, Ida B. Wells, a former slave and then a teacher, was part owner of the *Memphis Free Speech* in Tennessee, where she campaigned against lynching. She was out of town, says a biographical account, "when a mob invaded the paper's offices and destroyed the presses, responding to a call in a white-owned paper" after Wells, in an editorial countering the idea that black men raped white women, suggested that "white women might consent to a relationship with a black man." She heard that her life could be threatened if she returned, "and so she went to New York, self-styled as a 'journalist in exile'."<sup>24</sup>

## Walid Al-Saqaf: From Web-Crawling to Circumvention

*This is based on a Skype conversation with the author on February 22, 2011; Al-Saqaf was speaking from his home in Sweden.*

Walid Al-Saqaf comes from a journalism family in Yemen. His late father founded the *Yemen Times*, and Al-Saqaf is co-owner of that paper with a brother and two sisters, and contributes occasionally.

He left Yemen in 2006 to attend Örebro University in Sweden, pursuing a master's degree in global journalism. Needing a project for a course requirement, he asked himself, "Why not produce something that would not end with the course, and that would also help people?" The result was [www.yemenportal.net](http://www.yemenportal.net), an ambitious aggregation of material from Yemeni news and information sites.

His academic purpose, as the "About" page on the site explains, was "to study and analyze the Yemeni cyber sphere and assess the impact of websites on Yemen in the political aspect." The site has no evident political orientation, reflecting the fact that it is computer programs, not human beings, that find and post the material. It is also exceptionally user-friendly, allowing people to see results from news sources organized as "Government," "Independent," and "Opposition," among others.

With this neutral approach, it might be surprising that Al-Saqaf places himself on the "activist" side of the activist/journalist divide. That's not contradictory, he said. Posting all sides, clearly labeled, "in itself is a form of activism, especially in a country like Yemen." When he included links to websites promoting separatism for one part of Yemen, the government pressured him to take them down, and there have been other instances when he's had more indirect messages from the government, and experienced attempts to block his material.

"I wasn't intending to be an activist at that level, but the government forces you to do so," he said. "They actually recruited a group of people, so I heard, to make sure my website could not be accessed." That was the point, he recalls, that he said to himself, "OK, this is going too far. I had to either compromise my approach, or work hard to find ways to circumvent the filtering. That's when I started a new journey, along the lines of circumvention."

That was in 2008. By luck, Al-Saqaf is not only a journalist but a computer scientist, and he had the skills to do something about the government's efforts to block his work. He engaged in the "cat and mouse game" of proxy sites and domain shifts to keep his site accessible, and once again, he is using YemenPortal as a key part of his academic work. Now pursuing his Ph.D., his thesis focus is in the area of circumvention. ("I am perfecting the art of hitting two birds with one stone!"

His original intention had been to develop some sort of commercial website, perhaps an eBay-type service for Yemen. The government's efforts to block him changed his course, which he calls "a sort of silver lining." His new work, he says, proved "rewarding, heightened my innovation, and led to meeting people I would never have met," helping them meet similar challenges.

To do that, he developed software to allow people to access other blocked sites, and offers it on a site of its own ([www.alkasir.com](http://www.alkasir.com)). The purpose, he states on that site, was “to create a free circumvention solution aimed at supporting freedom of expression and access to information in countries suffering from political oppression.”

That sort of tool became invaluable during the recent turmoil in the Middle East, as the Internet became the primary medium of communication, and as governments resorted to cyber attacks. A February 16, 2011, CNN story included clips of a young Egyptian digital activist who had used Alkasir to keep activist sites open (<http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/tech/2011/02/16/dougherty.digital.activism.cnn>).

On February 14 this year, Al-Saqaf took his work to another level, creating a new page, [www.yemenportal.net/thawra](http://www.yemenportal.net/thawra). “Thawra” in Arabic means “revolution,” and he calls this page “the revolutionary window, or revolutionary portal.” The Thawra site is all in Arabic; the material, Al-Saqaf said, is aggregated from Facebook pages or other sites operated by groups involved in the popular uprisings.

He shared a Google analytics graph showing a spike in traffic to roughly 60 percent higher than the normal 3,500 daily visits in the week the Thawra page was introduced.

In Sweden, he supports himself by teaching at the university part-time—emerging technology and journalism, social media, and website design. He is frustrated at times about funding, and also because of his separation from his audience: “You aren’t able to reach to your readers for support.” But he remains fully engaged and energized by what’s going on in Yemen and throughout the Middle East.

“It’s a good time to use this opportunity to say, ‘What we are doing is making a difference,’” Al-Saqaf said.

## A Spirited Conversation: What Is Our Fundamental Role?

Today’s exile journalists came to this work by many different paths, but the two most common involve either people who were journalists in their homelands and have simply transferred their efforts abroad, or people who were activists, opposing a particular regime, and later chose journalism as an effective way to have their voices heard. Of the 36 respondents on the survey conducted for this report, just under half had worked full-time as a journalist in their home country. Almost nine percent had worked part-time—while 43 percent, more than two out of five, had not worked as journalists at all.

Those different trajectories have contributed to what may be the greatest internal debate among exile journalists: Are they activists, or are they professional journalists? Are they both? Ronald Koven, European representative for the World Press Freedom Committee, who was instrumental in making the Stockholm conference happen, calls it “to a large extent, a false dichotomy [because] sending in factual reporting is a form of political activism” in the countries in question.<sup>25</sup>

“False dichotomy” it may be, but it is a serious enough concern that it was the first topic on the conference’s agenda.

The debate often follows lines familiar to Western journalists: If they are to be trusted by the audience, it's important that they report the news as objectively as possible, without opinion. Yes, media everywhere, including the West, have opinion departments that support or oppose different political movements. And even reporters, individually or through professional organizations, sometimes take "activist" positions in support of the rights of press freedom, free speech, and so forth. But generally speaking, reporters are not supposed to actively seek to topple a regime, for instance.

This principle is not always so clear-cut for those working in exile. If a repressive regime has taken away all press or speech freedom, then activism in support of those principles is tantamount to a direct attack on the regime. As one person wrote in response to a survey question on this topic, there can be a balancing act when working to maintain objectivity:

*If a repressive regime has taken away all press or speech freedom, then activism in support of those principles is tantamount to a direct attack on the regime.*

"Because of the nature of our founding [by a pro-democracy organization], we are often times considered a political entity. This is far from the case. We do produce and investigate on reports of political matters but we believe in reporting from all angles. When there is obvious media suppression, we do play an activist role of advocating for press freedom. When I write activist pieces on political matters, I make sure it comes from a personal side. I believe all journalists working in exile conditions are activists in their own right, but not all activists are journalists."

And, said a Sri Lankan respondent, "Yes, there is a distinction. An activist has to see that written word become a force for change. The journalist may report and wait."

Gerry Jackson is one of the exile media practitioners with the most previous experience in journalism. She worked for a state-owned radio in Zimbabwe for 14 years before being fired, and then for an independent station until it was shut down at gunpoint. Eventually, she and some colleagues determined the only way broadcast freely to the people of their country would be from outside, and in December 2001 they launched SW Radio Africa from the UK.

Staunchly professional as she is, she also acknowledges a tension between the role of activist and journalist—and particularly when covering the activities of her country's opposition. "You do sometimes walk the moral tightrope about what people should and shouldn't know," she said. "We maintain support for the opposition, but at the same time we make sure they know they are being watched."<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, a commonly expressed problem for exile journalists is how to manage the expectations of opposition politicians, who may say, in effect, "What's the problem? We all want to accomplish the same thing, why don't you help us more?"

Khin Maung Win and his colleagues were full-fledged activists when they launched DVB in Oslo in 1992 as an arm of the Burma's opposition in exile. Later, "we came under heavy fire and criticism from the democracy movement when we started moving towards more independence," he said.

One example, Khin Maung Win said, was in the run-up to the November 2010 general election in Burma. He and other managers had decided to cover the election objectively, but "many of our journalists, who are from an activist background, wanted to boycott the election" and argued that if DVB covered it, it would seem to be "legitimizing" the election. The organization set up a series of election training sessions in 2009 and 2010, and, he said, "finally all the journalists listened to the management" about the importance of objective coverage.

But, he added: "You know what happened at the end. We got heavy criticism from both camps—those boycotting the election accused us of legitimizing it, and those participating in the election said we were damaging the only game that became available in 20 years."<sup>27</sup>

Kronmarker, of the Fojo Media Institute, watched this distinction between activist and journalist play out at the Stockholm conference. "What struck me particularly was that many of them are still activists, to such an extent," she said. "I sympathize a lot with what they're doing, but it's not journalism all the time."<sup>28</sup> She is one of many people, exile journalists and their supporters alike, who believe more training would be invaluable.

*The challenges for someone setting up and operating an independent exile media outlet are daunting.*

That points to another theme that regularly arises concerning independent media in exile: How professional could they be, considering that a large proportion were never journalists in their home countries? Jackson of SW Radio Africa was surprised by the extent of that difference in backgrounds at the conference. "I assumed that people who set up exile media outlets had prior experience as journalists," she said. What she observed was that in many cases, "they are just sort of enthusiastic activists. And that is why I think some of them are encountering problems. I don't know how you begin if you haven't a clue."<sup>29</sup>

## Funding: The Biggest Challenge

The challenges for someone setting up and operating an independent exile media outlet are daunting: In a foreign country, quite likely on a different continent, the exile journalist has to navigate the immigration system, possibly learn a new language, and then somehow both find information to publish—and figure out how to get that information past a hostile government. Not to mention finding a place to live and perhaps feeding a family.

As Jackson put it, "apart from the heartbreak of leaving your home, your friends, your family, and going to a country you don't know ... Well, if anyone comes up to you and says they want to set up as media in exile, I would say to them, 'I wouldn't recommend it!'"<sup>30</sup>

## Htet Aung: A Political Prisoner Discovers Journalism

*Extracts from e-mail to the author from Htet Aung, a reporter with the online Burmese exile publication the Irrawaddy, from Chiang Mai, Thailand, March 6, 2010; in his own words and edited only for clarity.*

I am now in my early 40s. I was a former political prisoner in Burma, spending ten years and three months in prison.

Burma's prisons were very notorious in their various tortures, physically and mentally. The authorities strictly prohibited any form of study and the related materials such as books, magazines, journals, newspapers, etc. If the authorities find out a piece of paper or a pencil in the hands of the political prisoners during their regular search in cells, it is a major violation of the prison rule, even resulting in bringing the prisoner to the court to give a new prison term.

Despite such a constant threat, many prisoners, including me, couldn't accept the death of our minds while our bodies were alive under this situation and managed to get a piece of paper to study. [I managed] to study English in prison by reading news magazines such as Time and Newsweek that I secretly received in various ways. Although I initially aimed to learn English from these magazines, I gradually loved to learn the way of researching, analyzing and reporting in these pieces that attracted me so strongly that I wished I could do it one day after my release.

After my release, I started the necessary preparation for my study abroad while coping with the financial and other social issues after being disconnected from the outside world for a decade. Finally, I left for Thailand primarily to pursue higher study in one of the Thai universities. Despite my enthusiasm in journalist writing, I chose to study in the field of development because my country needs to escape from the undeveloped situation. I got a master's degree at Chulalongkorn University.

Before my study at Chula, as soon as I arrived to Thailand in early 2007, I joined the Irrawaddy as a researcher, but later I started writing news and articles, learning by doing in the newsroom. After nine months, I went to Chula, and continued to work for the Irrawaddy as a part time job. I rejoined the Irrawaddy as a full-time reporter in early 2010.

Honestly, I have never taken a journalism course in any universities. I learned all these skills in the newsroom.

Also, I learned that the importance of journalism is to convey the truth to the readers in an unbiased and independent manner. Therefore, my simple principle is "Don't lie." Well, this single ethic is very important not only to be a good journalist but also to be a good politician or academic.

I feel satisfied with my space in the Irrawaddy because I can use my knowledge and skills in writing and reporting as much as I can. Also, I am very much interested in my work because I consider it as my responsibility to bridging Burma with the international community through informing others about the situation of the people and the country.

With all the challenges the independent media in exile encounter, two loom far larger than any others: funding, and technological interference such as jamming radio signals or blocking Internet sites. More than four out of five individuals in the survey of exile media said funding was one of their major challenges; more than three out of five said the same of technological interference.

Asked to name their single most serious challenge, it wasn't even close. Almost 53 percent named funding—three times as many as named technological interference, the runner-up, which nearly 17 percent called their top issue.

But statistics alone don't give the full texture of how these journalists feel about their difficulties in supporting the work they do. Funding comes up again and again in interviews with exile journalists, often in anguished tones.

Roozbeh Mirebrahimi, a former Iranian journalist now sending dispatches home from New York, is grateful for the support he has consistently received from Internews—but, like many of his peers, he feels worn down by the need to keep reapplying, on relatively short funding cycles. “This is difficult for me,” he said. “It makes me nervous. I have to do my journalist work, but I also have to do fundraising. It makes me very tired, but I have no other choice.” In a way, he said, this challenge reminds him of being in Iran, where, “if you choose to work as a journalist, you cannot be sure about anything.”<sup>31</sup>

Jackson echoes that concern—and, like Mirebrahimi, she said that when she started on her survey that she wasn't sure she'd be doing this work a year from now, it was purely due to funding uncertainties. When she was interviewed, funds to support SW Radio Africa were available for less than two more months. She might get a three-and-a-half-month extension, she said, “but after that, nothing.”

Jackson figures she spends 70-80 percent of her time on funding and related administrative issues—“another thing donors don't understand,” she said. “Always, at the last minute we've been saved,” but in a time of budget cuts she knows she can't be sure.<sup>32</sup>

DVB's Khin Maung Win gives an example of how certain types of new funding can actually cause problems later. DVB is one of the better-funded organizations, with support from 16 donors totaling \$4.5 million in 2010. About \$500,000 of that was for a special elections project. This required an expansion of their operation, but the money is not renewable. In addition, because of a new way donors are handling requests for funding, DVB's budget will be reduced by another \$500,000, he said. That's a total of \$1 million—more than 22 percent to be cut from the 2010 level.

“Financial dependency gives us the biggest threat,” Khin Maung Win said. “It can kill our operation.”<sup>33</sup>

Nearly 20 percent of those responding to a question about their funding sources said personal funds from themselves or someone in the organization were their main source of support—providing at least 80 percent of their funding. But that creates its own problems.

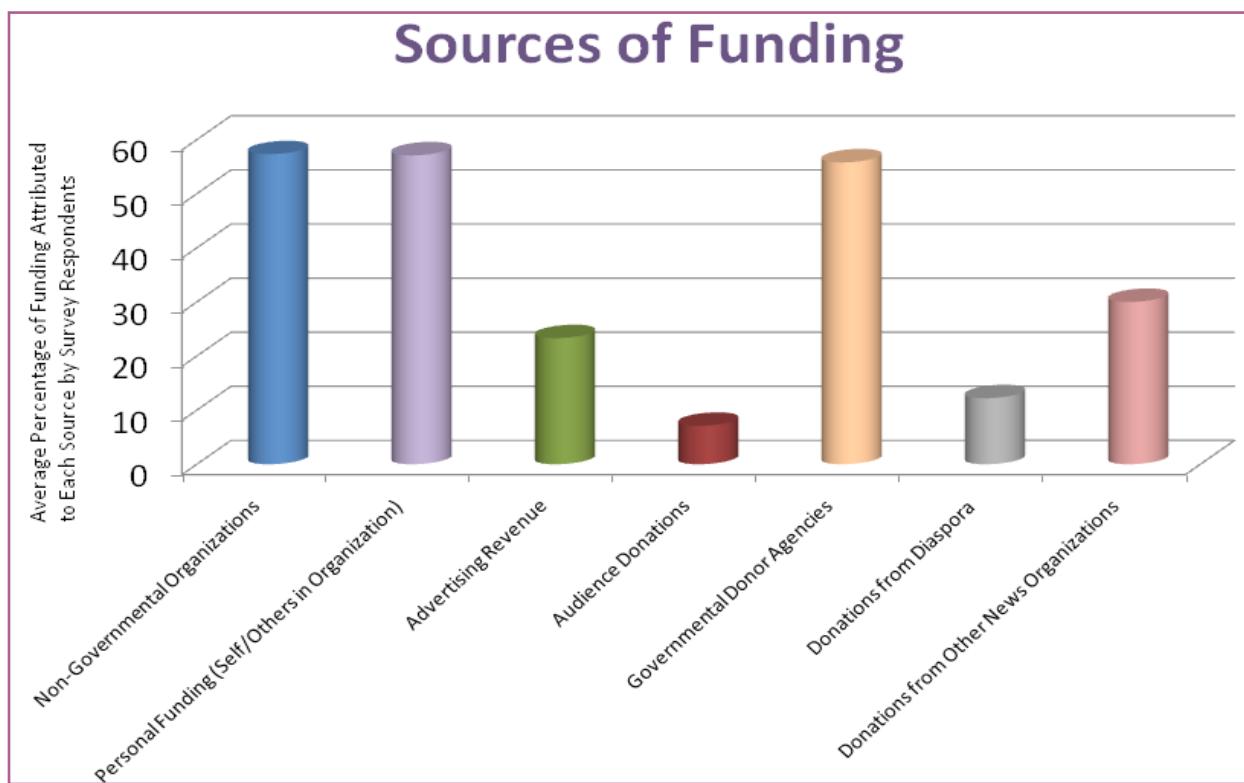
“I should have asked for funding, but I never did,” said Tesfaldet Mehareenna of Eritrea, who has had to reduce the size of his operation as his personal funds dwindle. “Do you spend your time chasing funding, or do you do the reporting? It is very hard.”<sup>34</sup>

Key players in the support community agree that the funding system is flawed, and also that the overall level of support for journalists working in exile should be increased.

Thomas Hughes, who was the longtime deputy director of International Media Support (IMS), a Danish nonprofit with major funding from the governments of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, said support for exile media is “a strong theme in the countries we work with.” He is now managing director of Media Frontiers, a sister company entirely owned by IMS that works to help online media in developing countries, including exile media operations.

Hughes points to the Open Society Foundations as the leading supporter of exile media, and said IMS probably comes next in the amount of funding for “the role of exile media in breeding change.” But he acknowledges that overall, exile media are “an undervalued area. They very often fall in between the cracks, and they very clearly don’t receive enough.”<sup>35</sup>

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is also a major funder of exile media groups, particularly in Asia. It supports nine of the 33 groups attending the Stockholm conference



as well as other exile media organizations that were not represented. For example, the NED provides several Burmese organizations, including DVB, with a significant percentage of their core budgets.

Hughes also acknowledged another area journalists in exile point to as a problem: A donor group may make all its grant decisions from a regional desk, say, in Africa, but the exile journalists are in a totally different region, such as the UK. Sometimes, Hughes said, “having the wrong postal code excludes you. That is a problem.”

Koven of the World Press Freedom Committee thinks it’s quite clear that the level of funding for exile media, relative to their importance, “is much too low. It’s an area that grantors have not been sufficiently aware of.”

That was something he hoped would come from the conference: “how, going forward, there could be more ongoing financing of exile media. I’m not sure we were sufficiently heard by the grantors,” who, he acknowledged, have their own financial problems these days.<sup>36</sup>

The Open Society Foundations is part of a worldwide network established by U.S. investor and philanthropist George Soros. In a conference call from their London office, Tatomir, deputy director of OSF’s Media Program, and Jane McElhone, senior program manager, described their work with exile media.

Tatomir noted that OSF’s priority is to support media “as long as they can operate within the country,” then to help exile media when it is an “option out of necessity.” Supporting exile media has been “basically our commitment since the beginning of our work,” she said.<sup>37</sup>

They both stressed the need for more collaboration among donors. “Different organizations can contribute in different manners,” Tatomir said, “so together we can collaboratively deliver more.” It can be especially helpful, McElhone said, when individual media outlets funded by several donors bring those organizations together; “that really encourages the donors to coordinate.” And it has other useful results, Tatomir added: “The recipient also must be equally transparent to each donor, for example.”

They agreed that it can be challenging for exile media to get the sort of non-targeted “core support” that’s essential to keep their operations running. “We have the privilege to be able to provide that to many of them,” McElhone said. Still, Tatomir noted, “We cannot say that in general the funds that are available are sufficient for the needs that are there.” Exile media need more than just year-to-year grants, she said. They need mid-term and long-term stability in order to succeed.

*Key players in the support community agree that the funding system is flawed, and also that the overall level of support for journalists working in exile should be increased.*

## *European Radio for Belarus: From Across a border, a Playlist of Music...and Probing News*

This account is drawn from telephone and e-mail interviews with two staffers of European Radio for Belarus in February, March, and April 2011. Both staffers requested anonymity due to personal-security concerns.

Depending on where you access the website of European Radio for Belarus (ERB, also known as Euroradio), you could have radically different impressions of this Poland-based station.

If your first introduction is the “What is Euroradio?” section on the “About” page (<http://euroradio.fm/en/about>), you will learn that this is a “youth multimedia project.” It offers listeners “CHR-Modern ROCK, based on the most popular rock chart entries.” It helps sponsor music festivals, and runs contests awarding free tickets to concerts. It plays the music of the newest Belarusian bands. Click on the MP3 button at the top, and you can listen for yourself.

If your first introduction is the topical information page, on the other hand (<http://euroradio.fm/en/info>), you will find quite different fare. Under the “Economy” section: “Belarusians keep twice more money at home than National Bank has in gold.” Under the “Politics” section: “Sending postcards to political prisoners ended in Dzmitryeu’s detention.” Under the “Society” section: “Manaeu: The authorities defeated the opposition in a struggle for youth.”

Is this just evidence of schizophrenia in the station’s mission statement? Not at all, said one of the journalists who voluntarily left Belarus in 2006 to start this independent station in Poland, broadcasting back into their home country via radio waves and the Internet. Instead, it’s part of a conscious goal—to “help young people know the world, understand that we are in tune with them, that some Belarusian media can be on the same level as western media.”

Programming is a mix of roughly 70 percent music and 30 percent news and other information. No stories run longer than about three or three-and-a-half minutes, with more demanding subjects done as series. In addition to news, the reports include cultural material on travel, modern music, etc.—always in Belarusian, rather than Russian, the language favored by the government. There’s usually one featured story a day targeted at the concerns of young people, for example tips on getting jobs.

This is serious journalism in exile, and it has made a difference for the people of Belarus. A staffer describes an incident in which “children in wheelchairs were initially promised and later refused a chance to attend the finals of junior Eurovision in Minsk which was to be televised by the state TV. Frustrated parents went public, and our radio helped expose the problem. The government had to back off and allow those children to participate. That happened during the presidential election campaign.” Euroradio was the first to report a document showing the dangers of building a nuclear power plant in the Grodno region. Authorities were trying to hide the document, but when it went public had to acknowledge it and start consultations with experts. During recent elections, the station videotaped two people going into the same voting booth, and the election commission had to accept it as proof of a violation.

With a claimed audience of 260,000 daily listeners, stories like these can cause the Belarusian government to sit up and take notice. “Everyone at our radio has been visited by the KGB at some point,” a staffer said.

But if the government can be a problem, the staffer went on, so can the opposition. “Most politicians in Belarus view the media as tools to represent themselves. So they came to our newsroom asking for a platform.” The Euroradio journalists committed themselves to a balanced approach—and, this staffer said in a recent presentation about the station’s origins, “we also found out that this works better with our audience. We should be realists and recognize that no one likes propaganda. Pro-dictatorship propaganda will make people switch off. But they will also switch off very quickly if we broadcast democratic propaganda... So to look our audience in the eye, we try to maintain editorial independence and balance, presenting the whole spectrum of news.”

Looking the audience in the eye—and remembering your ultimate goal—is essential to anyone practicing journalism in exile, this Euroradio journalist said in an interview:

“Be sure you know who you are broadcasting or writing to. Whatever you do as a journalist, do it with the thought that you will return home, and you want them to read you or listen to you then.”

McElhone, however, added that it is also important for the media outlets to show they are moving toward sustainability. That may be an uphill battle, considering the barriers, whether geographic, political, or technological. And some would argue, as Sharon Hom of Human Rights in China does, that the nature of the human rights work she does means “we will *never* have a situation of sustainability where it’s a market solution. Social investment will always come from the public sector, directly or through tax incentives, foundations or individuals.”<sup>38</sup>

Others see some hope, at least for partial sustainability. Mbanga of the *Zimbabwean* acknowledged at the Stockholm conference that publishing in exile “is not a good business model. It does not make sense.” But, he added, “if we do not make it work, we fail at more than business. We fail our countrymen. That is why we need donors ... but I also hope now that we cannot depend solely on donors.” He believes exile media can make more creative efforts to get online advertising, noting his site had grown from earning £50 a month to more than £1,000—and was undergoing a reconstruction to allow video-streaming and other elements that could help attract ad revenue.<sup>39</sup>

Hughes of Media Frontiers argues strongly that online advertising could help. While the media ad market in the West may have plummeted, he said, there is still strong potential in the developing world, and especially in publications that can reach diaspora as well as in-country audience.

One Media Frontiers initiative, the Protore Social Advertising Network, aims to help “socially responsible” organizations, including media in developing countries, attract more online advertising to build their sustainability. Protore is still undergoing testing, but “we’ve had good case examples already,” Hughes said, citing a small outlet in Yemen that previously had no ad revenue but, with Protore’s help, received \$600—a small amount to many, but a significant part of their operating budget.<sup>40</sup>

Significant advertising revenue is relatively rare for the exile media. Just four of the 32 outlets that reported their funding sources on the survey said they get as much as 40 percent of their support from ads. The only others with ads receive 10 percent or less. Nearly all of the larger, best known of the exile media, with paid staffs, professional operations, and relatively large budgets, have little or nothing in the way of ad revenue. This could either indicate the potential, or the challenges, for building advertising into something that could approach sustainability for larger outlets.

There is one other issue about funding that support groups raise only gingerly, in the most careful terms. As Hughes put it, “Media development organizations *do* need to weigh the pros and cons. At what point does one start to phase out the funding” to exile groups, he said, and say to the exiles that perhaps it is time for them to return to their country?

But, he quickly added: “And what right do you have to do that?”

## Circumvention and Cyber Security

Even if the exile media are funded well enough to produce news reports for their homeland, that won’t help if those reports never reach their destination. And while the Internet is a godsend for journalists operating from far beyond their borders, it has one big flaw: The governments in closed societies are both savvy and aggressive about blocking access or electronically disrupting exile operations.

One problem, of course, is that journalists can be totally at sea when it comes to the technological sophistications of the online world. In the survey, they were asked: “If you could talk directly with individuals or groups who want to help operations such as your own, what would you tell them you MOST need, beyond financial support?” Again and again, they mentioned technical support and training to help protect their websites from attack.

Eric Johnson is an expert on the cat-and-mouse games involved in keeping information flowing as freely as possible, and he was a presenter on the topic at the Stockholm conference. This is an essential skill for exile journalists, he stresses. “If you don’t get blocked in your target country, you’re not accomplishing anything; and when you do get blocked, then if you haven’t thought about circumvention, you’ve been effectively silenced.”<sup>41</sup>

Trinh Nguyen talks about the lessons her radio station learned when someone hadn’t been careful enough with their computer’s security, “and it opened us up to a lot of hacking and viruses. The [Vietnamese] government put a virus into some language software we use; it affected thousands of people.”<sup>42</sup> Others get their sites blocked in their home countries, and are left silent if they

*While the Internet is a godsend for journalists operating from far beyond their borders, it has one big flaw: The governments in closed societies are both savvy and aggressive about blocking access or electronically disrupting exile operations.*

don't know how to use proxy servers or other methods of circumvention. Still others are hit by distributed denial of service attacks, in which their servers are overwhelmed by a flood of automated, maliciously organized visits.

In this new world, circumvention becomes as important as journalism, and a wide variety of efforts are underway to make it work better. That's why technical support is another of the purposes of the IMS-funded Media Frontiers company. Its "Virtual Road" service provides Web hosting from a secure platform for media outlets that need it. Commercial service outlets must pay for, but at "minimal possible cost," Hughes said, adding that it has already proven itself by keeping one Middle Eastern website online despite repeated attacks.

"In order to be proficient, you have to be constantly exposed to those attacks, and learning from them, and getting better," Hughes said.<sup>43</sup> Walid Al-Saqaf, the Yemini journalist now operating out of Sweden, has developed and offers his own software to help websites use proxy sites to stay online (See sidebar, page 16). Others, such as Human Rights in China, send out circumvention solutions directly to users.

## Looking Ahead: Coordination and Communication

As these exile journalists talk about the Stockholm conference, their common message is how energizing it was to be reminded they aren't alone—that there are others around doing the same sort of work, with inspiring personal stories to learn from.

This was actually the third gathering of exile media organizations. The first two were forums sponsored by OSF in Budapest in February 2009 and in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in February-March 2010. The Budapest conference, McElhone said, was "very experimental." The plan was to bring together a small group of OSF-funded outlets, just to see what would happen. "Within seconds, there was a feeling in that room of people so relieved to have found each other," she said. At Chiang Mai, where the gathering was hosted by Burmese media in exile, "again, the idea was that this would be driven by the grassroots."

McElhone and Tatomir talk about a "network" of exile journalists, repeatedly stressing that such a support structure will only work if it is driven by the journalists themselves. "Our intention was never to create yet another umbrella organization, or a new institution," Tatomir said, but rather to bring similar outlets together "to see how they can help one another to learn," and to foster future exchanges. "As a result of those forums, and in collaboration with other donors, more in-house trainings have happened" addressing specific needs, McElhone said.<sup>44</sup>

Stockholm added another level – bringing in more of the donor groups to listen to and participate in the conversation with the journalists themselves. But while the conference concluded with a session titled "Looking for an Action Plan," it's still far from clear what it will produce in the way of tangible, long-term results.

## Speaking from the Heart: Advice to Others

*The final question of the survey conducted for this report was an open-ended one: Imagine you are speaking to a group of newly exiled people who want to produce journalistic reports for audiences in their home countries. Briefly, what would be your most important advice?*

*Nearly all the respondents contributed – and although their answers are couched in terms of advice, they are revealing about personal and professional lessons these journalists have learned in their years away from home. Below, some extracts, edited only for clarity and to remove any specifics that might identify an individual.*

Think long term and remember that this is going to be the hardest thing you are ever going to do in your life. I thought short term, believing the regime could not last much longer. I now know that unseating a repressive regime takes much longer than you think. And be prepared for the fact that you may not be able to return home for a very long time.

...

Don't lose sight of what is going on inside your country, and make sure you "speak" to your audience in a way they can relate to.

...

Make use of simple technology to reach people; don't treat them as consumers of news, make them become producers of news. Let every citizen report what they see, you help process the information they provide using every legal and political safeguard provided by your new place of residence.

...

Try to be the alternative media outlet, and try to listen to the heart beat of your people.

...

Be careful whether you are planning to do this job just because you want to, or because there is a real need. My advice is that we will be successful if we do the job because it is really necessary. So situation assessment is important.

...

1. You should know: you were an activist, but now you are a journalist as well as activist.
2. To get news, you sometimes act like an activist, but please treat the "news" you get and send to your audience like you are real journalist.
3. Be confident, because you are on the right side of history. Nobody can help you more than this belief.
4. Don't lose touch with people still inside that country, and don't look down on them due to their position. Respect them all the time.

...

Always think about your mission in light of the fact that you are now less restricted when reporting about grave human rights violations committed in your country. Speak up, extend a hand to those still suffering from totalitarianism and ensure that you work towards change in your country, because that is what many people in your homeland long for.

...

Keep in touch with the ground reality, and work in consultation with groups at home working for a change. It is easy to be idealistic and become isolated from the reality once away from home. Changes happen within—we exile journalists/activists can only help.

...

1. Have a thick skin. A lot of insults and threats will come your way.
  2. Build a network of trustworthy contacts in the homeland
  3. Train your contacts on security, especially Internet.
  4. Have more than one of your contacts verify a story; never rush to print.
  5. Recruit volunteers. Train your volunteers.
- \*\*\*

Have courage, stay unbiased, be prepared and do not affiliate with any political groups. Tell the truth and work for the people. There will be many challenges.

\*\*\*

Prepare a business plan first. If you don't have a plan, you plan to fail. Do your market research thoroughly.

\*\*\*

You must have a donor. Ideas and dreams can't be realized without resources.

\*\*\*

1. You should write a report that will help your community in general.
  2. Make sure your parents or relatives will not be arrested or threatened the next day by today's report.
- \*\*\*

Make sure you have enough contacts in your country, and be ready to face the same wrath you fled from—many dictators now are able to follow you wherever you go using different means.

\*\*\*

Stick to independence and avoid paid influence from opposition groups. Trust is important within media groups including idea exchange between inside and outside media.

\*\*\*

Never cheat your audience: neither with propaganda (even for better values), nor with a purposeful selection of facts that would suit your political point of view.

\*\*\*

It is important to be dynamic, creative, and scrappy as possible ... Equally important is to shore up skills in using media production tools because often times, producing media in exile means you have to be a jack of all trades.

\*\*\*

Try to keep all your connections in your home country. Do not forget you are in a free country now—but when you are doing anything or contacting anyone in your home country, you have to understand things there as if you were there.

\*\*\*

Remember why you left your country and continue pursuing that goal despite the other attractions or temptations life in a different country may present. Also, being in exile does not give you an excuse to be a biased journalist. The anger you have against people who forced you to leave your country should never be allowed to cloud your judgment. You are not in exile to fight enemies back home but to continue what you were doing at home.

\*\*\*

1. Don't give what dictators in your country want, your silence.
2. Keep your contacts at home active.
3. Acquire basic knowledge about secured ways of communication.
4. Don't forget that your journalistic contribution is still needed despite distance, volume and intensity.
5. Learn to live a simple life, at least till things change for you.
6. Finally, console your loved ones at home regularly.

Gerry Jackson, whose idea is credited as the genesis of the conference, called it helpful, “because a lot of issues were raised, and you talked to a lot of people who thought they were the only ones.” But she’s not sure what it will produce. “The trouble is we’re scattered to the four corners of the world. It was a great conference, a lot of people found it very helpful—and now it’s gone.”<sup>45</sup>

Koven, in his original proposal in September 2008 for what eventually became the Stockholm conference, cited three “expected outcomes”:

- Creation of a network of independent exile media.
- Exchanges of information on techniques among exile media.
- Creation of a statement of professional standards for exile media.<sup>46</sup>

He is satisfied that the conference achieved its immediate goals, including countering “the psychological problems of isolation” of exile journalists and helping them exchange information and ideas. But almost five months after the conference closed, he was less sure about the future-oriented goals.

*In this new world,  
circumvention becomes  
as important as  
journalism, and a wide  
variety of efforts are  
underway to make  
it work better.*

“What I had hoped would come out of it a little more quickly was the actual establishment of that network of support,” Koven said. “We really want something that creates a dynamic and lasting movement going forward.”<sup>47</sup>

There is talk, he said, of establishing a website that exile media could use to stay in touch and exchange information. Jackson, or Wilf Mbanga, editor of the *Zimbabwean*, might be coordinating that, Koven said, and there could be leftover funds from the conference to support it. Sharon Hom, who was a participant in the conference’s closing session, supported the

recommendation for some sort of wiki-like tool to keep participants connected. “I haven’t heard any progress on this yet, but I would like to see some movement,” she said. “It could create a platform for us all to come back together in the same virtual room.”<sup>48</sup>

But for the moment, at least, that appears to be on hold. “I had talked about the possibility of our webmaster creating a site, as he could do this at very little cost,” Jackson said. “It is not underway because of the crisis management situation I remain in, trying to keep [SW Radio Africa] functioning” in the face of funding uncertainty, and dealing with intense news coverage. “It is still something I hope can be taken forward in the near future.”<sup>49</sup>

Marie Kronmarker of the Fojo Media Institute, which hosted the conference, observed of the participants that “quite a few were very interested in taking the sort of short courses we offer.” Fojo hasn’t offered those courses to independent media in exile, just to journalists working in-country. “We are still thinking about what to do as follow-up to that conference,” she said.<sup>50</sup>

The survey conducted for this report reinforces the need for training. It included an open-ended question asking what, besides funding, the exile organizations most need in the way of help. Nearly 60 percent said they need training—in journalism, technical skills, and management. McElhone of OSF said she expects to meet with colleagues in Stockholm soon, for “a general discussion on how to move forward.” And, said Tatomir, “We are ready to continue to facilitate those efforts” of an exile media network—but not to “force the idea on anybody” if the participants don’t want it. “If they’re not playing some sort of leadership role in it, then we think it’s not really meeting their needs,” McElhone said.<sup>51</sup>

Galima Bukharbaeva is an exile from Uzbekistan who was honored with the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2005, and who now works for the online journal *Uznews.net*. At that final conference session, her comments addressed some of the frustrations exile media can feel.

“I’m thinking of coordinating my work with other media in exile,” she said, “but I do not see any kind of action plan here that would enable us to set up together. I still believe that, if we could be united as an association, that would help us to protect ourselves and maybe to campaign together to defend our rights and interests.”

“What we were discussing here was the same as one and a half years ago in Budapest,” she added. “For me, that meeting was exciting because for the first time I saw my colleagues working in the same conditions as I do. But this is the third forum and we have to come up with some real plan.”<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, action plan or no, the journalists in exile keep doing what they always do: navigate life in a foreign land while also pursuing a mission of personal passion. They are, many of them, energized by the popular uprisings in the Middle East, and the way the same tools they use were the strongest weapons the protesters wielded. “It certainly has created a buzz in Vietnam, about the idea of opposition parties, about self-mobilization online,” said Trinh Nguyen. “We saw all those opportunities; there’s a whole world that comes along with digital activism. It’s very exciting.”<sup>53</sup>

And even as they talk with each other of their frustrations and their challenges, they keep their audiences—their countrymen, whom they nearly all say they want to rejoin some day—foremost in their minds. Sharon Hom likes to remember the activists and lawyers and others who are more engaged in China than ever before, even though repression is at higher levels than before.

“They’re facing a lot more difficult constraints than we are—and they stick with it with great persistence and courage.”<sup>54</sup>

*Action plan or no, the journalists in exile keep doing what they always do: navigate life in a foreign land while also pursuing a mission of personal passion.*

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The independent media in exile produce a puzzling set of challenges for the international media-support community. On the one hand, most observers agree that these organizations are critically important in the context of repressive societies, and also that they are significantly underfunded compared to other media programs, proportionate to their importance and impact. On the other hand, it appears that some of their independent characteristics—the fact that they’re so widely scattered; or that so many of them didn’t start out as journalists, but came to it through activism—can complicate efforts to support them.

*The most likely path to improving the situation for exile media, in quality and in long-term survivability, is to create better, and more institutionalized, coordination—both among the exile media organizations and the groups that support them.*

Some of those most friendly to the exile media are at great pains to say that they don’t want to force any solutions on anyone, that it must be up to the exile media themselves to decide what they want and take the initiative. Of course that’s appropriate, especially in principle. But when you hear exile journalist after exile journalist say, most often in tired voices, that they can scarcely keep up with their journalism along with filling out another grant application, dealing with a cyber attack, or handling immigration issues and general administrative logistics, perhaps it is a principle that can be overstated.

The most likely path to improving the situation for exile media, in quality and in long-term survivability, is to create better, and more institutionalized, coordination—both among the exile media organizations and the groups that support them.

This is hardly a radical idea. Media houses in the United States and throughout the world learned long ago how valuable it is to form professional organizations with paid staff that can do anything from compiling industry standards, to forming joint advertising markets, to lobbying governments on laws affecting the media, to arranging ways for individual media to connect with others who are facing similar challenges (and with those in the business world who may have solutions). The forums supported by OSF in Budapest and Chiang Mai, and the conference in Stockholm last October, were invaluable first steps. Their effort will be largely diluted, however, if there is a pattern of occasional high-energy gatherings followed by little in the way of concrete, visible follow-up that spreads through the ranks of these journalists.

And anyone who believes the main responsibility for organizing this follow-up and carrying it forward should belong to the scattered, hard-pressed exile media themselves should think again. It is unrealistic.

## Ideas to Consider

- **Donor groups should expand and formalize their coordination of exile-media support.** Some coordination already happens, and it especially seems to work well, OSF's McElhone noted, when the exile-media organization brings the donors together. But why should it have to wait for that? Couldn't there be a way to create an exile-media working group, with representatives from each donor group, with regular communication (and occasional meetings) to address mutual issues?
 

Among many other things, the group could address:

  1. How to get around the bureaucratic problem that a donor might, for example, fund all its Asia support from an Asia desk—leaving an exile-media group that serves an Asian country but happens to be located in Europe either out in the cold or struggling to be heard.
  2. How to find a way to fund worthy exile media for longer stretches of time, rather than forcing them into a perpetual cycle of fundraising.
  3. How to apportion limited funding with the most impact, perhaps by agreeing that one donor will concentrate in one area, others in another.
  4. Or, creative approaches such as a “small-grants” program, since so many of the exile-media organizations don’t have huge needs. The smaller operations can least afford to deal with a cumbersome funding process; a small-grants approach that minimizes the bureaucracy, preferably with multiyear funding to assure continuity, could make a major difference.
- **Organizations providing international media training should actively seek to train exile-media journalists.** This shouldn’t be hard, and it is essential, particularly since so many people didn’t come to this work from a journalism background. Yet it seems to be an area that needs attention. Gerry Jackson cites her experience in applying to the BBC’s international training program, only to be rebuffed because her journalists—trying to overcome great barriers to broadcast into Zimbabwe—are physically located in London. Marie Kronmarker noticed how many people at the Stockholm conference were hungry for the sort of training her Fojo Media Institute provides to journalists flown in from in-country media organizations around the world, and she acknowledged that Fojo as yet doesn’t open its classes to those working from exile, although they are thinking about it. That would be a marvelous step.
- **A formal international association of exile media should be established.** This should not be a bulky bureaucracy. Donor groups working together could certainly find a way to provide office space, some support staff, and a paid executive director. And it should not have to wait until this fragmented, stressed-out group of individual exile-media outlets spontaneously takes the initiative. It wouldn’t be hard for a major support group to send out an e-mail soliciting input on what that association should

look like and essentially asking, “If donors commit to fund such an association as a pilot project for five years, would your outlet commit to joining?”

Galima Bukharbaeva was right when she said that such an association “would help us to protect ourselves and maybe to campaign together to defend our rights and interests.” At the recent conference she said, “This is the third forum and we have to come up with some real plan.” An association, with an executive director responsible to a board picked by members, could help remove the cloak of invisibility that too often shrouds these journalists. And it could, among many other things:

1. Help establish standards and a code of ethics relevant to the special circumstances of exile journalism. A very positive analysis of the widely admired Democratic Voice of Burma noted that “excessive bias is a major part of the criticism” of DVB from outside media experts, including slanting of coverage in support of the opposition.<sup>55</sup> By no means is this an issue for DVB alone; a clear set of shared standards and a monitoring body chosen by the exile journalists themselves would help enormously.
  2. Publicize training opportunities, and identify needed new ones.
  3. Share instructive stories of successes, pleas for help about problems, and tips on how others have dealt with similar problems. This would include coordinating with groups such as IMS’s Media Frontiers, spreading the word about what such companies are doing, and helping them see the best ways to help.
  4. Work as a sort of lobbyist with donor groups, helping to improve coordination and communication.
  5. Develop as consistent as possible a way to monitor the reach of the exile-media groups—their traffic, audience, circulation—and whether it is inside the homeland or outside. As Johnson of Internews pointed out, this is essential for the journalists and support groups alike.
- **The exile-media organizations themselves should take some of the initiative.** Of course they are strapped for time and resources. But someone at every one of these organizations has the time to send out individual e-mails to the organizers of one of the three forums, or group e-mails to participants they met there, asking what is happening in the way of follow-up, suggesting what they think should happen—and committing themselves to support it. They can rightly say that they don’t have the time or resources to create a new association, or organize training for their staffs, or solve all the problems of circumvention, on their own. But they do have the time to say to those in the support community: We value your help, we couldn’t be here without you, and what we need now is something more permanent, practical, and useful than an occasional series of meetings. We need to professionalize our work and raise its profile, and we need your help in creating an association that would do that.

# Appendix 1: News Organizations Participating in the Exile Media Survey

*These are the 33 exile news organizations whose representatives completed the survey used in this report.*

- Belarus, European Radio for Belarus; [www.euroradio.fm](http://www.euroradio.fm)
- Belarus, Radio Racyja; [www.racyja.com](http://www.racyja.com)
- Bhutan, Bhutan News Service; [www.bhutannewsservice.com](http://www.bhutannewsservice.com)
- Burma, Burma News International; [www.bnionline.net](http://www.bnionline.net)
- Burma, Democratic Voice of Burma; [www.dvb.no](http://www.dvb.no)
- Burma, *Irrawaddy*; [www.irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org)
- Burma, Kaladan Press Network; [www.kaladanpress.org](http://www.kaladanpress.org)
- Burma, Kaowao Newsgroup; [www.kaowao.org](http://www.kaowao.org)
- Burma, Mizzima News; [www.mizzima.com](http://www.mizzima.com)
- Burma, Shan Herald Agency for News; [www.shanland.org](http://www.shanland.org)
- Cambodia, *Free Press Magazine*; [www.fpmonline.net](http://www.fpmonline.net)
- China, Boxun News; [www.boxun.us](http://www.boxun.us)
- China, Human Rights in China; [www.hrichina.org](http://www.hrichina.org)
- Cuba, CubaNet News; [www.cubanet.org](http://www.cubanet.org)
- Cuba, PayoLibre; [www.payolibre.com](http://www.payolibre.com)
- Eritrea, Asmarino Independent; [www.asmarino.com](http://www.asmarino.com)
- Eritrea, Radio Erythrée Internationale; [www.erena.org](http://www.erena.org)
- Ethiopia, *Addis Neger*; [www.addisnegeronline.com](http://www.addisnegeronline.com)
- Ethiopia, *Ethiopian Review*; [www.ethiopianreview.com](http://www.ethiopianreview.com)
- Iran, *Iran dar Jahan*; [www.irandarjahan.net](http://www.irandarjahan.net)
- Iran, Iran's Freedom of Expression; [www.iran-free.org](http://www.iran-free.org)
- Nigeria, Sahara Reporters; [www.saharareporters.com](http://www.saharareporters.com)
- Rwanda, The Newsline; [www.newslineea.com](http://www.newslineea.com)
- Sri Lanka, Global Tamil News; [www.globaltamilnews.net](http://www.globaltamilnews.net)
- Sri Lanka, Lanka News Web; [www.lankaneWSweb.com](http://www.lankaneWSweb.com)
- Sudan, *Hurriyat*; [www.hurriyatsudan.com](http://www.hurriyatsudan.com)
- Tibet, *Tibet Post International*; [www.thetibetpost.com](http://www.thetibetpost.com)
- Tibet, Voice of Tibet; [www.vot.org](http://www.vot.org)
- Vietnam, Radio Chan Troi Moi/Radio New Horizon; [www.radiochantroimoi.com](http://www.radiochantroimoi.com)
- Yemen, Yemen Portal; [www.yemenportal.net](http://www.yemenportal.net)
- Zambia, Zambian Watchdog; [www.zambianwatchdog.com](http://www.zambianwatchdog.com)
- Zimbabwe, SW Radio Africa; [www.swradioafrica.com](http://www.swradioafrica.com)
- Zimbabwe, the *Zimbabwean*; <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/>

## Appendix 2: Survey Results: Inside the World of Exile Media

In preparing this report, the author, on CIMA's behalf, conducted an online survey of 36 individuals who are working in exile to send news reports, commentary or other forms of journalism back into their home countries. They represent 33 different exile-media outlets.

Of the respondents, 22 attended the conference on Independent Media in Exile in Stockholm in October 2010; the other 14 were found through recommendations from press-freedom organizations and independent research.

The survey, using the SurveyMonkey online surveying tool, asked respondents their names and the name of their media outlet but promised that none of the specific information on the survey would be attributed to an individual without his or her explicit permission. All 36 provided their names.

This survey presents a rare glimpse inside a world that is highly diffuse and, by its nature, often must be secretive. Here is an overview:

**Countries represented:** The 36 respondents send their reports back into 18 different countries: Belarus, Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, China, Tibet, Cuba, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

**Country of residence:** Nine live in the United States, five in Thailand, and three each in Poland and the UK. Countries with two respondents each are Sweden, Norway, India, Switzerland, and Uganda; one each lives in France, Hong Kong, Australia, Germany, Kenya, and Bangladesh.

**Length of exile:** Almost 20 percent left their home country in 2009 or later. The largest groups, 25 percent each, left either from 2005 to 2008 or before 1990.

**Reason for leaving home country:** 47.2 percent left either due to threat of imprisonment (27.8 percent) or to escape violent attacks or threat of attacks (19.4 percent). The other most common reasons were because of general political conditions (13.9 percent) and to pursue higher education (11.1 percent).

**What type of journalism:** The vast majority, just more than 82 percent, produce original news reports or commentary. About 12 percent find and share articles from other sources, and others do both.

**How they distribute the journalism:** The primary medium for 61.1 percent of respondents is a website, far ahead of the second most common, shortwave or regular band radio (19.4 percent). And taking into account *all* the different media they use:

- More than 93 percent have a website;
- 48 percent use blogs;
- 45.3 percent use radio;
- 45.2 percent use Twitter;
- 27.7 percent have a printed publication;
- About 22 percent use television;
- 19.4 percent send material via CDs, DVDs or other storage media;
- 13 percent use SMS/texting via mobile phones.

**Perceived impact:** 66.7 percent say there is significant evidence that the journalism they produce has real impact inside their home country, and nearly 20 percent more say there is moderate evidence to this effect. Just 13.9 percent say there is a small amount of evidence, and nobody believes there is none.

**Languages:** In addition to providing material in the language(s) of their home countries, about 53 percent present it in other languages, most commonly, English.

**Frequency of dispatches:** 86 percent produce content at least once a day (and 58 percent do it several times daily). 5.6 percent produce content two or three times a week, and 8.3 percent weekly.

**The audience:** Their audience includes a mix of people in their home countries (on average, about 47 percent of their audience, they estimate); members of diaspora outside their home countries (42 percent); and a general, non-diaspora international audience (12 percent).

**Topics of their content:** The overwhelming leader is news about politics/government in the home country; nearly 92 percent of them provide that. Next are: international news related to the home country (77.8 percent); news about the diaspora (61.1 percent); audience letters or other response (55.6 percent); business or other general news from the home country (47.2 percent); cultural or sports news from the home country (41.7 percent); and general international news (19.4 percent).

**Interactivity:** More than three-quarters—77.1 percent—use Facebook or other social network sites, 62.9 percent use comments sent from the home country via SMS or e-mail, and 54.3 percent use Twitter.

**Professionalism of the journalists:** 48.6 percent worked full-time as journalists before leaving their home country and 8.6 percent part-time. But a sizeable number, 42.9 percent, had never been journalists before going into exile.

**Size of operation:** Nobody reported working alone, and almost 92 percent of the respondents said their outlet had 10 or more people working with it.

**Major challenges:** When respondents were asked to indicate *all* the serious challenges they face, funding was number one (83.3 percent), followed by personal security issues and technological interference such as electronic jamming (tied at 61.1 percent), finding ways to distribute the journalism (52.8 percent), finding people to do the work (47.2 percent), finding sources in the home country (36.1 percent), technical issues such as Internet, unrelated to interference (30.6 percent), and legal/immigration issues in the country of residence (27.8 percent).

**Biggest challenge:** Asked the question again but this time, asked to specify just one single *most* serious challenge, the clear leader was funding (52.8 percent called this the most serious), with outside technological interference named the second most often, at 16.7 percent.

**Pay:** Almost 66 percent receive at least some pay for the work they are doing; 34 percent do not.

**Time spent at work:** 57 percent say they spend all their working time providing journalism to audiences in their home country, and another 20 percent say they spend at least three-quarters of their working time. Nobody spends less than one-quarter of his or her time.

**Other employment:** Nearly 66 percent have no other paying employment; 11.4 percent work at a separate job in the news media; and almost 23 percent work in a job unrelated to the news media.

**News sources:** Asked to indicate all the different sources of information they use in preparing material for audiences in their home countries, 72.2 percent say they use freelancers or stringers inside the home country, and a full 69.4 percent have sources within the government of their home country. Other news sources: independent contacts developed in the home country (94.4 percent); tips from private individuals in the home country (77.8 percent); sources in the diaspora (75.0 percent); media reports from inside the home country (72.2 percent); sources in NGOs or international groups inside the home country (66.7 percent).

**Looking into the future:** By far, most respondents, 75 percent, believe it is extremely likely they will still be doing this work a year from now; 16.7 percent think it is somewhat likely. Nobody thinks it is unlikely, but 8.6 percent say they're not sure about what the future holds for them.

**Activist or journalist:** Asked if they see themselves as an activist, working to bring about change in their home country, 11.4 percent said yes, while 25.7 percent said they would describe themselves as a traditional journalist, providing unbiased news and information. The largest number, 62.9 percent, said they see themselves as both activists and journalists.

**Sources of support:** One question asked: Besides funding, do you receive advice, training, materials, or other support from any of these sources? The replies: 75 percent receive support from international media or press-freedom organizations; 63 percent from NGOs; 34 percent from individual journalists in the country where they're based; 31 percent from media organizations in that country; and 28 percent from diaspora individuals or groups.

**What help they need:** An open-ended question asked: Besides money, what things do you most need to be successful? Respondents could indicate as many things as they wished. These were the leading replies:

- **Training:** Overall, 31 mentions (58.8 percent of the respondents mentioning it), with these sub-categories:
  - o Unspecified – just said “training”: 10
  - o Specified journalism training: 8
  - o Specified technical training: 8
  - o Specified management training: 5
- **Technical support** (including circumvention help): 14 mentions (41 percent of respondents)
- **Legal aid, security help:** 9 mentions (27 percent of respondents)
- **Advertising/Marketing assistance:** 3 mentions (9 percent)

## Endnotes

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