

# Arab journalists are proud to be martyrs

Monday 1 January 2007, by [MERHI Rima](#) (Date first published: 1 January 2007).

**The international community must honour every journalist in the Arab world who dares to cry out against tyrannical regimes, corruption, and ignorance without fear of imprisonment, persecution and terrorism, says Rima Merhi.**

In the Arab world, an audacious forthright reputed journalist does not write with ink. Every word is written with blood, fever for reform, and hunger for justice.

The international community must honour every journalist in the Arab world who dares to cry out against tyrannical regimes, corruption, and ignorance without fear of imprisonment, persecution and terrorism.

December 12 2006, Lebanon lost a legendary figure in Lebanese history. Gebran Tueini was a pioneer journalist and politician who dedicated his life fighting for Lebanese independence, sovereignty, and freedom.

A leading figure in the Cedar Revolution, Gebran Tueni called for an end to Syrian occupation of Lebanon, the empowerment of the Lebanese army over every inch of Lebanese soil, and unity between the Christians and Muslims of Lebanon. A few months before his assassination, Gebran lost a dear colleague at the Nahar newspaper: Samir Kassir wrote along the same political lines and suffered a similar fate. The failed assassination of Miss May Chidiac this year is yet another onslaught on freedom of the press in Lebanon.

In many other countries in the Arab world, the press continues to survive under siege. In Iraq, forty four journalists and reporters were killed last year. Many more journalists have been thrown in Syrian prisons for years. For most Arab journalists, this is a small price to pay for the triumph of freedom, democracy, and justice.

Arab youth must honour martyrs of freedom by refusing to allow their blood to be squandered at the hands of terrorists.

Lebanese youth may have their different sectarian political affiliations, but we owe it to our martyrs of freedom to stand united against any government that will hinder the formation of an international tribunal to investigate the assassination of our prime minister almost two years ago.

We owe it to ourselves to discover the truth behind the series of assassinations that robbed us of the very leaders who were willing to shed their last drop of blood fighting for Lebanon's independence and sovereignty.

We owe it to our children to do our utmost to empower the Lebanese army over every inch of Lebanese soil and drive out the enemies of Lebanon who continue to use Lebanese soil to fight their own battles.

Journalists in the Arab world may be killed every day, but their dream must live on. It is the

responsibility of Arab youth to revere in the memory of these heroes and adopt their mission with passion courage and faith. It is an honour and privilege to learn from men and women who chose to be armed with their pen in this perilous epoch of nuclear warfare.

The international community pays a heavy price every time the machine of globalization gobbles up powerful timely words that failed to reach the printing press. When a journalist is murdered in cold blood, his assassins attempt to suffocate the voices of the forlorn masses who can no longer withstand corrupt despotic regimes.

The terrorist in your backyard belongs to these despondent disgruntled impoverished voices that you refused to hear until the deafening sound of the explosion bashed into the twin towers on that fateful day and woke us all from a deep and long slumber.

To fight the war on terror, the international community condemned Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers along the Lebanese-Israeli border last July. Israel's "right to defend itself" left us with a country in ruins, thousands of innocent civilians dead, an ailing economy, and a people on the brink of civil war.

The Syrian bloc spear headed by Hezbollah and their supporters is holding ongoing mass demonstrations for the tenth day outside the presidential palace with a solemn promise to bring down the prevailing Lebanese government. The completely disproportionate war against Lebanon this fateful July only served to radicalize Hezbollah support in Lebanon.

With bleeding hearts, Lebanese youth wish to move beyond the Bush administration and address the American people: Where is your media to show you the reality that we suffer on the ground as a direct result of American foreign policy in the Middle East? What happens to freedom of speech when it moves beyond your borders? What happens to the sacred value of human life when it does not hold an American nationality?

We are no different from American or Israeli youth. We want to build a stable secure and prosperous country. We want to safeguard human life dignity and respect. We want peace. Honour our martyrs of freedom by pledging to give us a fairer hearing in your respectable media.

The World Association for Free Press paid tribute to the first memorial of Gebran Tueini on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> of December by instigating a "Gebran Award"- described by Thomas Friedman as the "Pulitzer of the Arab world". This honorary medal will be awarded to Arab journalists who possess the professional integrity courage and honesty that marks Gebran's legendary pen. Armed with Gebran's pen, we have real hope of bringing true democracy to the Middle East...

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## **P.S.**

\*Rima Merhi, an international human rights graduate, testified in the US Congress in the name of Lebanese youth last July and was on CNN, BBC and Sky News in August to give Lebanese youth perspective on the conflict.

\*\*Originally published on Middle East Online: [www.middle-east-online.com](http://www.middle-east-online.com)