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Cuban journalist, North Korean radio station and two Burmese bloggers win 17th annual Reporters Without Borders Prize

The Reporters Without Borders Prize jury chose **Ricardo González Alfonso** of Cuba as **“2008 Journalist of the Year”** for helping an independent press to survive in Cuba. After daring to challenge to the state’s monopoly of news and information, González was arrested on 18 March 2003 along with 26 other dissident journalists during the crackdown known as the “Black Spring.” Accused of being “in the pay of the United States” and “undermining Cuba’s independence and territorial integrity,” he was given a 20-year prison sentence. He has been held in Havana’s Combinado del Este prison since late 2004, despite poor health.

The jury awarded the **2008 Media prize** to **Radio Free NK’s** North Korean journalists in order to pay tribute to their courage and determination. Kim Jong-il’s totalitarian regime has Radio Free NK, North Korea’s first dissident radio station, in its sights. Obsessed by the desire to control news and information, the regime has on several occasions threatened to suspend dialogue with South Korea if this Seoul-based station is not banned. The North Korean journalists who produce Free NK’s programmes are often threatened and the South Korean police have been protecting its manager since a plot to kill him was foiled.

Finally, **Zarganar** and **Nay Phone Latt**, two Burmese bloggers, were chosen as joint winners in the **“Cyber-dissident” category**. □ Dubbed the “Burmese Charlie Chaplin,” comedian Zarganar defended human rights and denounced the military government’s abuses in sketches and entries in the blog he had been keeping since August 2007. Until his arrest in June of this year, he had become a reliable source of information in a country strangled by censorship and repression. □ A special court in Insein prison sentenced 28-year-old blogger Nay Phone Latt on 10 November 2008 to 20 years and six months in prison on a charge of violating the Electronic Act, which provides for severe penalties for those who use the Internet to criticise the government.

Awarding annual prizes since 1992

By awarding an annual prize to a journalist, a news media and a cyber-

dissident, Reporters Without Borders alerts public opinion to the wide range of violations of the right to be kept informed and to inform others, and to the need for a commitment to supporting press freedom. The winner in each category receives 2,500 euros.

Since its creation, the Reporters Without Borders - Fondation de France Prize has been awarded to: Zlatko Dizdarevic (Bosnia and Herzegovina - 1992), Wang Juntao (China - 1993), André Sibomana (Rwanda - 1994), Christina Anyanwu (Nigeria - 1995), Isik Yurtçu (Turkey - 1996), Raúl Rivero (Cuba - 1997), Nizar Nayyuf (Syria - 1998), San San Nweh (Burma - 1999), Carmen Gurruchaga (Spain - 2000), Reza Alijani (Iran - 2001), Grigory Pasko (Russia - 2002), Ali Lmrabet (Morocco - 2003), Hafnaoui Ghouli (Algeria - 2004), Zhao Yan (China - 2005), U Win Tin (Burma - 2006) and Seyoum Tsehaye (Eritrea - 2007).

Several winners were released from prison just weeks or months after being awarded the prize. They include Moroccan journalist Ali Lmrabet, who was awarded the prize on 10 December 2003 and was freed on 7 January 2004, and Russian journalist Grigory Pasko, awarded the prize in December 2002 and freed in January 2003. Massoud Hamid of Syria, winner of the 2005 prize in the "cyber-dissident category," was released in July 2006. Win Tin, the 2007 laureate, was released in September 2008 after 19 years in prison.

The winners of the Reporters Without Borders Prize are chosen by an international jury.

More information about the winners of the 2008 Reporters Without Borders Prize

JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR, for demonstrating a commitment to press freedom in his or her work, publicly-expressed views or stance. This year's winner, **Ricardo González Alfonso**, used to work for the state TV agency, where he was in charge of children's broadcasting. Born in 1950, he began working for Cuba Press, an independent news agency, in 1995 and became Reporters Without Borders correspondent in 1998. He and his friend Raúl Rivero set up the Manuel Márquez Sterling Association in May 2001 to train Cuba's independent journalists, who are often self-taught. In December 2002, he and other journalists launched the fortnightly De Cuba, with a first-issue print run of 200 copies. It tackled subjects ignored by the government such as racism in Cuba and the Varela Project campaign, which gathered more than 11,000 signatures to a petition calling for democratic change by constitutional means.

The other 2008 nominees in this category were: Moussa Kaka (Niger), Michel Kilo (Syria), Natalia Morar (Russia), Nguyen Viet Chien (Vietnam) and J.S Tissainayagam (Sri Lanka).

'A NEWS MEDIA embodying the struggle for the right to be kept informed and to inform others. Radio Free NK. The station broadcasts

several hours of programming every day denouncing the North Korean regime's lies. North Korea's sealed radio sets can only be tuned to government radio stations, and the political police have never stopped systematically checking radio sets to ensure they are not being tampered with. Nonetheless, more and more radio sets that can be used to listen to Free NK's shortwave broadcasts are entering North Korea across the Chinese border.

Thanks to a network of clandestine correspondents inside North Korea and in the Chinese border area, Free NK is able to broadcast exclusive news reports about the world's most closed country. Its manager, Kim Seong-min, a former North Korean government poet, uses a very "North Korean" style in the programmes in order to better reach listeners who have heard nothing but official propaganda for 60 years.

The other 2008 nominees in this category were: Chrono-tm.org (Turkmenistan), Democracy Now! (United States), Contravía (Colombia), Wechange.org (Iran) and Lynx (Guinea Conakry).

'TWO CYBER-DISSIDENTS prevented from giving us news and information via the Internet. Zarganar: An outspoken critic of poverty, privileges and government corruption in his blog, he was arrested in September 2007 for supporting the peaceful demonstrations being staged by Buddhist monks. Arrested again in June of this year on a charge of "disturbing public order" after talking to the BBC about the situation of the victims of the previous month's Cyclone Nargis, he was sentenced to 45 years in prison by a special court inside Insein prison in November. He was given an additional 14-year prison sentence a few days later. Two journalists have also received long prison sentences for, like him, gathering information about the post-Nargis situation in the Irrawaddy delta. He is still in Insein prison. Arrested for the first time during a severe crackdown on opposition activity in 1988, he had been forbidden since 2006 to embark on new artistic activities, including theatre and film. **Nay Phone Latt:** The owner of two Internet cafés in Rangoon, Nay Phone Latt was arrested on 29 January 2008 while in possession of a video banned by the military government. He kept a blog (<http://www.nayphonelatt.net/>) in which he described the difficulties that Burmese youth have to express themselves. It was also a very important source of information about the street demonstrations by Buddhist monks and young people in the autumn of 2007. The government is still cracking down hard on those who participated in or reported on this so-called Saffron Revolution. Nay Phone Latt suffers from an eye ailment but the authorities in Insein prison are not letting him see a doctor.

The other 2008 nominees in this category were: "Zola" (China), Cedric Kalonji (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Wael Abbas (Egypt).