



For immediate release – 24 August 2009

PRESS RELEASE

Lebanon: ARTICLE 19 Calls for Comprehensive Reform of Print Media Legislation

ARTICLE 19 today releases its analysis of the Press Law of Lebanon and amendments to a range of domestic media laws, as proposed by the Maharat Foundation, a civil society group promoting a free press in Lebanon.

At present, the operation of print media outlets and the professional status of journalists in Lebanon are regulated by the 1962 Press Law, a complex piece of legislation that also governs publishing and printing houses, libraries, distribution companies and various media institutions. ARTICLE 19 and the Maharat Foundation believe that this law is out of date because it does not reflect recent media developments worldwide and fails to comply with current international freedom of expression standards.

The current legislation stipulates entry requirements for all media professionals to practise journalism and insists upon mandatory membership of certain professional organisations. Regulatory bodies also have the power to suspend or ban journalists from practising, and can issue licenses and registrations for print media. The Government can exercise firm control over the media through its statutory regulation of media professional organisations and other structures.

The Maharat Foundation has proposed amendments to several domestic media laws in an attempt to ensure that the main principles of press freedom are upheld in Lebanon. It proposes to abolish the requirement of prior authorisation for publication and distribution of periodic publications and to reduce the powers of the Minister of Information to intervene in the press. A National Council of Press and Publications is also proposed to be established. Like press councils in other democratic countries, it will have powers to investigate issues concerning journalists' ethics and raise journalistic standards.

ARTICLE 19 believes that the existing Press Law should be abolished altogether, as is the case in most democracies. We further recommend loosening control over journalists and the print press by abolishing the special professional requirements for journalists and the admittance to the press roll. The mandatory provision of copies to the Minister of Information and the Prosecutor's Office should also be repealed.

Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director, says, "*We welcome efforts to reform media legislation in Lebanon and we hope that the amendments proposed by*

the Maharat Foundation will be carefully examined, to bring domestic legislation in line with international standards on freedom of expression.”

Lebanon underwent national elections in June 2009 and it is anticipated that the newly elected Government will support reform to the country's media laws. ARTICLE 19 intends to continue providing assistance during the media reform process.

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- The analysis is available in English at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/lebanon-amending-the-press-law-of-lebanon.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.