

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/jordan-king-urged-to-repeal-draconian-16-06-2014,46423.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Jordan

Repressive legislation

## King urged to repeal draconian changes to anti-terrorism law

16 June 2014

Reporters Without Borders wrote to King Abdullah today voicing concern about amendments to the 2006 anti-terrorism law that were approved by Jordan's parliament on 21 April and were published in the official gazette on 1 June.

In the letter, Reporters Without Borders said it is aware of the security threats to Jordan, especially since the deadly [suicide bombings](#), just as it is aware of the major impact that the Syrian crisis has had on security in Jordan.

But, while acknowledging that the king is responsible for protecting all of his citizens, the letter says the legislative arsenal Jordan has developed to combat terrorism violates its international obligations to respect fundamental freedoms, including freedom of information.

The anti-terrorism law passed in 2006 already contained [draconian provisions](#), such as allowing terrorism suspects to be detained without trial and allowing a state security court consisting of military judges to try civilian terrorism suspects on the basis of their intentions and not their actions.

Since its adoption, the authorities have often cited the need to combat terrorism as grounds to gag dissident voices, violating the individual and civil liberties of Jordan's citizens. And they have not hesitated to take civilians, including a number of journalists, before military courts.

The letter cites the case of **Jamal Al-Mouhtaseb**, the editor of the *Gerasa News* agency and the *Al-Mir'aa* weekly, who was detained pending trial for 21 days in 2012 on a charge of inciting anti-government protests and was tried by a special court, which violates international treaties Jordan has undertaken to respect, including article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, which it signed in 1972 and ratified in 1975.

The amendments published in the official gazette on 1 June constitute a disturbing reinforcement of the already repressive legislative arsenal, the letter says.

"These amendments are phrased in a very vague and general manner that leaves the judicial authorities a great deal of discretionary power, with a resulting danger of arbitrary decisions," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

"Some of the provisions are particularly likely to obstruct the work of news providers, whether professional or not, and even result in their arrest and imprisonment. In the absence of clear and precise definitions, there is a danger that the Jordanian authorities will use the fight against terrorism to gag civil society organizations and news media."

Article 3(e) criminalizes "using information systems or the Internet, or any means of publishing or media, or establishing a website to facilitate terrorist acts or support a group or organization or charity that commits terrorist acts or promotes their ideas or funds it," providing for sentences of more than 10 years in prison.

Publishing or relaying reports referring to terrorist groups or activities, with the aim of providing information in the public interest to Jordanians or the international community, could potentially be treated under this new article as support for terrorism.

Paragraph (b) of the same article penalizes "acts that would subject the kingdom to hostile acts, or harm its relations with a foreign country." It is not the job of journalists to protect any country's diplomatic relations. Their role is simply to inform the public about what is going on. This article clearly constitutes a potential constraint on freedom of information, again on the grounds of combatting terrorism.

The letter also cites the example of **Mwaffaq Mahadin**, a journalist who was jailed on 12 February 2012 on charges of endangering relations with a foreign state, inciting racism, encouraging the government's overthrow and harming the state's image because he had criticized Jordan's cooperation with the United States on security matters on Al-Jazeera.

The latest amendments to the anti-terrorism law constitute a further departure from Jordan's international obligations to respect human rights.

"We think it is essential that these provisions should be rendered more specific so that they cannot be applied to the important work of research and reporting by journalists or any other citizens," Deloire added. "Or, if they are not made more specific, they should be repealed altogether and a debate on the anti-terrorism law should be resumed in the light of these observations."

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