



Egypt

Egypt

12 October 2010

## Repeated attacks on freedom of expression ahead of parliamentary elections

**The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organizations the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) express concern about a string of events that, taken together, appear to be a systematic crackdown on opposition voices and the press ahead of November's parliamentary elections.**

According to reports in Egypt's leading independent daily, Al-Masry al-Youm, Egypt's National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (NTRA) on Monday imposed new restrictions on text-messages news services and mobile phone companies, in an apparent attempt to preempt possible anti-government activism during the polls.

In addition, the NTRA would take 3 percent of companies' SMS-generated revenue in order to pay for alleged text-message "controllers" whose job, Al-Masry al-Youm reported, would be to monitor and control text messages sent by opposition political groups.

Effectively, « these regulations require the media to pay for censorship », FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen, said on Tuesday.

The NTRA's moves come at the end of a string of troubling developments in Egypt's media landscape ahead of the November polls. Last week Ibrahim Eissa, editor of the opposition newspaper Al-Dostour and a veteran opposition journalist, was removed from his post soon after the paper was purchased by Al-Sayyid al-Badawi, the head of the opposition Al-Wafd Party. Al-Badawi sold his shares in Al-Dostour soon after firing Eissa.

Many in Egyptian civil society were troubled by Eissa's firing, coming as it did soon after Eissa was removed from his television talkshow. Earlier this month, authorities closed the religious conservative satellite television network Al-Badr for inciting sectarian hatred, and soon after shut down the studios that had produced the political talkshow "Al-Qahira il-Youm" ("Cairo Today") for the Orbit satellite television network.

FIDH, EOHR and CIHRS urge the Egyptian authorities to refrain from imposing restrictions on freedom of expression and allow dissident voices to be heard.

<http://www.fidh.org/Repeated-attacks-on-freedom-of-expression-ahead>