

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/jordan-new-law-tightens-government-s-grip-21-09-2012,43435.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Jordan

Institutionalized censorship

New law tightens government's grip on media

21 September 2012

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This week's royal decree amending Jordan's media legislation and drastically restricting freedom of information appals Reporters Without Borders, [which expressed its deep concern](#) about the draft law on 30 August and subsequently wrote to the senate speaker urging him to reject it.

"These new curbs on freedom expression, which affect online media in particular, have swept aside the reform promises that the government made at the height of the Arab Spring in 2011," Reporters Without Borders said.

"This law, under which Jordan's 220 news websites will have to obtain government accreditation to continue operating, is clearly designed to increase the regime's control over the media, especially online media, at a time when the Internet is playing a major role in informing and rallying the Arab population."

The new law, which amends the press and publications code, violates international standards on freedom of information, especially article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which covers freedom of opinion and expression.

"The new provisions regulating how news websites operate will leave a permanent threat hanging over online journalists who express views that are at variance with the government's," Reporters Without Borders added.

Aside from the danger it poses to media independence, the new law enshrines censorship and judicial proceedings as the standard response when online journalists broach sensitive subjects. Article 49 paragraph 7 allows systematic censorship whenever officials decide that content does not comply with the law's provisions.

Reporters Without Borders is particularly concerned about the judicial abuses that could result from the vagueness of the language used to refer to offences. Paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 42 refer to crimes "against internal and external security" without offering any precise definition.

The possibility of publication bans being imposed on both print and online media is also disturbing. The state broadcasting commission's power to refuse to issue or renew licences puts journalists and website editors in a precarious situation and is liable to encourage self-censorship.

Requiring journalists to join a union that is not independent is also unacceptable. Journalists must be free to decide whether or not to join a union or association, and to choose which one they join.

Finally, paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of article 49 render news sites legally responsible for the comments posted at the foot of articles or other forms of content.

Many journalists [have been participating in daily sit-ins](#) in Amman in protest against the new law's adoption. [Others demonstrated in Amman](#) on 19 and 20 September to demand repeal of the new provisions and to proclaim their refusal to work under the threat of prosecution.

You can download those documents on our website :

- Document in Arabic, (PDF - 43.9 kb)
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