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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Reporters Sans Frontiers International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The state of the world press

There was a drastic decline in freedom of information in 2014. Two-thirds of the 180 countries surveyed by *Reporters Without Borders* for the 2015 World Press Freedom Index performed less well than in the previous year. The annual global indicator, which measures the overall level of violations of freedom of information in 180 countries year by year, has risen to 3,719, an 8 percent increase over 2014 and almost 10 percent compared with 2013. The decline affected all continents.

Index details

2015 Index: Reasons for a worrying decline

Conflicts proliferated in 2014: the Middle East, Ukraine, Syria and Iraq... All warring parties without exception waged a fearsome information war. The media, used for propaganda purposes or starved of information, became strategic targets and were attacked, or even silenced.

[See the analysis: “News control - powerful weapon of war”](#)

Non-state groups follow no laws and disregard basic rights in pursuit of their own ends. From Boko Haram to Islamic State, Latin American drug traffickers and the Italian mafia, motives may vary but their *modus operandi* is the same – the use of fear and reprisals to silence journalists and bloggers who dare to investigate them or refuse to act as their mouthpieces.

[See the analysis: “Non-state groups: tyrants of information”](#)

Stretching sacrilege prohibitions in order to protect a political system is an extremely effective way of censoring criticism of the government in countries where religion shapes the law.

The criminalization of blasphemy endangers freedom of information in around half of the world’s countries. When “believers” think the courts are not doing enough to ensure respect for God or the Prophet, they sometimes take it upon themselves to remind journalists and bloggers what they may or may not say.

[See the analysis: “Blasphemy: political use of religious censorship”](#)

Can journalists be seen as the common enemy of protesters and police alike at some demonstrations?

This is the sad conclusion of Reporters Without Borders this year. 2014 saw an increase in violence towards reporters and netizens covering demonstrations.

[See the analysis: “The growing difficulty of covering demonstrations”](#)

The European Unions recorded a bigger decline in 2015 over the 2014 Index, exposing the limits of its “democratic model” and highlighting the inability of its mechanisms to halt the erosion.

The EU appears to be swamped by a certain desire on the part of some member states to compromise on freedom of information. As a result, the gaps between members are widening – EU countries are ranked from 1st to 106th in the Index, an unprecedented spread.

[See the analysis: “European model’s erosion”](#)

Democracies often take liberties with their values in the name of national security.

Faced with real or spurious threats, governments arm themselves routinely with an entire arsenal of laws aimed at muzzling independent voices. This phenomenon is common to both authoritarian governments and democracies.

[See the analysis: “National security” – spurious grounds](#)

These **authoritarian governments** are in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and also the Middle East. Most are headed by cartoon characters come to life who would be laughed at if they did not exercise total control over news and information. In 2014 they further tightened the grip they have had on the media for many years. Among the lowest-ranking 20 countries in the 2015 Index, 15 performed even worse than they did in the 2014 edition.

[See the analysis: “Governments seeking ever more information control”](#)