

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/jordan-dismay-after-government-approves-30-08-2012,43300.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Jordan

Draconian bill

Dismay after government approves repressive media bill

30 August 2012

[Read in Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

Reporters Without Borders is very worried by the Jordanian government's approval of a bill last week that would radically change the existing media legislation and drastically restrict freedom of information. Parliament is due to begin considering the bill on 2 September.

"We are disturbed by the decline in freedom of information in Jordan and, in particular, the government's proposed changes to the press and broadcasting code. Politicians should not interfere in journalists' work. Media independence is one of the foundations of freedom of information. We call on parliament to reject this repressive bill.

"The new provisions are like a sword poised over the head of every journalist. They show that the authorities are determined to bring journalists and their news media to heel, so that dissident views get as little exposure as possible."

The bill would make the 1998 press and publications code much tougher, especially articles 38, 42, 48 and 49. Under the amended articles, the officials in charge of enforcing them would have more authority to restrict the freedom of expression of media that are deemed to have acted outside the law.

Paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 42 envisage the creation of a new specialized court, based in Amman, that would just handle cases involving the press and publications and would probably pose a serious threat to freedom of information. The press offences it could try include crimes "against internal and external security." The failure to define such crimes precisely opens the way to judicial abuses.

Under article 48, which restricts the press and publications department's criteria for issuing licences, media without a licence would have to suspend their activities. Broadcast media would have to stop broadcasting and newspaper issues would be seized. Media that contravened these provisions could also be fined up to 5,000 dinars (5,600 euros).

These and other articles define a "journalist" in an unacceptable manner, restricting access to the profession and forcing journalists to join a union. Journalists should be free to decide whether or not they join a journalists' association. They should also be free to choose which union they join.

The bill also targets the Internet. Paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of article 49, would hold news websites responsible for the comments posted underneath reports or other forms of content, and would require that comments be vetted before they are posted. The sites would also have to store all the comments in a database for at least six months.

This article puts the bill clearly at odds with international standards of media freedom and freedom of information, including article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which covers freedom of opinion and expression.

Paragraph 7 of article 49 gives the head of the state broadcasting commission the power to censor and ban any news website based abroad that does not respect the laws applicable to Jordan's media. Article 49 also gives him the power to prosecute local news websites that

contravene this law.

This draconian bill has emerged at a time of tension and media freedom violations that include the suspension of satellite broadcasting by the TV station JOSAT since 26 July, after the latest edition of its [weekly political programme focussed on corruption in Jordan](#).



JOSAT's suspension without warning violated article 15, paragraph 4, of the constitution, under which no broadcast media can be suspended without court approval.

Reached by Reporters Without Borders, **Rula Al-Haroub**, JOSAT board vice-president and the offending programme's presenter, accused the government of using the Saudi-Jordanian broadcasting company Sasco to get the TV satellite company NileSAT to drop JOSAT.

JOSAT's head of broadcasting said the station had received an official letter from NileSAT denying any role in the station's suspension. The head of Sasco had clearly yielded to government pressure to get JOSAT suspended, he said. Reporters Without Borders tried to reach the head of Sasco to verify this claim, but he was on a trip and unreachable.

Reporters Without Borders is also concerned about the proceedings that the state broadcasting commission has initiated against JOSAT, as a result of which Al-Haroub and her guests on the offending programme had to present themselves for questioning on 14 August. [The station's journalists demonstrated outside the commission on 28 July](#) in protest against the suspension.

The attorney-general has charged them with defaming the king, defaming a public institution, inciting and participating in a public order disturbance and violating article 22 of the press and broadcasting code, for which they risk a possible 15-year jail sentence.

Such suspensions combined with the new bill's provisions are bound to have a major impact on editorial policies and critical news coverage. The Jordanian media fear that the proposed new law will be routinely applied to media whose political and editorial views are at variance with the government's.

[Hundreds of Jordanian activists and journalists staged demonstrations throughout the country on 24 August](#) in protest against what they call a "return to the past" in media freedom.

You can download those documents on our website :

- cp-jordanie-ar, (PDF - 43.4 kb)
-