

Press Release

# THE UNCENSORED LIBRARY

Under  
embargo until:  
**11.03.2020**  
**17:00**

**Reporters Without Borders (RSF)  
opens “The Uncensored Library” –  
The digital home of Press Freedom  
within a global computer game.**

Press freedom NGO, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), creates a loophole to overcome censorship by building a safe haven for press freedom. Where? Within one of the world's most successful video games, Minecraft.

In many countries, free information is hard to access. Blogs, newspapers and websites are censored. Journalists get arrested and have to fear for their lives.

Such censorship lets many young people grow up in systems with almost no access to independent press. Their opinions become heavily manipulated by governmental disinformation campaigns.

But although the youth in those countries differ from ours, they do what young people all around the globe do: play video games. Minecraft is a favourite – one of the world's most successful computer games, with more than 145 million active players every month. Here communities can build entire worlds out of blocks, experience the freedom of an open world. Its creative mode is often described as “digital Lego”. In these countries, where websites, blogs and free press in general are strictly limited, Minecraft is still accessible by everyone.

## **Minecraft offers unlimited freedom even in countries where there is no press freedom.**

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) used this backdoor to build “The Uncensored Library”: A library that is now accessible on an open server for Minecraft players around the globe. The library is filled with books, containing articles that were censored in their country of origin. These articles are now available again within Minecraft – hidden from government surveillance technology inside a computer game. The books can be read by everyone on the server, but their content cannot be changed. The library is growing, with more and more books being added to overcome censorship.

***“We need to defend press freedom every day.”***

Hatice Cengiz, fiancée of Jamal Khashoggi

***“In many countries around the world, there is no free access to information. Websites are blocked, independent newspapers are banned and the press is controlled by the state. Young people grow up without being able to form their own opinions. By using Minecraft, the world’s most popular computer game, as a medium, we give them access to independent information.”***

Christian Mihr, Managing Director Reporters Without Borders Germany

On March 12 – the World Day Against Cyber Censorship – the Uncensored Library will open its doors, giving young people around the world access to independent information, through a medium they can playfully interact with. The campaign runs under the hashtag: #TruthFindsAWay

## **Censored articles become uncensored books within Minecraft.**

Journalists from five different countries, despite having been banned, jailed, exiled and even killed – now have a place to make their voices heard again. Their articles have now been republished as Minecraft books in English and the articles’ original language and are available in countries that censored their works.

Reporters Without Borders worked together with the creative agency DDB Germany, the design studio BlockWorks and the production company MediaMonks to realise the project. Hatice Cengiz, fiancée of Jamal Khashoggi supports the project, alongside international acclaimed journalists like Nguyen Van Dai and Yulia Berezovskaia.

## **Testing the limits of Minecraft.**

The Uncensored Library was built in collaboration with BlockWorks, an internationally acclaimed design studio and consultancy using Minecraft. The library was built over 3 months, and is made from over 12.5 million blocks. It took 24 builders from 16 different countries over 250 hours to design and create the library. The library’s main

dome is nearly 300 metres wide, which would make it the second largest in the world.

***“The Uncensored Library is a bold use of Minecraft. It really encapsulates everything that is great about this game and the community it has created”***

James Delaney, Managing Director BlockWorks, Architect of the Uncensored Library

The design of the library is a neoclassical architectural style. Derived from the traditions of ancient Roman and Greek architecture, neoclassicism is a style often used in the design of public buildings around the world such as museums, galleries and libraries. It is an architectural style that is often used to represent culture and knowledge. BlockWorks used this style to design a building that represents freedom of knowledge and the power that truth has over oppressive government authorities and regimes.

The Uncensored Library is accessible through Minecraft with the server adress: **visit.uncensoredlibrary.com**

The launch of the server is accompanied by the Microsite [uncensoredlibrary.com](http://uncensoredlibrary.com) including the launch film, a 360° walk through experience of the library including books, a making-of film and the full Uncensored Library Minecraft map as a download to be shared and experienced offline.

Additional to banned articles from journalists, visitors of The Uncensored Library can find the RSF World Press Freedom Index and reports on the current press freedom situation of 180 countries in the world.

**An open library inside an open world game to overcome censorship.**

The Uncensored Library raises awareness for the importance of press freedom. However the end goal is to empower the next generation to stand up for their rights to information and to give them a powerful tool to fight oppressive leaders: knowledge.

***“The only real way of fighting censorship is sharing and spreading what has been censored.”***

Yulia Berezovskaia, editor in chief of [grani.ru](http://grani.ru)

Find more information on the microsite: **[uncensoredlibrary.com](http://uncensoredlibrary.com)**

Please use this link to share our launch film:  
<https://youtu.be/EBI7-pL52GY>

**#TruthFindsAWay**

# Why Reporters Without Borders (RSF) use Minecraft to reach young people:

Minecraft is one of the world's most successful computer games, with more than 145 million active players every month. First released in 2009, Minecraft's phenomenal success is still growing 10 years later. The game is played around the world, attracting a wide range of ages across both sexes.

**"We need to reach the next generation in order to change the future!"**

Nguyen Van Dai, democracy activist and blogger

Minecraft is an open world game where players can explore an intentionally blocky, pixelated world. Here they can discover and extract raw materials, craft tools, build structures and cooperate with other players. The game's creative mode is often described as "digital Lego" and is being used in educational environments. Part of Minecraft's gameplay is gathering and crafting items, such as books. Minecraft books have 100 pages and can be written freely. Other players can read them but cannot change the content of the books on the server.

## Censored articles from five different countries and various journalist got republished in Minecraft books.

### **Egypt:**

RSF World Press Freedom Index:

163<sup>rd</sup> of 180 countries

Egypt is one of the world's biggest jailers of journalists. Most of the media is now controlled directly or indirectly by the state. More than 500 websites are blocked, and more and more people are getting arrested because of their social network posts. Inside the Uncensored Library visitors can read articles from Mada Masr. Since 2013 the news portal has reported about corruption and security issues in a manner that is often critical of the government. It is the last professional news website that reports independently and is one of the most important sources of quality journalism in Egypt. Since May 2017 the website has been blocked in the country.

### **Mexico:**

RSF World Press Freedom Index:

144<sup>th</sup> of 180 countries

Although not at war, Mexico is one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists and even surpasses Syria. Collusion between officials and organized crime poses a grave threat to journalists' safety and cripples the judicial system at all levels. Journa-

lists who cover sensitive political stories or organized crime are warned, threatened and often gunned down in cold blood. Others are abducted and never seen again. Inside the Uncensored Library visitors can read articles from Javier Valdez. He was a journalist and founder of the newspaper Riodoce, a weekly dedicated to crime and corruption in Sinaloa, one of Mexico's most violent states. He was also the author of several books on drug trafficking. Valdez was killed on May 23, 2017 by gunmen. He was 50 years old.

### **Russia:**

RSF World Press Freedom Index:  
149<sup>th</sup> of 180 countries

Since the widespread protests in 2011/12 the Russian leadership tightened the grip on critical journalists. Each year dozens of people are sentenced to prison because of their online activities. Even a "like" can put someone in jail. The state has been building the infrastructure for systematic mass surveillance and wants to prevent anonymous or encrypted communication. With Russia's sovereign internet law, the government is attempting to gain control over the infrastructure of the web and, if necessary, be able to cut off the Russian internet from the worldwide web.

Yulia Berezovskaia is editor in chief of one of Russia's many blocked websites. She is collaborating with the Uncensored Library to republish articles from grani.ru, a news source for protest activities, politically motivated trials and civil society activism. On March 13, 2014 grani.ru was blocked by the Russian government.

### **Saudi Arabia:**

RSF World Press Freedom Index:  
172<sup>nd</sup> of 180 countries

Saudi Arabia permits no independent media. Despite his talk of reform, Mohammad bin Salman has intensified the repression since his appointment as crown prince in June 2017. The number of journalists and citizen journalists in detention has tripled since the start of 2017. Everyone censors themselves, and authorities keep Saudi journalists under close surveillance – as the case of Jamal Khashoggi illustrated.

Jamal Khashoggi was a Saudi Arabian journalist and his articles can now be read in the Uncensored Library. Khashoggi fled Saudi Arabia in September 2017 and went into self-imposed exile. In the U.S. he worked as a columnist for The Washington Post. Khashoggi was a sharp critic of some of the policies of Saudi Arabia's crown prince. On October 2, 2018, Khashoggi was killed and dismembered inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

### **Vietnam:**

RSF World Press Freedom Index:  
176<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries

As Vietnam's media all follow the Communist Party's orders, the only sources of independently reported information are bloggers and citizen journalists. The level of terror has risen sharply in the past three years, with many citizen journalists being jailed

or expelled. In December 2017 the military unveiled the existence of a 10,000-strong military cyberwarfare department, which is tasked with defending the Party and targeting dissident bloggers.

Inside the Uncensored Library visitors can read articles from Nguyen Van Dai. He is a Vietnamese human rights lawyer, democracy activist and blogger. In 2006 he founded the Committee for Human Rights in Vietnam, to fight for civil empowerment through legal means. In April 2018 Dai was sentenced to 15 years of prison with an additional 5 years of house arrest but got later released and exiled to Germany. His blog is blocked in Vietnam.

## Reporters Without Borders

For freedom of information

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is the world's biggest NGO specializing in the defence of media freedom, which they regard as the basic human right to be informed and to inform others.

In 2019 alone 39 journalist and 10 citizen journalists got killed and currently there are 228 journalists and 120 citizen journalists imprisoned. These are alarming numbers. At the turn of the 21st century, nearly half of the world population still lacks access to free information. Deprived of essential knowledge and manipulated by disinformation, they are prevented from living in a political system in which factual truth serves as the basis for their life choices.

Where governmental media censorship and disinformation campaigns are on a rise globally, RSF fights for freedom of information and for the truth to be known.

## Contact:

Jennifer Schiementz

Assistant for press relations

Tel: +49 30 60989533 - 55

E-Mail: [jsch@reporter-ohne-grenzen.de](mailto:jsch@reporter-ohne-grenzen.de)