

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/tunisia-cautious-welcome-for-pledge-that-12-10-2012,43535.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Tunisia

Threat lifted

## Cautious welcome for pledge that constitution will not mention blasphemy

12 October 2012

[Read in Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

Reporters Without Borders hails today's announcement by National Constituent Assembly speaker Mustapha Ben Jaafar that Tunisia's constitution will not contain any clause criminalizing blasphemy. He gave the undertaking in an interview for Agence France-Presse.

"We are relieved that, for the time being, this grave threat is being kept out of the constitution," Reporters Without Borders said. "Jaafar's announcement satisfies one of the main requests we recently expressed to the Tunisian authorities. Under the international standards that now prevail, using blasphemy legislation to restrict freedom of expression is unacceptable.

"This announcement is a major step forward for freedom of information in Tunisia. We will nonetheless be on the lookout for any attempt to criminalize blasphemy in other legal texts or in legal practice."

Jaafar's comments reflected the strong concern that civil society and Reporters Without Borders have voiced since Ennahda, Tunisia's biggest party, announced in July that it planned to criminalize blasphemy.

In his interview for AFP, Jaafar stressed the difficulty of criminalizing "attacks on the sacred" because "the sacred is something very, very difficult to define; its boundaries are blurred and one could interpret it in one way or another." He added: "I think that freedom of information and the media world must have absolute freedom."

[A Reporters Without Borders delegation led by director-general Christophe Deloire visited Tunisia](#) from 2 to 4 October, on the first anniversary of the inauguration of a Reporters Without Borders bureau in Tunis.

The delegation met journalists, civil society members, media owners and political leaders. Withdrawal of the proposed criminalization of blasphemy was one of the key demands that Reporters Without Borders made at a news conference and in its meetings with Ennahda party chief Rashid Ghannushi and National Constituent Assembly members who specialize in media issues.

Reporters Without Borders also voiced strong concern about the legal void in which the media have to operate.

"We continue to be worried by the lack of a clear legal framework for the Tunisian media, one that respects international standards," Reporters Without Borders said. "As a matter of urgency, the government, National Constituent Assembly and judges must finally implement Decree Laws 115-2011 on the print media and 116-2012 on broadcasting.

"On the whole, these laws provide a great deal of protection even if we reject some of their articles, but they have still not been put into effect although they were promulgated more than nine months ago. This legal void is, for example, allowing the Tunisian authorities to make state media appointments using methods similar to those employed by the old regime (LINK)."

Reporters Without Borders also reminds the Tunisian authorities that they have a duty to protect journalists, who are being attacked and threatened with complete impunity. The 130 media freedom violations registered since the start of the year constitute a strong incentive to Tunisian journalists to censor themselves.



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