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<http://www.rsf.org/maroc-rwb-s-recommendations-on-morocco-s-21-11-2014,47260.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Morocco

Reform bills

RWB's recommendations on Morocco's media reform bills

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Reporters Without Borders has given the Moroccan communication ministry a memo with its initial recommendations on three media bills that parliament is to begin debating soon. RWB submitted the memo to the communication ministry on 15 November, the second day of a two-day international conference on media freedom that it attended in Rabat. The conference was organized by the Centre for Social Science and Research. The memo welcomes some of the bills' provisions, especially the proposed abolition of prison sentences for media offences, which is the most significant measure. But it stresses the need to amend the bills to bring them into line with international standards on freedom of information.

The communication ministry unveiled the three bills – on “press and publishing,” the “status of professional journalists” and the “National Press Council” – on 18 October.

Reporters Without Borders hails the fact that the government is finally reforming Morocco's media legislation, something it promised to do after the constitutional referendum in 2011. [RWB has repeatedly stressed](#) the need for legislative reforms that fully guarantee freedom of information.

The provisions on the confidentiality of journalists' sources and defamation actions also represent a big step forward but they need to be strengthened and made more specific in order to be effective guarantees.

Other provisions need to be thoroughly overhauled so that they do not constitute new obstacles to freedom of information in Morocco, especially the provisions on electronic media, procedures for seizing publications and closing websites.

Finally the long-awaited reform of the system of “red lines,” forbidding coverage of the monarchy, Islam and territorial issues, has not materialized.

The communication minister said he would be ready to amend certain provisions and to take account of the observations of the various organizations and participants at the conference.

RWB recommends that the government should:

- Open and pursue a process of consultation on the bills
- Begin a proper process of consulting and informing journalists and civil society about the creation of a system of media self-regulation or co-regulation with an independent body
- Explicitly guarantee online freedom of information
- Rule out the need for any form of permission to post content online
- Expand the definition of journalists so that it complies with international standards
- Drop regulations specifically targeting foreign journalists and publications
- Dedicate an article to the specific protection of journalists' sources and ensure that the legislation provides effective protection
- Guarantee a real right of access to information in line with international standards
- Establish a real mechanism for protecting journalists, above all by incorporating provisions into the proposed legislation that make it a specific criminal offence to attack journalists and make it an offence for public officials to obstruct freedom of information, and by creating mechanisms for preventing attacks.
- Eliminate articles under which defaming certain officials, public figures and state institutions

are penalized with more severity

- Include full provision for absolving journalists of responsibility in defamation cases if they can show they acted in good faith
- Eliminate increased penalties for second or subsequent press offences
- Eliminate the offences of insulting the king or religions, and the ban on articles that question Morocco's territorial integrity
- Guarantee the principle of proportionality of sanctions and limit recourse to website blocking, publication bans and publication seizures.

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