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Jordan: Internet Blocking Orders Violate Freedom of Expression

The spread of the Internet has led to an unprecedented flowering of expression, democratising the flow of information and allowing ordinary people to access an incredible diversity of news and ideas. By the same token, the Internet has challenged the ability of governments to control information, and some have responded by adopting repressive laws. The September 2012 amendments to Jordan's Press and Publication Law, which imposes strict registration requirements on news websites, are a good example of this. On 2 June 2013, Jordan's government used the legislation to block over 300 websites, including Al Jazeera and the website of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood, on the basis that the websites had not registered.

"These blocking orders are a flagrant violation of freedom of expression and should be rescinded immediately," said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *"Furthermore, the root cause of the problem, the 2012 amendments to the Press and Publication Law, should be repealed; even if they are not formally imposed, they exert a chilling effect on online speech."*

In addition to imposing significant costs, the registration requirements require news websites to appoint an editor-in-chief, who must have at least four years' standing as a member of the Jordanian Press Association. The amendments also require website owners to vet any comments that their users post for offensive material and for "truthfulness", or risk liability. These rules breach the right to freedom of expression as protected under international law, according to which any mandatory requirement to register websites is not legitimate.

CLD will be releasing a full analysis of the amendments in the coming weeks.

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