

by UPI

BEIJING -- China's media freedom has come under assault ahead of the 2008 Olympics, the Human Rights Watch said Wednesday.

The group in New York said in a report that the Chinese government is backtracking on new rules for greater freedom to foreign journalists while continuing to deny comparable freedoms to domestic journalists.

The group warned there also are indications the domestic media, already under censorship and crackdowns, may face even tighter controls in the future.

"The Chinese government is already failing to deliver on its pledge to fully lift restrictions for foreign journalists ahead of the Beijing Games," said Sophie Richardson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "These arbitrary restrictions on press freedoms undermine the new regulations, and raise questions about the government's commitment to implement them in the first place."

The report said the new freedoms under "Service Guide for Foreign Media" appear on the Web site of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (<http://en.beijing2008.cn>).

"There is no justification for denying to Chinese journalists even the limited freedoms that their foreign colleagues enjoy," said Richardson. "If China is genuine about press freedom for the Olympics, it must also emancipate its own journalists."

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*HRW: China media freedom under assault by UPI*