

XIX

ARTICLE 19

For immediate release – 14 April 2009

Sudan: ARTICLE 19 Voices Serious Concerns on the Draft Press Law

ARTICLE 19 today releases its Note on the Draft Law of Sudan on Press and Printed Press Materials. The Draft Law is prepared by the Sudanese Ministry of Information and Communication and is tabled for reading by the Sudanese Parliament in 2009. ARTICLE 19 is seriously concerned about the current version of the draft Law and finds it incompatible with the international standards on freedom of expression.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes the initiative of the Sudanese Government to repeal its highly restrictive 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law. However, the changes introduced by the Draft Law are merely cosmetic and fail short of amending the deficiencies of the current regime. In particular, the analysis of ARTICLE 19 highlights the following shortcomings of the proposed legal framework:

- Print press organisations are subject to a licensing regime
- Journalists are obliged to register with the Press Council before practicing their profession
- Restrictions are imposed on the eligibility of chief editors
- The Press Council, the regulatory body of the print press, is not independent but controlled by the President
- The Press Council has powers to impose criminal sanctions for violations of the law, although an administrative and regulatory body should not carry such functions.

ARTICLE 19 believes that these features of the Draft Law are contrary to international law and will limit the ability of the print media in Sudan to fulfil their informational role in society. We note that since the introduction of the 2004 Law, several newspapers in Sudan have been suspended. In view of the forthcoming 2010 national elections and the 2011 referendum in Sudan, restrictions against the media are likely to intensify unless the strict framework for regulation of the print media in Sudan is democratised.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- The analysis is available in English at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/note-on-draft-press-and-printed-press-materials-act-of-sudan.pdf>
- An English translation of the draft Law on Press and Printed Press Materials is available at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/laws/sudan-draft-of-the-press-and-printed-press-material-act-2008.pdf>

- Thanks are given to the European Commission and NMFA for their support to this project.
- 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.