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### **Letter of concern for press freedom in India**

India has for some time been defined as “the world’s biggest democracy”. It is an honourable title. But it also requires concrete and persistent work to uphold basic democratic measures such as press freedom.

We therefore regret that recent development in India where freedom of speech and the ability to criticize, inform and discuss all political issues has deteriorated.:

- According to Reporters without borders and their World Press Freedom Index India has fallen from number 142 in 2021 to 150 in 2022:

*The violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis in “the world’s largest democracy”, ruled since 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right.*

- The New York Times wrote that “India’s Proud Tradition of a Free Press Is at Risk”.
- Tax authorities in february this year raided BBCs offices in New Delhi and Mumbai shortly after a critical documentary on prime minister Narendra Modi role in anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 was aired.
- In 2021 Indian authorities pursued a similar razzia against a tv-station and newspaper which had criticized the government handling of the corona situation.
- Kashmiri journalist Sanna Irshad Mattoo was prevented from flying to the United States by Indian authorities to collect her Pulitzer Prize in October 2022. In 2019, British Indian journalist Aatish Taseer was stripped of his Indian overseas citizenship after he wrote an article in Time magazine criticizing Modi’s leadership.

- Amnesty International decided in 2020 to withdraw from India after authorities took action against their office premises and halted bank accounts.

We also wish to draw Your attention to the situation of Rana Ayyub. She is a critical journalist, writing Global Opinions for the Washington Post. Her pieces also appear in the Time, New York Times and the Guardian. Her work has included critique of the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the treatment of minorities within the country.

Rana has been named among the ten journalists in the world who face maximum threats to their lives.

She is accused of money laundering and has reason to fear imprisonment. Ayyub denies any wrongdoing, and argues the charges are intended to intimidate her, prompted by her work criticizing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

Last February, United Nations special rapporteurs called on India's government to halt "relentless misogynistic and sectarian attacks" against her:

*Constructive criticism is the lifeblood of democracy. Even if the authorities find it uncomfortable, it should never be criminalized or outlawed in this way"*

We urge Your government to take necessary actions so that India can live up to the proud image as the world's largest democracy.

Sincerely

Norwegian PEN, committee for press freedom

Thomas Spence, Siri Gedde-Dahl, Annette Groth