



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Vietnam (2003)

The media, already tightly regulated by the ruling Communist Party, faced further government-imposed restrictions in 2002. Although the constitution guarantees press freedom, the criminal code contains broad national security and antidefamation provisions that restrict free speech. In addition, a 1999 law requiring journalists to pay damages to individuals or groups that have been harmed by press articles has been invoked in at least one lawsuit. In January, the government published a decree instructing police to confiscate and destroy prohibited publications. The Committee to Protect Journalists expressed concern in July over a number of official efforts to curtail access to information, including banning the public's access to satellite television broadcasts and clamping down on press coverage of a key corruption scandal. Authorities also further tightened controls over the Internet, blocking thousands of sites and requiring all owners of Internet cafes to submit to licensing and background checks. All media outlets are owned by the government, and many journalists practice self-censorship. A number of journalists and cyber-dissidents were arrested or detained during the year, and several were sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their writings.