

CHERNOBYL

THE serious accident at the atomic power reactor in the USSR underlines dramatically the failure of that country's government to live up to the spirit of the Helsinki Accords on the free flow of information across borders.

Because of the Soviet government's secrecy and delay, reporters were not allowed to properly assess the situation. As a result, millions of people in other countries were seriously disturbed by lack of information on the potential risks to their lives and health from radioactivity.

Such behaviour is not acceptable from any government in an age when major events in one country can have serious world-wide consequences.

The 35th General Assembly of the International Press Institute in Vienna, representing some 2,000 editors and publishers from over 60 countries, condemns such secrecy and delay. It urges the Soviet government to live up to the Helsinki Accords and permit world journalists to enter the USSR promptly and report without hinderance on such important events.

Governments of all countries must realise that a full and rapid flow of accurate and impartial information is essential if others who might be affected are to take timely precautions against potential crises.

TERRORISM

IN THE past two years, terrorists and governments that support them have used a variety of tactics to discourage independent coverage of events in sensitive regions at crucial times.

In Lebanon, five French journalists, one Briton and an American are still being held hostage, some of them for more than 15 months.

The journalists had never been accused of professional or other wrong-doing. Their captivity is quite evidently a result of cynical calculations by those who do not wish the true situation in Lebanon to be fairly and accurately reported.

Their ordeal is also being used by their captors as a means of political pressure against Western governments.

The enforced withdrawal of most independent journalists from West Beirut is also a result of a deliberate decision by lawless groups to prevent the impartial reporting of events.

The 35th General Assembly of the International Press Institute in Vienna, representing 2,000 editors and publishers from over 60 countries, expresses full solidarity with those courageous colleagues.

Their ordeal in captivity strengthens our resolve to fight for press freedom throughout the world.

This Assembly strongly condemns the action of hostage-holding groups. Their contempt for civilisation and human rights cannot even remotely be justified by reference to any real or imagined cause or grievance.

The General Assembly calls on respon-



RESOLUTIONS

The International Press Institute, meeting in Vienna, issued the following resolutions:

sible governments, international organisations and public opinion, especially in Muslim countries, to do everything in their power to secure the release of our colleagues. Otherwise total darkness will descend on Lebanon, once the cradle of press freedom in the Middle East.

The General Assembly also noted with distress the Libyan government's decision to expell more than 300 journalists from 30 countries, including many in the Third World, to prevent accurate and impartial reporting of the situation there.

By insisting that only invited correspondents who were constantly accompanied could work in Libya, and then expelling virtually all of even those, the authorities in Tripoli have once more underlined their fear of scrutiny by the world's media.

SOUTH AFRICA

THE International Press Institute, representing some 2,000 editors and publishers from more than 60 countries, is deeply shocked at the ever increasing violation of human rights including restrictions on and harassment of the press in South Africa. Recent official acts of repression include:

Granting of power to state officials to ban pictorial coverage of unrest and violence when people demonstrate against the system of government;

Shooting at and physically assaulting reporters and photographers carrying out their duties;

Harassing and attempting to intimidate foreign correspondents by refusing or delaying routine accreditation and other documentation.

There are also threats to license and register journalists.

All such acts are vigorously condemned. They are attempts to curtail the free flow of information within and from the country, and to interfere with the

world's right to learn of developments in South Africa and their potential impact on neighboring countries.

PRESS FREEDOM

THE 35th General Assembly of the International Press Institute in Vienna noted with satisfaction the recent slow but encouraging progress towards press freedom in a number of countries.

Special mention was made of the progress in many Latin American countries. Delegates hoped that this trend would continue to develop.

The Assembly also expressed its wishes for speedy restoration of full democracy in the Philippines and Haiti, where the end of dictatorships brings new hope of press freedom.

Despite such positive developments, however, the Assembly notes with regret exceptions to this trend, such as:

ABC Color, one of South America's important dailies, is still closed two years after a personal order by Paraguay's General Stroessner;

Two Cuban journalists, Luis Rodriguez and Fernando Rivas Porta, have now been in jail in Cuba for 21 years as prisoners of conscience.

IPI urges the respective governments to end these outrages.

LICENSING

IN A landmark decision, the Inter-American Human Rights Court ruled recently that licensing of journalists in Costa Rica is not compatible with press freedom.

The 35th General Assembly of the International Press Institute in Vienna, representing editors and publishers from more than 60 countries, applauds the court's far-reaching decision. The Assembly strongly urges the government of Costa Rica, and governments of all countries, to uphold the ruling of the Human Rights Court, thus preventing the limitation that licensing imposes on freedom of expression.

IPI considers all legal limitations on the free exercise of journalism as forms of licensing.

RIGHT TO REPLY

THE International Press Institute, meeting at its 35th General Assembly in Vienna, emphasises its support for a free, open and responsible press in which every citizen can expect to receive fair treatment.

But the Assembly notes with concern that some governments are considering ill-conceived laws to impose a so-called Right of Reply. IPI warns that there can be serious dangers in such laws, which have been used as a mechanism of harassment and repression, endangering press freedom.