Cyber attacks against media on the rise, rights group says

(Reuters) - Cyber attacks against journalists and media organizations around the world have increased over the past few years as criminal hackers provide a cheap and easy way of censoring the press, a media rights group said on Thursday.

The Committee to Protect Journalists said media cyber attacks, such as those that recently occurred at The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post, were simply part of a growing global trend.

"We have seen distributed denial of service attacks against individual journalists and against individual news outlets increasing over the last few years," Robert Mahoney, the rights group's deputy director, told reporters.

Denial of service attacks occur when hackers disrupt operations by flooding them with information. The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal both have said that the cyber attacks targeting them last month originated in China [1].

"They are becoming increasingly sophisticated, it's very cheap to hire criminal hackers to mount such a distributed denial of service attack and digital security, information security is vital," Mahoney said.

"We have reports in places in Africa and Asia of journalists coming under attack, even in North Africa, even before the 'Arab Spring' there were attacks against news outlets in Tunisia [2] for example," he said. "We have seen whole newspapers brought down in countries like Ethiopia because there's been an attack."

(Reporting by Michelle Nichols and Louis Charbonneau; Editing by Paul Simao)

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