

ACCESS DENIED



VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT AND BULLYING - JOURNALISM IN CHINA IN 2017

The Chinese government has intensified its attempts to deny or restrict the access of foreign journalists to large parts of the country while increasing the use of the visa renewal process to pressure correspondents and news organizations whose coverage it does not like.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China annual survey asked members about their experiences during the calendar year 2017.

The results show that reporting conditions in China are deteriorating in a number of important regards, a conclusion borne out by the marked increase in the number of journalists who think conditions are worsening compared to the year before.

There was also no let up in 2017 in violent attacks against foreign journalists and intimidation of news sources, which continued alongside growing concerns about surveillance and invasions of privacy.

One of the most significant findings is that certain regions of China became particularly difficult for correspondents in 2017. Local security agents and thugs stepped up intimidation of foreign journalists in the far western region of Xinjiang, in border areas such as those near North Korea and at the trials of human rights activists.

Correspondents surveyed by the FCCC also reported greater difficulties in renewing their visas. The FCCC is aware of five international news organizations that experienced visa difficulties in 2017 that appeared to be reporting-related. Those difficulties included lengthy delays in approval, the issuance of credentials with unusually short validity and outright refusal by Chinese authorities to issue accreditation.

In the course of their reporting in 2017, some journalists were physically beaten. Others were detained and questioned. In other cases, news sources were too afraid to talk because they feared reprisal from authorities.

The FCCC also notes with concern the willingness of Chinese authorities to use interactions with foreign media as evidence of criminal activity. In January, Tashi Wangchuk, a Tibetan advocate, was detained after speaking to the New York Times about Tibetan education and culture. At the time of this report's publication, Tashi had been tried in court for "inciting separatism," but not yet sentenced.



2017 KEY FINDINGS

This report is based on a survey of journalists who belong to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China in Beijing. Conducted in December of 2017, the survey was completed by 117 of 218 correspondent members. Detailed results can be found later in this report, followed by a timeline of reported incidents of harassment and detention of foreign correspondents.

- *40% of respondents felt reporting conditions in 2017 deteriorated from the year before, compared with 29% in 2016*
- *Reporting grew more difficult in many areas of China, but in particular Xinjiang, China's westernmost region. 73% of respondents who traveled to Xinjiang in 2017 were told by officials and security agents that reporting was prohibited or restricted, compared with 42% in the FCCC's 2016 survey*
- *15% of respondents said they encountered problems during the renewal process, up from 6% the previous year. Compared to 2016, twice the number of respondents said the problems were related to their reporting. 6% of respondents were threatened with cancellation or non-renewal of visas in 2017, up from 2% in the FCCC's previous survey*
- *Correspondents reported higher levels of concern about surveillance and invasion of privacy, as well as greater pressure by overseas Chinese officials on media organization headquarters*
- *Nearly half of surveyed correspondents said they experienced interference, harassment and physical violence, roughly in line with 2016*
- *News sources in China continued to face negative consequences for interacting with a foreign journalist. 26% of surveyed correspondents said sources had been harassed, detained or called in for questioning, roughly in line with 2016*



FROM THE FRONT LINES: ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

In addition to the survey, the FCCC Media Freedoms Committee conducted in-depth interviews with Beijing bureau chiefs and senior correspondents at 14 newsgathering organizations headquartered in North America, Europe and Asia.

Most described worsening conditions for foreign journalists, as authorities leverage pressure in China and abroad both to interfere with reporting they consider undesirable and punish coverage they dislike.

VISAS AND ACCESS

That included rising threats of visa non-renewal, as well as multiple instances where certain media organizations were denied entry to important news events. The most notable of these was the Oct. 25 unveiling of the new Politburo Standing Committee, arguably the most important political event on the official Chinese calendar in 2017. A large number of news organizations applied to attend, but were told no seats were available, including The BBC, The Economist, The Financial Times, The Guardian, the New York Times, Yomiuri Shimbun and Sankei Shimbun, Libération and the Voice of America.

"We've definitely been penalized ... for opinion columns that the Chinese government seems not to like," said Financial Times bureau chief Tom Mitchell. "It was never said so explicitly, but ever since those columns came out, there have been a few examples of us just not being invited to things that other people have been invited to."

While Mitchell has previous experience in the "bad books" of Chinese authorities, "there were never any consequences for it. This is the first year that there were obvious consequences."

FOLLOWING, MONITORING AND INTERFERENCE

Sankei Shimbun was excluded from press conferences three times in 2017, and experienced significant disruption of its newsgathering in China. "We are hassled every time" a reporter makes a reporting trip, said Sankei Shimbun Beijing bureau chief Fujimoto Kinya. That has included the interruption of interviews with experts on Korea.

Being hassled by authorities in the field is "common," said Tatsumi Tomoji, Beijing bureau chief of Kyodo News. He pointed in particular to difficulties meeting with activists: "The police never say 'we monitor who you are communicating with, but I think their surveillance is stronger than in the past.'"

"We all felt like the intensity of the following in cities outside Beijing had increased," said a reporter with one western media organization. "I'm almost certain they had us on an airline watch list. When I arrived in a new city, they would be waiting for us at the airport."

In 2017, reporters for Agence France-Presse were stopped from working in Xinjiang, Tangshan, as well as while covering the death of Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo and the trials of human rights activities.

"They're trying to make us think that the consequences of covering human rights issues and lawyers, western

China and other undesirable topics is that your life becomes very inconvenient and your news organization has difficulties functioning,” said another correspondent for a western media outlet.

Some bureau chiefs protected Chinese colleagues from potential harm by preventing them from reporting on sensitive issues, such as meeting with human rights attorneys. These stories were, instead, delegated to foreign correspondents. At least one Chinese colleague at a U.S. newspaper left because of intimidation or pressure.

DIRECT PRESSURE FROM CHINA’S FOREIGN MINISTRY

Beijing bureau chief Patrick Baert, who first came to China as a reporter in 1997, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at least twice in 2017.

“What hasn’t changed in 20 years... there’s this appearance of transparency, openness, press conferences, but in fact there’s no real interaction between journalists and official voices. It’s still so hard to be able to reach the administration... finding people who can speak, who are not afraid to speak,” he said.

After various foreign news media published articles on the death of Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, China’s foreign ministry described them as “fake news.” Later, another journalist at a U.S. media outlet was scolded for writing about Liu. During an hour-long chat with a U.K. television journalist, a foreign ministry representative handling U.K. media accused the journalist’s colleague of being “biased and disrespectful” in their coverage of Liu.

OUT OF BOUNDS

Correspondents experienced increased harassment in sensitive border areas, including in Xinjiang, the western China region where Beijing has imposed tough security measures that have affected the largely-Muslim Uyghur ethnic group, and at the border of China and North Korea.

Those two border regions were under “special restrictions,” authorities told a bureau chief at a Western media organization, but declined to explicitly define those regulations in writing.

The vague meaning of the phrase effectively gave Chinese authorities broad power to harass journalists at the scene, including pressuring them to disclose photos and videos so that authorities could delete material deemed too sensitive.

“It feels like everyone is participating in this word game of obfuscation and confusion,” said the bureau chief. In talks with the bureau chief, authorities referred to a 2008 policy and said that they have the right to enforce “the law.” “But they don’t say what law they’re enforcing that we’re apparently violating,” the bureau chief added.

PRESSURE BACK HOME

At the same time, correspondents in China have experienced rising pressure at home, as Chinese diplomats reach out to media headquarters to criticize the work of reporters in the field.

“They’re being much more assertive in terms of trying to bully us into killing certain types of coverage,” said a correspondent for a western media organization.



DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS:

WORKING CONDITIONS

A large percentage of correspondents in China reported a worsening atmosphere for newsgathering, with 40% saying conditions had deteriorated relative to the previous year, an increase from 29% who answered the same way in the FCCC's survey of working conditions in 2016. No respondents said they believed reporting conditions in China met what they considered to be international standards.

"Police and other local authorities increasingly tried to claim that prior permission is required to report in their area. The already anemic list of researchers and academics who are willing to speak with foreign reporters continued to dwindle. Attacks and innuendo in state media further poisoned public opinion against foreign media." -Josh Chin, WSJ

"Fewer people will speak on the record, especially Chinese academics. No one wants to comment on the government, even positive stuff, on the record." -Charlie Campbell, TIME magazine

"It's more and more complicated to get access to persons and information. Nobody really is willing to talk with me." -Matthias Müller at Neue Zürcher Zeitung, a Swiss daily newspaper

Correspondents travelling to areas deemed sensitive by Chinese authorities reported significant attempts to hamper their reporting. Of respondents who travelled to Xinjiang, 73% were told by officials and security agents that reporting was prohibited or restricted, a significant increase from 42% the previous year. Large percentages of respondents had similar experiences in other areas of high scrutiny: 80% in Tibetan-inhabited areas (compared to 58% the year before); 54% near the border with North Korea; 20% near Chinese borders with south-east Asian countries and 63% in industrial districts, such as steel-producing areas.

"We were observed and followed when reporting from Yanbian, our taxi driver was secretly called and asked to keep the phone line open when driving us so as to monitor our conversations inside the car." -Bernhard Zand, Der Spiegel

"I was detained for three hours in Xinjiang and questioned by officials with the Ministry of State Security, who told me I could not report without prior permission, and demanded access to my laptop. When I refused, they seized my laptop and tailed me for two hours back to a hotel in Kashgar. The laptop was returned 12 hours later." -Nathan VanderKlippe, the Globe and Mail

"We entered an area in the Myanmar border that was on total lockdown, we were detained and escorted out of the area in less than 24 hours after getting there. Numerous incidents of harassment in steel producing regions of Hebei by thugs hired by local factories." -Canadian news organization

"We were stopped by State Security officials in Helong, Jilin and Tumen in May 2017. Urged to stop filming and head out of town. We were followed until we left their respective jurisdiction. However interactions with the State Security officials were professional and cordial." -U.S. news organization

"During a visit to Shenyang in the early part of 2017, I was followed most of the time I was there. A group of 3-4 unidentified individuals followed me wherever I went. Lingered close by when I was conducting interviews on the street and at one point pretended to be an interested average Joe on the street. They followed me to my hotel and hung around in the lobby, on the metro, pretty much everywhere I went. They did not interfere with my work directly, but made it almost impossible to get anything done." -Bill Ide, VOA

Chinese diplomats overseas have grown more assertive in applying pressure to media organization headquarters, with 22% of respondents reporting such activities in 2017, up from 19% in the previous survey. That pressure includes critical public statements made by Chinese ambassadors and embassies – which have included accusations that reports are “fabricated news”; requests to delete articles and direct appeals to editors for “better coverage.”

In China, meanwhile, large numbers of correspondents reported interference, harassment and violence while reporting over the course of 2017, with 49% saying they were obstructed at least once by police and other officials, 23% obstructed by persons unknown and 8% subjected to manhandling or use of physical force. While these numbers are roughly in line with the previous year, they illustrate the degree to which authorities physically interfere with newsgathering in China.

"At least 3 experiences with physical force in different cities including Beijing, Tianjin and Shenyang, where my assistant and I were violently harassed by plainclothes or thugs, who beat me on my arms and bruised my left arm." -U.S.-headquartered news organization

"When attempting to enter the compound of a known political activist I was pushed and had my wrist twisted. My camera operator was also pushed. When filming on remote location, locals were warned against talking to us and even told not to help us with places to eat or sleep. Several companies which offered us filming facilities of political pilgrimage sites subsequently withdrew their offers after government/local authority pressure to do so." -Kathy Long, BBC News

"Attempts to smash camera equipment for refusing to hand over footage. Physically punched by local goons." -Matthew Goddard, BBC News

"It happens all the time. I was detained in Xinjiang numerous times, in pretty much every city, on the train. I was interrogated for 11 hours and was not permitted to sleep for two nights." -U.S. news organization

"Followed and photographed by plain clothed police outside hospital in Shenyang while covering death of Liu Xiaobo, physically obstructed by security outside Liu Xia's apartment, obstructed from filming and followed by plainclothes police in Beidaihe ahead of Congress, prevented from vox popping outside shopping centre in Beijing during Congress, followed and crew car surrounded by police/security in Xinjian Village (Beijing) while filming migrant evictions." -Michael Greenfield, Sky News

"During a reporting trip to Kashgar police came to my hotel within minutes of check-in, summoned me to a meeting and informed me that reporting was forbidden without permission from local authorities. Wen Jiabao's 2008 easing of travel restrictions on foreign journalists in China did not apply, they told me. During a visit to an urban village in northwest Beijing that has been affected by the recent campaign of mass evictions, an unidentified and threatening man accosted our team as we were leaving the area through a demolition site and ordered us to leave, vowing unpleasant consequences if we returned to the area." -Tom Phillips, The Guardian

Foreign correspondents are still being called in for meetings with the Ministry of State Security, a continuation of a worrying trend, although the numbers have declined. This year, 12% of respondents were called in for such meetings, a decrease from 27% in 2016. Correspondents also continue to be called in for meetings with Foreign Ministry officials.

"Was met by State security for coffee at the Zhaolong Hotel before going to Beidaihe during summertime when Chinese leaders had their meetings there. Tone and questions were polite. But the police wanted to make clear, that they know about my reporting plans to go to Beidaihe. They did not intervene." -**German reporter**

"Our researcher was approached and intimidated. She later quit." -**U.S. news organization**

"I was asked about the nature of foreign journalists' work, my organization and for future "help" with their activities. I was polite but provided no information that could not be obtained through a Google search." -**Megha Rajagopalan, BuzzFeed News**

Pressure against Chinese colleagues working for foreign media, including news assistants, continues to be routine. Over 30% of respondents said Chinese colleagues had been pressured, harassed or intimidated in 2017. While this is a slight improvement from 33% in 2017, the regularity of such intimidation remains disturbingly high.

"A Chinese colleague left due to intimidation or pressure." -**U.S. newspaper**

"We have been more careful than usual about shielding the assistants from 'sensitive' stories. They have had some invitations to tea, which they dislike but those were cordial." -**UK newspaper**

"A colleague was called in twice for tea at the turn of 2016-17 and asked questions about our operation. She was inexperienced and not really expecting this, and ended up leaving the profession. This may have been a contributing factor." -**U.S. news organization**

"Working at Dandong Port area our crew was detained and Chinese colleagues were harassed and told they were traitors to their country because they worked with a foreign journalist."
-**Matthew Carney, Australian Broadcasting Corp.**

Similarly, pressure continues to be exerted on sources. 26% of respondents said sources had been harassed, detained, called in for questioning or otherwise suffered negative consequences for interacting with a foreign journalist. This number is in line with the FCCC's 2016 survey.

"Contributing Chinese writers have encountered warnings from authorities over articles/editorials they've written or would otherwise have written." -**U.S. newspaper**

"One interview subject who spoke about his police detention experience has been threatened with prison if he accepts interviews again, and has been told to steer clear of speaking to me."
- **reporter with U.S. news organization**

"After I went to the home of one of my sources in a province near Beijing, he was visited by local police who accused me and my colleagues of being spies. They said that we were not real journalists and made him change his phone number and promise never to speak to us again. Though we have had limited communication since then, the police continue to call him in for regular chats." -reporter with a French news organization

Correspondents expressed deep-seated and rising concern over government monitoring and digital surveillance, and reported a number of unusual situations. The majority said they were "very" or "quite" concerned about such violations, with 88% of correspondents worried about privacy violations on their telephones, 94% worried about internet surveillance and 79% concerned their homes and offices were being monitored. Each of these were higher than in the 2016 FCCC survey. Some respondents had anecdotal evidence that through surveillance, authorities had learned about travel plans and used that information to disrupt reporting. Others had seen evidence at home and in their offices that someone had entered.

"Frequently notice interference on phone lines, especially when talking to key colleagues and when words such as Xi Jinping or The President are used. Suspicion that emails are being intercepted in some way. We always assume that WeChat messages are monitored as it is not secure and we suspect that our office is most likely bugged. We have also experienced difficulty with broadcast kit and suspect that there may be efforts made to cut interviews done over internet connections - this has happened in Beijing during Congress and also on the border with North Korea."

-UK broadcaster

"About one minute into a phone interview with a Hong Kong-based expert in September, his answer strangely repeated word-for-word several times, like a recording being replayed. I hung up, called him back, and the same thing happened one minute into his second answer. My guess is that our conversation was being recorded and a bug in the system caused the conversation to be replayed over my phone, though I cannot be sure that it was because of eavesdropping."

-French reporter

A rising number of correspondents believe foreign journalists should abstain from asking questions at heavily stage-managed international media events, such as the Two Sessions press conference, when they must first seek official approval. This year, 78% of respondents said journalists should not engage in such practices, up from 74% in 2016.

VISA RENEWALS

The great majority of foreign correspondents in China must reapply for journalist visas every year. This process can allow Chinese authorities, and in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to apply pressure on correspondents seeking to renew credentials. It can also be used to frustrate the efforts of news organizations to bring new reporters to China. In both areas, the FCCC 2017 survey found cause for concern.

Survey respondents experienced increased difficulties during the visa renewal period, with 15% saying they encountered problems, up from 6% the previous year. Six respondents, twice the number in 2016, said the problems were related to their reporting.

"I was called in for a chat and reminded they were reading my stories and so were Chinese people. But I don't think that qualifies as a significant difficulty." -**U.S. news organization**

"The process itself was smoother than usual, but my interview ahead of picking up my press card was pretty unpleasant this year. I was scolded for writing on Liu Xiaobo. Later, when I mentioned that I hadn't violated any foreign ministry guidelines on reporting I was told, somewhat ominously, that China has 'other laws.'" -**reporter for a U.S. media organization**

"As bureau chief, I have been threatened vaguely that reporting may affect the issuance and renewal of visas for bureau reporters." -**U.S. newspaper**

"Foreign ministry officials, including a spokesperson, openly complained of so-called negative reporting and excessive focusing on China's human rights conditions. "
-**U.S.-headquartered news organization**

At a friendly lunch meeting with MoFA, our request for help with delayed visas was met with the reply that certain articles were not objective, citing precise dates. -**UK media organization**

Threats of visa non-renewal, while still relatively infrequent, have risen. This year, 4% of respondents said they received such threats during the course of visa renewal, double the percentage reported in 2016. In response to a separate question, 6% said they were threatened with cancellation or non-renewal of visas over the course of 2017, compared to 2% the previous year.

"In a discussion about visa renewal, I was told that my ability to continue working in China depended on me writing 'interesting' stories that they would approve of."
-**U.S. media organization**

"The threat was not explicit, but it was definitely implied, along the lines that if I pursued such sensitive stories we might encounter difficulties. This was quite vague, so difficult to say with certainty whether he meant difficulties might arise during reporting on these stories, or with ability to remain working in China." -**Katie Stallard, Sky News**

"PSB officers in Kashgar threatened to have our visas cancelled after a colleague and I refused to allow them to review photos and video we had taken." -**Josh Chin, WSJ**

"In June 2017 I was held by police in Tianjin for 5 hours, as I was trying to get pictures of a government facility. A couple of policemen threatened me with cancellation of my J1 visa. They also said that maybe they could change my visa from J1 to J2." -**Giulia Marchi, photographer**

"An official in Xinjiang warned me that journalists could lose their visa if they violated Chinese rules on reporting. I asked him if that was intended as a threat. He replied it was not, adding that he just wanted to remind me of the rules. And when I told him that was not in accordance with the law, he replied that the law in Xinjiang is different. Officials in Xinjiang told me that I had to get permission from authorities to interview anyone, even on the street."
-**reporter for a French news organization**

"As bureau chief, I have been threatened vaguely that reporting may affect the issuance and renewal of visas for bureau reporters." -**U.S. newspaper**

For journalists who are new to China, respondents reported improved times in credentialing procedures, with nearly half saying their visa applications were processed in under two months, an improvement from less than one-third of respondents in 2016.

"My process was very fast, maybe a week or so."
-João Pimenta Portuguese News Agency - Lusa Portugal

Among correspondents already in China, 45% were called in for interviews prior to the issuance of new press cards, an improvement over 85% in 2016 (correspondents in China must secure new Foreign Ministry-issued press cards before receiving new visas). Respondents indicated an improvement in renewal times, with 82% saying they received a new press card in up to seven working days, compared to 76% in 2016. Similarly, only 5% of respondents waited more than 10 working days for issuance of a new visa at the Entry-Exit Bureau, an improvement over 9% in 2016.

The number of weeks involved in the credential renewal process continues to cause problems for correspondents in China, with 18% reporting that it affected their work and travel, an improvement from 23% in 2016. Correspondents receive a temporary identification while their passports are with the Entry-Exit Bureau for visa renewal, but several reported that banks would not accept that temporary document.

"I was unable to attend a conference my company held in Hong Kong because Entry-Exit had my passport, but of course I might have avoided this by careful planning."
-Correspondent for UK media

"Yes, couldn't cover the prime minister's visit to Indonesia and Singapore."
-Philip Sharif Khokhar, Danish Broadcasting Corporation

"Couldn't travel internationally, couldn't sign lease on new apartment until passport returned."
-Reporter with western media

In the last two years, the Foreign Ministry has abandoned a previous process that tied all correspondents to a similar December renewal schedule. Correspondents can now renew their credentials on a 12-month basis from when they entered China. While this has reduced conflicts with renewals over the western holiday season, it has created its own problems. Only two-thirds of respondents said they received new visas with validity for a full 12 months. A quarter received 11-month visas, 6% 10-month visas and 2% received only six-month visas.

"They have been moving the date up gradually each year and not having to renew around the holidays at the end of the year is actually a good thing for now. My expiration date this year was 11/22. Next year it is 10/31. However, if the date keeps moving toward the summer vacation period, the same problem of having to hand in your passport around a time of higher travel frequency, could quickly crop up again." **-Bill Ide, VOA Beijing bureau chief**

"The visa is an annual visa. However the year starts from the day I applied for my Press Card which is roughly 4 weeks before the expiry of my old visa." **-Mathias Boelinger, Beijing journalist**

YEAR IN REVIEW: 2017 NOTABLE INCIDENTS

In 2017, correspondents reported numerous incidents of harassment, violence and interference by authorities.

In February, journalist Brice Pedroletti was subjected to lengthy control, coercion and monitoring in the Ganzi Tibetan prefecture of Sichuan, an experience that involved plainclothes police giving him a deadline to leave a town where he was reporting.

In February, a BBC reporting team including correspondent John Sudworth was prevented from meeting an interviewee in Hunan by a group of men who refused to identify themselves. They assaulted the BBC journalists and broke their camera equipment. Later, in the presence of uniformed police officers and government officials, the BBC team was forced to sign a written confession and apology, under the threat of further violence.

In April, multiple journalists reported problems reporting in Chinese areas along the border with North Korea, including one who was persistently filmed by police and shown a written document that purported to ban photography in the area. Monitoring was so pervasive that agents watched the journalist walk through the boarding gates at the airport on the way out of town. Another journalist was told it was illegal to take pictures in China anywhere near the border, and detained by soldiers for several hours.

That same month, an AFP reporter was detained by police in Changsha while reporting on the trial of human rights lawyer Xie Yang. Police demanded detailed information from the reporter, including the location of news organization superiors and whether other foreign journalists were in the city. Police even photocopied a hotel room key.

In May, police in Yining, Xinjiang, told a correspondent at a western news organization that speaking to locals was forbidden. In Horgos, police came to the correspondent's hotel room and said reporting from that area was also not allowed. The police filmed the exchange and also filmed the journalist leaving the city.

In June, a Chinese journalist with a foreign media organization was reporting on an explosion at a kindergarten in Jiangsu when locals attacked three Japanese journalists, shouting "down with the Japanese imperialists!" The Chinese journalist was called a "Chinese traitor" and "Japanese spy," while uniformed police looked on doing nothing. The reporter left when locals began to don masks, creating fear that they were preparing to attack.

Also in June, a correspondent at a western news organization was blocked by police from approaching a village struck by a landslide in Sichuan. Police refused to speak by telephone with a Foreign Ministry official who said the correspondent should be allowed to report on the landslide. A group of five police and local officials eventually escorted the correspondent; the correspondent was later surrounded by three police cars and about 20 police, who escorted the correspondent to a local propaganda office 40 minutes away.

In July, reporters faced significant pressure during and after reporting the death of Liu Xiaobo, a Nobel laureate and prominent Chinese dissident. The government barred news media including foreign correspondents from entering the hospital where Mr. Liu died. Voice of America correspondent Yibing Feng and news assistant Ai Lun were roughed up by a group of plainclothes in Shenyang while covering Liu Xiaobo's case. Yibing Feng was slightly injured on his arms during the incident and Ai Lun's video camera and earphones were damaged.

In August, the two VOA journalists were blocked in Tianjin by 10 plainclothes men and women who claimed to be local citizens but attempted to check identification and delete content from a mobile phone. The journalists were subjected to violence, with Ai Lun's mobile phone forcibly snatched, and both journalists pushed around

and roughed up. They were then taken to a local police station, where policemen interrogated them and took their laptop computers and cameras. They were not released until four hours later, and were forced to delete content recorded prior to their detention.

In August, Volkskrant correspondent Marije Vlaskamp was persistently harassed in Tumen, with police demanding to check mobile phones for photos and walking alongside her as she worked. A taxi driver also reported her movements to authorities.

That same month, Libération correspondent Raphaël Balenieri was woken by police in Ningxia when they knocked on his hotel room door at 11 p.m. and questioned him about his reason for being there.

In August, a Wall Street Journal reporter was surrounded by plainclothes officials, one of whom showed a badge, who sought to move her away from a courthouse where activist Wu Gan was on trial. They accused the reporter of causing trouble and “making a scene.”

In August, Globe and Mail correspondent Nathan VanderKlippe was detained in Yarkand County in Xinjiang. He was questioned by Ministry of State Security officials, who searched photos and demanded that he give them access to his laptop. When he refused, they seized his laptop and followed him on the road for two hours to Kasghar. They refused to provide documentation of the search and seizure, saying such rules did not apply to them. The laptop was returned 12 hours later.

In November, a correspondent with a U.S. news organization were detained for 11 hours by officials who said prior permission is needed to report from Xinjiang. Officials asked to see photos and demanded a signed record of a sequence of events that transpired. They refused to allow the reporter to photograph that statement and, over the course of the following days, detained the reporter on multiple occasions. Authorities appeared to deny the reporter lodging at local hotels, and the reporter was obviously monitored by staff on a train.

In December, ARD German Radio correspondent Axel Dorloff was covering the eviction of migrant workers in a Beijing village when he was approached by 15 to 20 “Te Qin” security who asked him to leave, saying he did not have proper permission to conduct interviews. They repeatedly asked him to stop conducting journalism and hassled him until he left.

Also in December, two South Korean journalists were beaten by Chinese guards while covering the state visit of South Korea President Moon Jae-In.