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Statement on Regulation of Journalists in the Arab World

Arab and international human rights and media experts world have adopted a Statement setting out a number of clear standards regarding the regulation of journalism. These include that it is not for governments to decide who is and who is not a journalist and that journalists have the right to choose freely which unions, associations and/or syndicates they wish to belong to and that they should not be required – by either the law or their employers – to belong to any particular syndicate. The Statement was developed and adopted at a regional meeting of human rights and media experts held in Tunis from 6-7 March 2015 which was organised by the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) working with partners the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), International Media Support (IMS) and Vigilance.

“The rules governing journalists in many countries in the Arab World have been designed with the aim of exerting government control over the profession, said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. “In many cases, this is achieved in part by channelling resources through mandatory membership syndicates in exchange for some degree of loyalty.”

The Statement recognises that journalism is different from other professions, inasmuch as the very substance of what journalists do – seeking and imparting information and ideas – is a fundamental human right. This means that the profession should be open to all. Some of the other important standards set out in the Statement are:

- Journalists’ syndicates and unions should not act as gatekeepers for the profession.
- Public funding and resources are legitimate only where provided through a system which is protected against interference and which is fair and transparent.
- Journalists have a right to protect their confidential sources of information.
- Systems for issuing press cards should not be used to control access to the profession, should be overseen by independent bodies and should be administered fairly.

The Statement in Arabic, English and French, along with a background paper on these issues, is available at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/live/statement-on-regulation-of-journalists-in-the-arab-world/>.

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