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Jordan: Press Law Amendments Seriously Threaten Online Speech

On 2 June 2013, Jordan's Press and Publications Department issued an order blocking hundreds of websites due to their failure to register with the government. The order drew international condemnation, mainly because it is the first high-profile case of implementation of Jordan's new legal regime for the print media, which was amended in 2012 to extend onerous registration and other requirements to the Internet. Today, the Centre for Law and Democracy released *Comments on the Law Amending the Press and Publications Law of 2012*, which highlights the severe problems with these amendments from the perspective of freedom of expression.

"These amendments are at best a clumsy attempt to regulate the Internet," said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. "If they were really properly implemented, they would threaten the very viability of the Internet in Jordan, as they require the authorities to block access to most social media websites."

The main problems identified in the Comments include the following:

- The scope of the Law is extremely broad, inasmuch as it applies to any website that hosts any comment on current affairs in Jordan.
- The Law imposes onerous registration requirements on 'news websites'.
- Websites which breach the law, including by failing to register, are subject to mandatory blocking provisions applied by a government department.
- Websites must record information about all users who submit comments.
- The Law treats comments submitted by users as journalistic content authored by the website, effectively forcing websites to vet all user-generated content.

CLD calls upon the Jordanian government to introduce significant amendments to the 2012 amendments to the Press and Publications law to bring it into line with international human rights standards, including by repealing the registration, moderation and tracking obligations for websites, as well as the blocking rules.

The Analysis is available at: ____.

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