

## **COLORS 65: Freedom of Speech - extracts**

“If it’s hard to say what exactly the freedom of the press is, it’s far easier—and, it seems to us, more urgent—to draw up a list of when it’s violated, and fight.”

“You’ve understood: instead of theoretical debates—fascinating, but sometimes a little sterile—we prefer concrete action. Yes, we are hopelessly pragmatic, and we’re proud of it. What we want to do is to push back the arbitrary powers that send journalists to prison, accusing them of causing displeasure and disturbing the peace. In this issue, the **COLORS** team invites us on a tour around these daily ignominies—in its own iconoclastic way, with its weapons made of devastating irony, and above all, with a talent that can convince those on whom our more academic methods are lost. For that, the team—and the direction of *Fabrica*—should be sincerely thanked.”

**Robert Ménard**  
**Secretary-General, Reporters Without Borders**

**Marjane Satrapi, 36 - Iran**  
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Marjane Satrapi is the author of the bestselling graphic novel *Persepolis*, an account of her life in Iran, which she left when she was 14. “In a sense, I censor myself everyday. I’m responsible for what I transmit about Iran. Consequently, that limits my freedom. Words can kill.”

**Wen Chong, 30 - China**  
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Wen Chong was at home in the Chinese town of Zhong Shang when four men came into his house, beat him up and severed his right middle and index fingers, which they took away with them. Wen is a reporter for *Nanfang Dushi Bao* (Southern Metropolis News), a Guangzhou newspaper that is probably the most independent in mainland China. *NDB* stories—including reports on the SARS outbreak and on corruption—regularly anger people in power: Its editor Chen Yizhong has been imprisoned in the past, and two reporters are serving eight and six years in jail on trumped-up corruption charges. “I love news reporting and I’m not going to stop. I’ll just type more slowly.”

**Tony Barros, 35 - Brazil**  
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In 2002, Brazilian journalist Tim Lopes was tortured, killed and dismembered with a Samurai sword in a Rio favela (slum) after going undercover and filming drug deals. It was the first time the traffickers—who run the neighborhoods—had killed a journalist. Now, the slums are mostly off-limits to the media and only the 12 correspondents of the website Viva Favelas dare to report from inside the favelas where they live. Correspondent Tony Barros has to self-censor. “If it’s public, I can cover it; if it’s an execution, I can’t.” It’s dangerous, but worth it. “I’m a bridge to the outside world. I can show others how we suffer, but also how we enjoy life.”

**Volunteers, 37 - Thailand**  
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Thailand's constitution contains 67 provisions protecting freedom of expression and human rights. It's the most progressive constitution in the region, but only on paper. Since the election of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra there have been over 20 cases of journalists and editors harassed or dismissed to appease the government.

**Pavel Felgenhauer, military analyst - Russia**  
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“The rule used to be that they knew they couldn’t criticize [President Vladimir] Putin and had to be cautious in what they said, but they could report a fact as a fact. Now there are problems even with facts.”

**Quezon City - Philippines**  
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A few hours after 200 people in Quezon City formed a candle-lit human chain (above) to mark World Press Freedom Day, broadcaster Klein Cantaneros was shot seven times in Dipolog City.

**Rory Peck Trust, Freelance Journalists Organization - UK**  
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Independence costs. Freelancers pay for their freedom in money (they don't have expense accounts), insecurity (there's no news organization to bail them out) and poorer health (freelancers in war zones are more prone to depression and social dysfunction, according to research).

**Shahla Sherkat, 49 - Iran**  
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Zanan (Women) has been called the Ms. of the Middle East. But the American feminist magazine was probably never confiscated when it featured a woman with her wrists exposed, while for Zanan, shut-downs and court summonses are common. Even so, says editor Shahla Sherkat, “10 years ago we couldn’t even talk about feminism as a movement. It was too threatening.” Zanan’s content ranges from interviews with female beggars and prisoners to sexist statements by politicians (often published alongside their photos). “Our art is knowing how to write articles so that we are not shut down. We say what we have to say, but in creative ways.” Over at Tehran newspaper Shargh, which was temporarily closed recently after publishing a letter from a parliamentary candidate, there are four levels of internal monitoring before anything is published. “Self-censorship is one of the biggest problems in Iran,” says staffer Badrossadat Mofidi. “We have become our own worst enemies.” They have also become resilient. Of the 10 papers Mofidi has worked on in the last ten years, “each time one was shut down, it reopened in a new form.” “I’m optimistic,” says Sherkat. “If the magazine is closed down, I’m not sure what I’d do, except start again.”

**Roselyne Godard, 46 – France**  
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Roselyne Godard was accused of belonging to a pedophilia ring in the northern French town of Outreau. “I remember the moment when my freedom of speech was taken away from me. It was April 11, 2001, when I was arrested. I denied everything, but it was no use; I had become a monster, a pedophile. My words had no weight. They finally said I was innocent, but in the eyes of many people, I’m not. I was given an image that isn’t mine, and I have to bear it: I’m the ‘baker of Outreau,’ even though I’ve never been a baker in my life. My family is astonished I still give interviews, but I have to thank the press, because without them the scandal of Outreau would never have come out. For 20 months and 21 days, I had to keep silent. Today, I have a great feeling of freedom. I go where the wind takes me.”

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