

# Sees and records... The Internet in the Arab World

"The seventh report"



# Sees and records... The Internet in the Arab World

## "The seventh report"

### Introduction

If it weren't for the Internet, everything would settle down for the Arab governments, given their usual repression and hostility towards freedom of expression and their endemic disregard for the rule of law. But the battle is not over; there is a lot of hidden fire brewing underneath. It might blow some smoke that some may think that the fire went out, but it is still burning as people are not destined to live under tyranny.

With some minor exceptions, political parties have been absent, or forced to be absent, from the public political arena. What remains then is the opposition movement stirred by the Arab public or citizens on the Internet, bringing it to become not only the battleground of conflict between anti-democracy governments and people who are thirsty for democracy, but also a tool in the hands of those who look forward to bright future or any glimmer of hope, those people are simply the Arab public, especially the Arab youth.

This is briefly what ANHRI's seventh Internet report talks about.

Since the release of ANHRI's first report in 2004 tackling the Internet and Arab governments, which is published every two years, the fight is still going on. The issue has not been resolved for either of the conflict parties; whether the governments with their various institutions or the Arab peoples who are using the Internet and seek change in the world.

The internet sees, listens and records every nuance of everyday life; whether it is news reports, personal views, videos or pictures. No matter how one tries to renounce any stance or position he previously took, or any piece of news or a video he published or an opinion he previously voiced, it will remain available online and with some thorough research it will be find. The Internet is a live archive, it never dies.

More than half of the population of the Arab world uses the Internet and nearly a third of the global population uses "Facebook".

Among nearly 420 million Arab citizens, more than 220 million use the Internet and about 159 million are Facebook users.

There has been a relapse in the Arab uprisings but they didn't die. Revolutions of dignity and social justice do not die; their sound may fade down but it doesn't completely fade away. If the first wave of Arab revolutions- which involves 6 countries "Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Bahrain" has witnessed some inactivity, the second wave has, yet, very little to do with first one "Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon".

The Internet is always present. It always helps and supports the calls for change. This includes Facebook, Twitter or YouTube, in addition to dozens or hundreds of independent news websites that provide free and professional media; especially after the Arab governments imposed strict controls on all media platforms that practice professionalism, either by blocking or suspending them or by launching smear campaigns against them. What remain, hence, are the superficial media platforms that only seek for appeasing the government and glorifying the ruler regardless of who he is.

But blocking didn't help; the public is still involved in making the news and checking its accuracy, veracity and validity. If a news report is blocked in a website or a newspaper, you will find it available in another website or any of social media platforms.

The general public who uses the Internet as a tool for change is the one who, most probably, pays the price! More than 70% of prisoners of conscience are prosecuted and sent to jail because of what they wrote on the Internet.

It's all aired;

And as the popular Arab proverb says: "The sunlight cannot be masked by a sieve",

The Internet, likewise, cannot be banned or blocked.

The Internet sees and records everything and is always available for whoever seeks news, information, or opinion.

## **UAE: Big Brother as in George Orwell's 1984**

### **1- Overview**

The UAE is the first Arab country in the list of landline users. It is the second in the mobile broadband Internet access rate. Nevertheless, it is the first in the list of countries that monitor activists and human rights defenders in cooperation with Israeli companies. Infrastructure development did not develop the UAE authorities' visions which are anti-freedom of speech. Public Relations companies exert a lot of useless efforts to improve the image of the authorities which practice suppression and violate human rights.

Glamorous phrases like the Ministry of Possibilities, Year of Happiness, Year of Tolerance, did not help much in changing the nature of repression in this country. UAE exploited all modern technology tools to hack and penetrate accounts of activists, human rights defenders, not only inside the country but also in other Arab countries.

### **2- Developments in the ICT Sector**

The population in UAE reaches 9.6 million. UAE owns a fast and efficient telecommunication network, which is organized by the federal telecommunications regulatory agency Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). The service is mainly offered by the Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (Etisalat), Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (Du) for landlines, cell phones, Internet and satellite, Specialized Telecommunication (NIDAA) for telecommunication wired and wireless services, offered to all governmental and semi-governmental bodies. Thuraya Telecommunications Company for telecommunication through satellite, Alyah for satellite telecommunication, operating landlines through satellite.

Cell phone users reach around 19 million, forming 198% of the population, landline users are 2.3 million, while broadband users are around 3 million.

### **3- Legal Environment for the ICT Sector**

The UAE authorities amended laws and ministerial decrees to siege opinion-makers. The government introduced a new law concerning information technology crimes, Hamad Seif Al Shamsi, Public Prosecutor, announced on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2017, a new Ministerial Resolution No. 220 of 2017 established a Federal Public Prosecution specialized in Information Technology Crimes, headquartering at Abu Dhabi. The prosecution is specialized in investigating and following trials concerning information technology crimes.

In June 2017, the public prosecutor issued a statement warning that whoever shows sympathy with a written or visual or verbal content supporting Qatar, will be imprisoned for a period not less than three years and not more than 15 years with a fine of 500 thousand Derham (136 thousand US dollars) under the Criminal Act and e-crimes law year 2012.

The president of the UAE, on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018, introduced an amendment to Federal Law no. 5 of 2012, concerning combating information technology crimes, aiming at pursuing bloggers and opinion-makers under the pretext of "jeopardizing public security". The law allows security services to pursue users who browse websites and those who comment or share. The amendments included sentences that reach 10 years in jail and a fine of 4 million Derham (one million and 90 thousand US dollars). The amendments target also admins, supervisors, publishers with loose accusations like jeopardizing state security and its interests and damaging public security.

#### **4- Social Networks**

Statistics point out that 99% of the citizens in the UAE use social media continuously. Some activists uncovered lies about the state of happiness, welfare, and the nothing is impossible slogans. Authorities recruited agents on social media to uncover "seditious" users and pursue them. Moreover, the authorities cooperated with Israeli technology companies to spy on human rights defenders and activists.

Statistics point that users are increasing reaching about 9.5 million, forming approximately 98.5% of the population, Facebook users reached around 8.8 million, while Twitter users are decreasing in comparison with 2017 dropping to around 2.3 million only from 2.5 million. This goes back to a procedure taken by twitter administration to delete fake accounts, mostly coming from the UAE. Instagram users are around 3.7 million.

#### **5- Blocking and Surveillance**

The UAE authorities arrested and tried some Internet activists. It was uncovered that the authorities are using ToTok application to spy on tens of human rights defenders worldwide, as it steals the phone data, traces the application's users, spies on their audio and video calls and controls the mobile camera and microphone. It has been uncovered also that the authorities are illegally intervening in the regional work of Twitter.

On the other hand, the Emirati authorities prevented access to some websites. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) determined a list of 19 banned categories on the Internet. Among these categories: websites that defame the state or harm public order. This category includes any content that carries satirical hints, defaming the state, its governors, heirs, and parliament members, any content calling for changing the regime, any content that calls for demonstrations or

rallies without permission, any content that is viewed by the authorities as harmful to the national currency or perplexing public opinion about the economic situation and any content that is blocked through a judiciary order or a public prosecution decision.

The UAE, on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017, blocked the Arabian Business website and confiscated the printed issue for one month on charges of publishing false news in a report about a failed real estate project.

After boycotting Qatar in 2017, the authorities blocked al Jazeera websites and most of the websites funded by Qatar.

On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019, the authorities blocked Skype under the pretext that the unauthorized use of Voice Over IP (VoIP) jeopardizes privacy and safety.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019, Mohamed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and governor of Dubai, published on his twitter official account a threat to twitter activists for what he called “messaging and causing chaos on social media”. He added that “the state's reputation is not a subject to be played with by those who want more followers”.

## **6- Persecution and Security threats**

Violations continued as the authorities did not only target activists and human rights defenders on social media but also it continues to imprison activists after terminating their sentences in another kind of prison which is called "the advice center". Ossama al Najjar was arrested since 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017, he was released on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019, under the public prosecution decision which expanded his detention because he is "a threat to society". The court referred him to "the advice center" under article no. 40 of Federal Law no. 7/2014 of the Terrorism Act. The court sentenced Najjar on 25 November 2017 to three years and a fine of 500 thousand Derham (136 thousand US dollar) on charges of "publishing false news, membership of Islah movement and inciting hatred against

the state", on the background of posts he published on twitter asking the minister of Interior about his father who was a member of the UAE 94, as the son, expressed concern about his father's treatment in prison.

### **Trying activist Ahmed Mansour Al-Shahi**

On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017, security forces stormed into Ahmed Mansour Al Shahi's house, searching it and confiscating electronic devices. Shahi was led to an unknown location. Later on, the Federal Public Prosecution specialized in Information Technology Crimes announced that he was arrested. He was accused of "publishing false news and information aiming at spreading hatred and sectarianism, damaging unity and national harmony and defaming the state", on the background of posts on Twitter.

Since his arrest and until his trial, Mansour was held in solitary confinement. He was deprived of meeting his lawyer and suffered ill-treatment. On 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018, the appeal court in Abu Dhabi sentenced him to ten years and fined him with one million Derham (270 thousand US dollars) on charges of defaming the state, publishing rumors, and false news to incite hatred and sectarianism through social media". The court decided to subject him to surveillance after the termination of his sentence, confiscate his devices, delete his posts and suspend his accounts. On the last day of 2018, the Supreme court supported the verdict.

It is worth mentioning that Mansour is a prominent activist and blogger in the UAE. He is the laureate of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights in 2015. In 2006 he launched campaigns calling for the authorities to respect freedom of expression and civil and political rights. He shared in launching a petition in Emirates Dialogue Forum on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011 calling for democratic reform in the parliament. He was detained with other four activists, later on, on charges of "insulting the Emirates leadership" in a case known as the "UAE 5". He spent most of 2011 in jail for his opposition through the Internet. A pardon was issued, and he was

released in November 2011. Mansour was targeted for his activism, threatened with murder and his accounts were hacked in October 2014.

### **Trying the academic Nasser Bin Ghayth for his opinions on social media**

The appealing court of Abu Dhabi, on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017, sentenced the prominent economic expert, Nasser Bin Ghayth Al Morri, to 10 years in accordance to the Cyber Crimes Law and Terrorism Act of 2014, on charges of “insulting the state” on the background of his opinions which he published on social media. Ghayth was accused of corresponding and cooperating with Islah banned group, pointing at his visit and meetings with members of UAE 94, which is a group of human rights defenders and opposition figures who were tried in 2013 and were sentenced to long periods.

Security forces in plainclothes stormed Ghayth’s house in Abu Dhabi, on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2015, searching it and confiscating his devices. He was arrested until he appeared before State Security Chamber in the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi, on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016 the judge referred the case to the court of appeal in December 2016.

Dr. Nasser Bin Ghayth Al Morri, an economic academic, expert, a member of the group 'UAE 5", which consists of five activists calling for reform. They were detained since April 2011 on charges of "public insult" against officials.

### **Detention of journalist Tayssir Al Najjar**

The Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017, sentenced Jordanian journalist residing in the UAE, Tayssir al Najjar, to 3 years and fined him 500 thousand Derham (\$136,000) on charges of insulting state figures. The court also ordered to suspend his accounts on social media, expelling him after the termination of his sentence under article 29 of the Cyber Crimes law of 2012.

Trying Najjar came on the background of comments published on Facebook. On 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017, the Supreme Federal Court in Abu Dhabi upheld the verdict and rejected the defense of his lawyer.

Najjar fulfilled his sentence on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018, yet he was kept in jail till he was released on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019 for not being able to pay the fine.

Security forces have banned Najjar from traveling to Amman on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, ordering him to get back to them daily to check without mentioning reasons. On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015, he was arrested without notifying his family or the Jordanian embassy. His arrest was not made public until 22 January 2016. Mystery surrounded his case until March 2016.

# Morocco: From the besieged press to the restricted Internet

## 1- Overview

The number of Internet users in the Kingdom of Morocco is growing rapidly, and the Kingdom is considered one of the leading African countries in Internet access, but the figures reveal the weakness of the country's infrastructure concerning landline in particular and the monopoly of one company over landline subscription in the Kingdom. This is reflected in the small number of landline users.

While the Parliament passed legislation that would exercise the right to circulate information and stop the monopoly, it also passed some laws that restricted the production of online content through the Press and Publication Act. Besides, many social media activists and human rights defenders have been prosecuted for fabricated charges against the background of posting their opinion on social media.

## 2- Developments in the ICT sector

The Kingdom of Morocco has a population of about 36.6 million, the number of mobile phone subscribers is estimated at around 43.7 million, and the number of landline subscribers is about 2 million. On the other hand, the number of Internet users in Morocco reaches approximately 23 million users, with a growth rate of about 63%, including about 21.4 million mobile phone users in the network.

Maroc Telecom, a subsidiary of Etisalat, owns 42.3% of the Moroccan telecommunications market, Orange Morocco owns 29.6%, and InWana, which operates under the name of InWI, has acquired 28.1% of the market. <sup>1</sup>

While the Kingdom's telecommunications companies complain of the monopoly of Morocco's telecommunications company for the landline phone participation in the Kingdom, the Moroccan government signed a new contract with the company for

---

Published on 22 May 2019, last visit on 20 November 2019, a report on the Arab 1  
markets website entitled "Morocco organizes the ICT sector for integration into the global knowledge  
<https://www.asswak-alarab.com/archives/17818> economy"

the value of ten billion Moroccan dirhams (about one billion dollars) for the development of the communications' infrastructure over three years. <sup>2</sup>

### 3- The legal environment of the ICT sector

Amendments to the Press and Publication Code, which codified the blocking of thousands of websites, entered into force on August 15, 2018, and consists of three laws: The Press and Publication Act No. 88.13, the Law 89.13 on the Regulations for Professional Journalists, and the Law No. 90.13 on the National Press Council.

The Press and Publication Act contains many articles restricting the establishment and administration of online newspapers, including the requirement that each periodical or online newspaper has an editor-in-chief who must hold a university degree or a specialized certificate in media, and that it be a professional journalist. While the old law only required that each newspaper or periodical publication should have a chief editor.

On the other hand, the House of Representatives, in a public session, on Tuesday, July 24, 2018, approved Bill No. 121.12, which provides for the change and nationalization of Law No. 24.96 on Mail and Telecommunications, and the publication of the law in the Official Gazette on February 18, 2019. The law introduces a new public institution, the National Transport Regulatory Agency, which is affiliated with the Prime Minister and enjoys a legal personality and financial independence, which aims at preparing studies and regulatory procedures relating to the transport sector and monitors regulatory provisions. The law focuses mainly on the necessity of informing the users of the means of communication with the general and contractual conditions of offers and services offered by the public transport operators, and obliging the telecommunications companies to work on practical solutions to the problems of digital communication and communication through the Kingdom, especially in remote areas, implementing measures aiming at facilitating the introduction of new services, and promoting the adaptation of communication markets to technological developments. <sup>3</sup>

---

News on the economic statement website under the title "Telecom "Morocco concludes a billion-dollar deal", published August 27, 2019, last visit on November 20, 2019, <https://www.albayan.ae/economy/the-world-today/2019-08-27-1.3635062> 2

Approved texts - the website of the House of Representatives "Bill No. 121.12, which provides for the change and passage of Law No. 24.96 on Mail and Telecommunications", dated July 24, 2018, last visit of November 20, 2019 3

The parliament also ratified on Tuesday, February 6, 2018, the first law the Kingdom has known to regulate how to obtain information and documents in the possession of public departments and facilities, and representative institutions, Law No. 31.13 on the right to information, and the law came into force on Tuesday, March 12, 2019. One year after it was published in the Official Gazette, issue No. 6655. <sup>4</sup>

#### 4- Social networks

The Moroccan people are particularly interested in social media, especially after the stranglehold on traditional websites and media outlets. Facebook activists have been using Naser Al-Zafzafi district events to convey to the mosque's imam in Al-Hoceima and used them to broadcast live marches and protest demonstrations in the movement of the countryside (Rif). Social movement activists also used social media websites to publicize and win support for the boycott of three companies in April 2018, after monopolizing markets and charging monopolistic prices for their products.

The number of Internet users in Morocco reached about 23 million, thus making the Internet growth rate for the population (approximately 63%). The number of Facebook users reached around 15 million, while the number of Twitter users reached about 400 thousand.

---

<http://www.chambrederesrepresentants.ma/ar/>النصوص-التشريعية/مشروع-قانون رقم-12112-يقضا-بتغيير-وتتميم-القانون رقم-2496-المتعلق-بالبريد

Approved texts - the website of the House of Representatives "Bill No. 121.12 provides for the change and passage of Law No. 24.96 on Mail and Related Links", published July 24, 2018, last visit November 20, 2019

<http://www.chambrederesrepresentants.ma/ar/>النصوص-التشريعية/مشروع-قانون رقم-3113-يتعلق-بالحق-فيالحصول-علا-المعلومات-0

## 5- Blocking and censorship

On August 15, 2018, the government's second deadline for websites to regularize their status under Law No. 88.13 on Press and Publishing expired, and since the beginning of 2019, the Moroccan government has launched a massive campaign to intimidate unauthorized website operators to close voluntarily.

On July 3, Minister of Culture and Telecommunication Mohamed Al-Araj said that in the context of applying the Press and Publishing Law, 1000 websites were "voluntarily" suspended by their owners, the minister added that the concerned authorities will resort to issuing urgent decisions against websites that do not comply with the Press and Publishing Law. He recalled that a fine of AED 20,000 (approximately \$2,000) would be imposed for each day of delay.

## 6- Persecution and security threats

### **Nawal Ben Eissa's trial for blogging on rural mobilization**

Moroccan police arrested Nawal Ben Eissa, an activist in rural mobilization, four times between June and September 2017, on the background of posts published on her Facebook account, calling on residents of Hoceima to join the rural protests. The Moroccan authorities forced her to close her account, which was being followed by some 80,000 followers to release her. The court of the first instance in Al-Hoceima sentenced Nawal to a 10-months in prison suspended sentence, fining her 500 Dirhams (about 50 dollars), claiming "insulting the members of the public forces during their missions and gathering in the public roads, demonstrating in public roads without prior authorization, contributing to the organization of an unauthorized demonstration, and incitement to felonies or misdemeanors", on January 17, 2019, the court of appeal upheld the sentence.

### **Convicting Mohamed Taghra sentenced to prison for posting a video on the Internet**

On August 18, 2017, the Court of the first instance in the city of Anzkan sentenced blogger Mohamed Taghra, known as Hamza al-Zain, to 10 months in prison and fined him 500 Dirham (approximately US\$ 53) for "insulting, slandering, and defaming the Royal Gendarmerie". On the background of posting a video clip on the Internet that includes accusations of bribery and forgery of the police in Khamis Ait Uayira center and the public prosecution in the court of the first instance in Banzkan. Mohammed Taghra was arrested by the security services in Agadir on Friday, August 4, 2017.

### **Human rights activist Rashid Ishi imprisoned on the background of solidarity with rural detainees**

The Criminal Chamber of the Court of First Instance in Zafroo (southeast of Fez), on the evening of October 19, 2017, sentenced Rashid Ishi, member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights in Fez-Meknes, to prison for two months with execution and fined him 2000 Dirhams (approximately \$212), on the background of "incitement to commit an offense by electronic means" and "incitement to disobedience", based on opinions published on his Facebook account calling for solidarity with Moroccan rural detainees.

### **Lawyer Abdul Sadeq Al-Bouchtawi sentenced to prison for "Facebook" posts**

On February 8, 2018, the court of first instance in Al-Hoceima (northern Morocco) sentenced lawyer Abdelsadeq El-Bouchtawi, member of the defense panel for the rural movement detainees, to 20 months in prison with effect. A fine of 500 Dirhams (50 dollars). He was accused of "insulting public officials, inciting participation in an unauthorized demonstration, and mocking judicial rulings", on the grounds of a post on his Facebook account criticizing the approach taken towards peaceful protests in rural areas and the arrests of protesters, Al-Bushtawi will remain unreleased until all proceedings have been completed.

### **One year in prison against Sufian Al-Naqad for calling for a demonstration on Facebook**

On 11 February 2019, the Court of Appeal in Tetouan (northern Morocco) sentenced activist Sufian Al-Naqad to one year in prison and a fine of 2000 Moroccan Dirham (About 208 US dollars), on charges of "incitement to riot and harming state security" on the background of his post on his Facebook account, calling to join a demonstration protesting against the killing of the young woman Hayat Belkassem who was killed when the Moroccan Navy fired shots at a Spanish boat with a group of Moroccan emigrants onboard, and she was among them.

### **Mohamed Al-Qasabi and Ayoub Al-Kriani arrested for a post rejecting Pope Francis' visit**

On March 30, 2019, security forces arrested a man who recites Quran named Qassabi, known as 'Muqli al-Maghrib', a mosque imam in the city of Tamara (6 km south of Rabat), and another young man named Ayoub al-Krini, for their posts, refusing the visit of Pope Francis to Morocco. They were released the following day.

### **Activist Hassan Benchaib sentenced to prison for calling for a demonstration on Facebook**

On 23 May 2019, Moroccan authorities arrested activist Hassan Benchaib from Bu'ayyash in Al Hoceima, from outside his home. He appeared before the Public Prosecutor's Office at the court of first instance in Hoceima the following day, on charges of "calling for participation in an unauthorized demonstration, insulting a legally organized authority, inciting disobedience, and threatening to commit a crime", based on posts published on Facebook to support the rural movement detainees, and on 3 June 2019, al-Hoceima's primary court sentenced Hassan Benchaib to two years and a half in effect.

### **Trial of blogger Adnan Ahmedoun**

Blogger Adnan Ahmedoun appeared before the public prosecution in the court of first instance in Betwan (north Morocco), on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019 under charges of "inciting to demonstrate" on the background of a post he published in which he tackled the movement of Jarada city, east Morocco, in December 2017, in protest of the murder of coal miners. The prosecution released him on bail of 2000 Dirham (\$200) and set a date for his first trial session on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

## **Sudan: Al Bashir and the Internet... mutual hatred**

### **1- Overview**

Ousted President Omar Hassan al-Bashir mocked protesters' use of social media, saying in a speech on January 31, 2019, that "Governments and presidents cannot be changed through Whatsapp and Facebook," and al-Bashir tried to downplay citizens' social media activity, trying to go on with his dictatorial rule that he built on the corpses of Sudanese people in Kordofan, Darfur, and Nubia Mountains.

Al-Bashir and his government tried early on to control the Internet and social media through police pursuits, the enactment of absurd laws, unfair trials, and the control of traditional media. But he failed to achieve this complete control, and his removal and arrest came on April 11, 2019, culminating in citizens' perseverance for nearly four months of peaceful street protests and the exchange of news and views through social media. Activists succeeded in spreading the truth and gaining support for peaceful demonstrations by publishing and exchanging thousands of photos and videos of demonstrators, attacking Al-Bashir's forces, and portraying victims' families' feelings on social media.

The demonstrations began on Wednesday, December 19, 2018, in the city of 'Abra, Nile State, to condemn the rise in commodity prices, the scarcity of many commodities and the devaluation of the Sudanese currency. The demonstrations spread to the cities of Damer, Berber, Al-Matma, and Shendi, followed by Dehira and Khartoum, and then followed by other Sudanese cities.

### **2- Developments in the ICT sector**

Since 2017, Sudan has sought to develop the telecommunications sector at a rapid pace, following the lifting of some US sanctions that were imposed since 1997 when Sudan hosted fugitives,

including al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. In 2017, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) sought to complete the launch of 4G services from all telecommunications companies. In cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Interior and telecommunications companies, TRA has initiated a chip registration project which has been linked to the civil registration system to verify the user's identity through their national ID.

On July 3, 2018, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of Sudan issued special regulations for the control and security of the provision of certification, registration, and electronic signature services. Following the removal of former President Omar al-Bashir, on August 15, 2019, the Transitional Military Council issued a decision to subordinate the Communications Regulatory Authority to the Ministry of Defense. After the formation of the Sovereign Council, the President of the sovereign Council on September 16 of the same year passed a decree abolishing Military Council resolution No. 358 of 2019, which called for the dissolution of the Department of Communications and Post Organization, and the subordination of the body was transferred to the sovereignty Council.<sup>5</sup>

Sudan's population is estimated at approximately 42 million. The mobile communications sector is serviced by three companies, Zain, MTN, and Sudani company. The number of registered mobile phone users reaches around 30 million users, with about 71%, Zain company has approximately 49% of the market, and MTN acquires about 27%, while Sudani company acquires around 24% of the market. Concerning landline subscriptions, the number of

---

Sudan Tribune, "the sovereignty Council cancels the decision to subordinate the communications apparatus to the Ministry of Defense," September 19, 2019, and the date of the visit

مجلس-السيادة-يلغي-قرار-تبعية-جهاز December 3, 2019, <http://www.sudantribune.net/>

subscribers increased to about 137.2 thousand users, and the company of Kenar acquires around 34% of the market in Sudan.<sup>6</sup>

### **3- The legal environment of the ICT sector**

Omar al-Bashir and his government have sought to muzzle and control the Internet through some legislation or by amending the constitution, during which time the Sudanese National Council (parliament) passed on April 25, 2017, some controversial amendments to the country's 2005 interim constitution. The amendments to the National Security and Intelligence Service have preserved wide powers granted to them in 2015, as it gave to the Security Authority the right to violate privacy under the pretext of protecting national security.

On June 10, 2018, the National Council passed the Anti Cybercrime Bill of 2018, in the first reading phase, using broad terms that restrict freedom of expression and online publishing, enabling the government to control social media and online newspapers. The Act provides for a provision which shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, by whipping or by a fine: Anyone who uses the information network, telecommunications, or any means of information, communication or applications to publish any news, publicity or report with knowledge of its incorrectness, thereby causing fear or panic to the public and threatening public safety and reducing the status of the State. The National Council also passed the Telecommunication and Mail Act 2018, which is an alternative to the Telecommunications Act of 2001, changing the of the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (NTRA) to be Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) and the Post.

---

The TRA report "the most important indicators of communications performance up to the first half of 2019" last visit December 7, 2019, [https://tpra.gov.sd/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/indicators\\_2019\\_Q2.pdf](https://tpra.gov.sd/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/indicators_2019_Q2.pdf)

#### **4- Social Networks**

The Sudanese fled from the siege of Al-Bashir's government on traditional media to social media, to gain access to information, to learn about different opinions, and to make social media a window open to activists and human rights defenders to reach out to the public, as social media activists revealed many important incidents and events. The government of al-Bashir has worked to hunt down activists and spread so-called electronic flies to discredit opponents. The number of Internet users reached about 13.7 million users. The Arab Network for Human Rights Information estimates the number of Facebook users at about 7 million, while the number of Twitter users is estimated at around 250 thousand.

#### **5- Blocking and censorship**

The Sudanese Telecommunications and Mail Organization operates an effective and declared system of blocking and monitoring websites without judicial rulings. The blocking system depends on technology and devices that contain programs to filter the information received, according to lists of the addresses of websites to be blocked. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) announces its readiness to receive requests to block websites from Internet users on its email. During the revolution, the Sudanese authorities kept the Internet completely or partially blocked. Social media have also been blocked several times of peaceful protests and demonstrations or to prevent the circulation of scenes of crimes committed by the security forces against demonstrators during this period:

- On December 20, 2018, Social Media suddenly stopped working in Sudan, Zain's subscribers, especially encountered difficulties with instant messaging on mobile phones, and access to social media websites to reduce news and photos of protests that erupted on December 19 because of the high prices and deteriorating economic conditions. The Internet continued to be partially cut and did not come back until al-Bashir was deposed on April 11, 2019.
- In coincidence with the execution of a large-scale bloody attack by the government forces on the sit-in in front of the

general command headquarters, known as "the general command massacre" on 3 June 2019, the military Council ordered the internet cut off from the mobile phones.

- On June 10, 2019, the council ordered the cut-off of landline Internet access lines to become a "semi-complete" outage in Sudan. On June 11, Transitional Military Council spokesman Shams al-Din Kabashi said the Internet service would not return for the time being, claiming that the Internet constitutes a "threat to national security." The Internet outage continued until the Military Council agreed to return on July 10, after a court ruling that he had returned.

## **6- Persecution and security threats**

The government of Omar al-Bashir has taken the approach of arrests, prosecutions and interrogations against website journalists and social media activists inside and outside Sudan, to curb Internet freedom, silence critical voices, and encourage self-censorship. During this period, Al-Bashir government committed numerous violations against online journalists and social media activists, for example:

### **Sudanese Congress Party leader imprisoned for a message on Whatsapp**

On July 20, 2017, the Criminal Court of Umm Rawaba sentenced the head of the opposing Sudanese Congress Party branch in the city, and Central Council member Hatem Mirghani Abdel Rahman, to two years' imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 Sudanese pounds (approximately \$4400) for a complaint by the mandatory service coordinator in Umm Rawaba, accusing him of "defamation". Against the background of a message on Whatsapp concerning the corruption of the ruling "National Conference party."

### **Journalist Alaa Eddin Mahmoud was prevented from traveling because of news in an online newspaper**

Authorities at Khartoum airport prevented journalist Alaa al-Din Mahmoud, who works in the Gulf newspaper in the UAE, from traveling on 30 October 2017, because of an order issued by the Information Prosecution until he appears before it, in a communiqué filed against him by the White Nile state government, accusing him of "discrediting" the State Minister of Culture and Information, on the background of news published by the online newspaper (Hose Post).

### **Activist Mohsen Moussa Mahmoud detained**

Members of the local police, accompanied by plainclothes members of the National Security Service, arrested on the evening of April 12, 2018, activist Mohsen Musa Mahmoud, 28, from his family's home in the Kadkali neighborhood of Hagar al Nar, detaining him at the central police station of Kadqli. He has been interrogated the same night, in a report by governor Issa Abkar who accused him of defamation, after publishing posts on his Facebook account criticizing the government's performance in providing health services, electricity, and water in the city, in addition to the high price wave and long lines of people waiting for gas, in addition to his criticisms of the governor's involvement in the gold trade and participation in looting the state's wealth.

### **Blogger Hisham Ali Mohamed Ali arrested**

Saudi authorities handed Sudanese activist and blogger Hisham Ali Mohamed Ali, known as Hisham Wad Kalba, to the Security and Intelligence Service in Sudan. Hisham Ali Mohamed Ali arrived in Sudan on the morning of May 29, 2018, he was arrested on November 18, 2017, by Saudi authorities, at the demand of the security services in the Sudanese embassy because of his activity on social media. He remained in the prison of Al-Dhaban until he was deported. Hisham has been working as an independent accountant in Saudi Arabia, where he has migrated for work since

2010. He writes articles for several online forums to expose government corruption in Sudan.

### **Activist Ahmed Al-Dai detained**

Members of the security and intelligence services arrested social media activist Ahmed al-Dai Bishara Gouda from his home in Omdurman on July 16, 2018, he was prevented from contacting his lawyer and prevented him from reaching out to his family, because he published a video criticizing Bashir's visit to Moscow by private plane to attend the final match of the Mundial, while the Sudanese people are suffering from a terrible economic deterioration. Ahmed al-Dai was detained until he was released on September 18, 2018.

### **Dismissing Heba Mekawy from work on the background of a Facebook post**

Sudanese authorities dismissed Heba Mekawy a broadcaster in the news department at national radio on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 on the background of a Facebook post on her account in which she called for stopping figures of Beshir's regime from controlling media.

### **British ambassador summoned to protest against tweets**

The Sudanese Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador in Khartoum on 12 June 2019 to protest against tweets written by the British ambassador Arfan Siddiq, after the Sudanese security forces dispersed the sit-in in front of the army general command headquarters, saying "there is no justification for such an attack. That must stop now," the foreign ministry's spokesman said, "the ambassador's repeated tweets run counter to "established diplomatic norms."

## **Tunisia: Two Steps Forward... One Step Back**

### **1- Overview**

The democratic experience in Tunisia is moving slowly but steadily. As the country is suffering from economic obstacles along with combating terrorism, not to mention the negative impact of personal interest networks on decision-making in a country that revolted against dictatorship a few years ago. Social media played a key role in the Tunisian revolution, therefore, Tunisians are increasingly using information technology and telecommunication.

### **2- Developments in the ICT Sector**

The population in Tunisia reaches around 11.7 million. After the success of the revolution erupted on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011, a leap took place in using telecommunication services. Internet users are increasing a year after another. Cell phones and Internet access occupies a large space in everyday life. Cell phone users reach around 15.1 million, while landline users reach 1.4 million. Broadband users are approximately one million.

The telecommunication service is provided by four companies: Tunisie Telecom, Ooredoo Tunisia – Tunisiana, Orange Tunis, and Mobile Virtual Network Operator, which belongs to Lycamobile company that provides its services through Tunisie Telecom.<sup>7</sup>

### **3- Legal Environment of the ICT sector**

The parliament on a public session, on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017, ratified a draft law concerning Tunisia joint agreement no. 108 with the EU, tackling

---

National Body for Telecommunication website, operators and coverage page, last visit: 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019  
<https://www.intt-info-conso.tn/ar/telephonie-mobile-operateurs-couverture/>

protecting individuals from automated processing of private data and the extra protocol no. 181 concerning surveillance authorities and the flow of data across borders.<sup>8</sup>

The agreement no. 108, dated 28<sup>th</sup> January 1981, is the first legally-binding international document which obliges the signing countries to take the necessary measures in their legal system to implement the agreement's principals, aiming at protecting basic rights of individuals from "writing, registering, preserving, storing, including, displaying, sending, receiving, circulating, publishing, deleting, editing, restoring and analyzing their data. To sum it up, what is known as the automated processing of personal data<sup>9</sup>.

The parliament, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2019, ratified law no. 9 of 2019, with amending law no. 26 of 2015, concerning combating terrorism and countering money laundry. The amendments were published in the official gazette on 29<sup>th</sup> 2019. The law includes some amendments, among them: articles concerning hindering telecommunications, digital penetration, as the new paragraph guaranteed, in chapter no. 54, for

---

A law permitting Tunisia to join agreement no. 108 in the EU concerning protecting individuals from automated processing for personal data and its extra protocol no. 181 concerning authorities of surveillance and the flow of data through borders. Parliament website. Last visit: 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019  
[http://arp.tn/site/servlet/Fichier?code\\_obj=97201&code\\_exp=1&langue=1](http://arp.tn/site/servlet/Fichier?code_obj=97201&code_exp=1&langue=1) 8

Protecting Individuals from automated processing for personal data agreement, EU council website. Last visit: 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019 9

---

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900016802e8630>

public prosecution or investigation judge, the judicial seizure order, entitled to follow terrorist crimes and the right to stop suspects in emergencies and following a report that justifies it. The newly added paragraph in chapter 57, allowed for the responsible for the judicial seizure to directly or digitally penetrate data through disguised security personnel or detectives.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4- Social Networks**

Using social media in Tunisia varies among young people. Some of them use it for dating or making friends, some are using it for staying up to date with the news, some are searching for jobs. Moreover, activists use social media for organizing social and political movements and gaining more supporters.

The latest statistics point to an increase in Internet users as they reached around 7.9 million, forming 67.5% of the population. Facebook users reached approximately 7.4 million, while twitter users decreased to be around 200 thousand as the new users prefer Instagram forming about 1.9 million users.

#### **5- Blocking and Surveillance**

The Tunisian government, during this period, did not adopt a blocking policy, as the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information - ANHRI did not receive except two complaints: the first was from Moroccan Street website, which was blocked on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017, and Tunisian Freedom website, which was blocked in September 2018.

---

Basic Law no. 9 of 2019, with amendments of law no. 26 of 2015 concerning combating terrorism and preventing money laundry. Parliament website. Last visit: 26 December 2019

However, the Tunisian authorities persecute activists on social media and impose restrictions on websites' reporters to prevent them from acquiring first-hand information. For example, security forces prevented journalist Rushdi Al Jarai, a reporter for the website of the Moroccan voice, from covering clashes between demonstrators and security forces in Habib Bourguiba street on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2018. An official in the ministry of education prevented Afaf Al Wedarni, reporter to Digital Tunisia website, from covering a protest of some teachers on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

## **6- Persecution and Security Threats**

Social media activists and human rights defenders have some increasing concerns as they fear that freedom of expression is rescinding, after the arrest of some Internet and social media activists and trying them for posts in which they criticized some political stances of the government or criticizing some state officials. For example:

### **Interrogating Nawah Website Director for an Article about Reconciliation**

Sami Ben Gharbia, founder and director of the independent website "Nawah", and its legal representative, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2017 appeared before the Tunisian National Guard Research and Inspection Squad in Ewayna to be investigated on charges of robbery, theft and uncovering secrets, on the background of an article published on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2017, uncovering details of the presidency plan to pass an amended draft for the economic reconciliation law, stating to reconcile with officials accused of corruption and receiving bribes during the era of former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and to stop pursuing them if they restore the robbed money.

### **Arresting Activist Qays Al Bouazizi**

Security forces arrested activist and blogger, Qays Bouazizi, in Sedi Abo Zeid city, on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018. He was interrogated and detained for 3 days then he was released. This took place on the background of several posts he published on Facebook calling for demonstrating against the government for high prices and austerity measures.

### **Trying Blogger Mohamed Al Hamami in the Case of Minister Mahdi Ben Gharbia**

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2018, the primary court in Benzert, sentenced blogger Mohamed Al Hamami to 8 months and a fine of 120 Dinar (\$43) on charges of insulting and defaming Minister of Relations with Constitutional Bodies and Human Rights, Mahdi Ben Gharbia, on social media following a lawsuit the latter filed against him.

The Public Prosecution had referred Mohamed Al Hamam, on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to primary court in Benzert. He is still released pending the final verdict. The court, on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017, sentenced him in absentia to one year.

### **Referring Activist Tarek Al Ghamri to Trial**

Police in Baja summoned Tarek Al Ghamri, a member of the Al Moetamar party, 3 times during the period from 5 to 10 September 2018. He was referred to the prosecution on the background of his posts on Facebook, in the campaign titled "Where is the Petrol" which is countering corruption. The prosecution investigated him, and he was released pending the case.

### **Trying Member of the National Bureau of Nedaa Tunis Party for Posts on Facebook**

Security forces, on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018, arrested the director of the Tunisia Today website and a member of the National Bureau of the Nedaa Tunis Party, Adib Al Jibali in front of his house in Ariana. He was led to the criminal inspection squad in Khadra district on charges of inciting against the government through posts on Facebook, on the background of his posts in which he criticized the alliance between the Prime Minister and Nahda Party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, Jibali appeared before the public prosecution of the primary court in Tunisia and the prosecution referred him to trial while he was released. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2018, the primary court sentenced Jibali to 8 months for inciting against the government and causing a riot.

#### **Trying blogger Amina Mansour for a Facebook post**

The primary court of Benarous, on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018, sentenced blogger and political activist, Amina Mansour, to two months for posting on Facebook claiming that there are suspicions of corruption in the Customs Authority. The court released Amina pending appeal.

#### **Trying Parliament Member Yassin Al Ayari for posts on Facebook**

On the first of November 2018, the military court sentenced parliament member and blogger, Yassin Al Ayari, to 3 months on charges of defaming the military after a post on his official account on Facebook. Ayari appealed the verdict and it was postponed to 6<sup>th</sup> December 2018. The military appeal court reduced the sentence to two months.

#### **Imprisoning blogger Fadila Belhaj for a post on Facebook**

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 2019, the misdemeanor department of the primary court sentenced blogger Fadila Belhaj to two years on charges of "insulting an employee on social media" on the background of a lawsuit filed against her by the Cabinet after publishing a post on Facebook

criticizing the Ministry of Interior's methods dealing with terrorism and the alliance between Youssef Al Shahid and the Muslim Brotherhood.

## Saudi Arabia: Unlimited Spying and Piracy

### 1- Overview

The Saudi authorities were involved in a good deal of espionage and hacking of social media accounts scandals, as news spread about bribing some technicians inside Dubai's Twitter regional office, recruiting others to use them inside the office. One is the scandal that a Saudi engineer, Ali al-Zabara, has identified activists opposing the authorities in the Kingdom, using his former Twitter business privileges. The Dubai Regional Office's breach was behind the arrests of several Saudi Arabian tweeps in 2017 and 2018, most notably admins of "Kashkoul" account, "E3tekal – arrest", "Samahti", "Ghassat Al Hanin" and "Sharazad Barida".

Moreover, the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman was involved in hacking the Amazon founder and Washington Post owner, Jeff Bezos's phone, just before the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The Saudi authorities also used Israeli piracy technology to spy on political activists and opponents abroad. It is known that the Israeli "NSO" group developed the "Pegasus" spy program which was used by Saudi Arabia. It is a program that turns smartphones into eavesdropping devices. On August 31, 2018, U.S. media reported the UAE's attempt to spy on the phone of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, a Saudi prince and some Saudi dissidents through the Israeli company itself.

In 2017, the Kingdom also bought software from Italian Hacking Team, which prevents criticism of the government and the regime, by spying on Saudis on the Internet and all social networks. Those programs enabled the Saudi authorities to control cyberspace inside the Kingdom. Through spying malware that facilitated the identification of any citizen who has different opinions other than those which are imposed on the public and publishes opinions critical of the

regime or its officials, in an attempt to suppress reformist or critical views of the policies of Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman.

## **2- Developments in the ICT sector**

Saudi Arabia has a population of about 34 million, and the number of Saudi citizens is about 21 million Saudis, while the number of foreigners and residents to work reaches about 13 million individuals. The rise in the number of arrivals comes despite the departure of more than 1.6 million foreigners after the increase in foreign labor escorts fees since July 2017.

The Kingdom's telecommunications sector is based on the mobile phone, and according to the performance indicators issued by the Telecommunications and Information Technology Authority, the mobile subscribers rose to about 41.6 million, while the landline subscribers settled at about 3.1 million. The landline and mobile broadband subscribers rose to 31.41 million subscribers.<sup>11</sup> Internet users in Saudi Arabia reach about 30 million users.

## **3- The legal environment of the ICT sector**

Saudi Arabia was not satisfied with laws and regulations that it possesses but has recently enacted some legislation that enables it to silence all opponents. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2017, Royal Decree No. 21 of the Law on combating terrorism and financing terrorist crimes was promulgated. This law is considered a sword on the Internet activists' necks because it includes vague and elastic expressions of terrorist acts. Also, it approved the sentence of imprisonment for a term not less than

5 years and not more than ten years for anyone who describes - directly or indirectly - the king or the Crown Prince in any description doubting their religion or justice.<sup>12</sup>

On May 28, 2019, the Cabinet issued a regulation "on the use of information and telecommunication technologies in government bodies" following Ministerial decree No. 555 of May 27, 2019. The resolution contains some important requirements that government agencies have to comply with, including information security, the agency's website, email, and social media pages.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4- Social networks**

The Saudis love social media networks, as the users of Social Media reached approximately 23 million, making Saudi Arabia the highest Arab country in terms of annual increase of social media users, and users of Facebook exceed 18 million, users of Instagram reached about 13 million. While the number of Twitter users reached about 11 million, the rate of increase in the number of Twitter users declined after the hacked account violations, some of them moved to the small social network of

---

The Counter-Terrorism Crime System (CTC) on the website of the Council of Ministers, the last visit of 16 November 2019 12  
<https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/57694209-3eed-46c7-a5d8-a9ed012761d4/1>

Controls on the use of Information and Communication technologies in government agencies, on the website of the Cabinet of Experts, last visit on 16 November 2019 13  
<https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/Viewer/5d817837-2898-4a9a-a0c9-aa6400f17274?lawId=eb1ceceb-d684-404c-afd7-aa6400f17220>

Parlor, moreover, Twitter removed thousands of "fake" accounts supporting the Saudi government, that has established an "electronic trolling committee" to promote its policies online.

## 5- **Blocking and censorship**

Without a judicial decision, and by a decision of an executive officer in the Telecommunications and Information Technology Authority, more than one million links on the Internet were blocked during 2017.<sup>14</sup> The block is not restricted to pornographic websites as the organization claims, but it includes news and human rights websites, for example, the Saudi authorities blocked Al Jazeera Net websites. Qatar News Agency (QNA), Al Watan, Al-Raya, Al-Arab, Al-Sharq, Al-Jazeera Media Group, Al-Jazeera Documentary, and Al-Jazeera English, on May 24, 2017, following statements by the Emir of Qatar on Iran, Hamas, the Brotherhood and Al-Adid.

The audio-visual communication service in Whatsapp was re-blocked on March 12, 2019, hours after its sudden operation, despite the announcement by the Minister of Communications and Information Technology, on September 13, 2017, that the block has been lifted from voice and video calls, nevertheless, blocking voice and video calls is still in effect. The Saudi Ministry of Information also began on July 29, 2019, under article 16, paragraph 3, of the electronic publishing system, websites, forums and Snapchat accounts carrying names of tribes, cities or public places shall be blocked.

---

A statement by the Communications and Information Technology Commission, 14  
"TRA addresses more than one million blocking requests for links that violate the end of 2017",  
published May 13, 2018, and the last visit of November 16, 2019,  
<https://www.citc.gov.sa/ar/mediacenter/pressreleases/Pages/2018051301.aspx>

## **6- Prosecution and security threats**

The Kingdom imposed a media blackout on detentions, names of prisoners arrested, the blackout was imposed also on trial sessions, which are supposed to be open. During the period covered by this report, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information monitored the following violations:

### **Trial of writer Essam Al Zamil**

The special criminal court in Riyadh began on October 1, 2018, hearing the lawsuit filed by the public prosecution against economic affairs writer Essam Al Zamil on several charges, including "seeking to shake the social fabric and national coherence, and provoking sedition inside the Kingdom through using social media sites. He also is accused of challenging the domestic policies, judicial and security institutions, to question their integrity, describing them as unfair and to challenge the foreign policies of the regime, to incite demonstrations and sit-ins, and to communicate with Qatar", after criticizing plans of the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammad Bin Salman, for offering five percent of the shares of the government company Aramco to the public subscription. Essam al-Zamil has been on trial since his arrest in September 2017.

### **Trial of Loujain al-Hathloul, a women's rights advocate**

The trial of a social media activist, Loujain al-Hathloul, known for her defiance of the Law on preventing Women from driving cars, began on March 13, 2019, claiming "to harm the country's interests and support hostile figures abroad," after her arrest on May 14, 2018, on the background of her activity in defending women's rights in Saudi Arabia. It is worth mentioning that the security services have detained Loujain more than once from King Fahd International Airport in Dammam on 4 June 2017, and her detention continued for 3 days. She was arrested in

late 2014 and detained for more than 70 days for criticizing the government online and for defending for the right to drive cars.

### **Arresting activist Kholoud Al Yafei**

Saudi security forces arrested Kholoud Al-Yafei on Tuesday, July 18, 2017, and interrogated her for several hours before her release that same evening, because of a video broadcast on social media, showing her wandering in the traditional village of Bashkadis, in Shaqra governorate (190 km northwest of the capital Riyadh) with a short-skirt and a T-shirt that reveals her arms.

### **Arresting activist Noha Al Balwi**

Saudi security forces arrested activist Noha Al Balwi, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018, on the background of broadcasting a video on her Twitter account criticizing the Saudi authorities for normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel. The authorities blocked her account, confiscated her devices and suspended all her social media accounts then she was released on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2019.

### **Trial of activist Mohammed bin Abdullah al Otaibi**

On January 25, 2018, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced human rights activist Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Otaibi to 14 years in prison, on charges of "participation in the preparation, drafting, and issuance of several online statements that include an offense to the Kingdom's reputation" and "the establishment and publication of an association before obtaining the necessary licenses". Mohammed al-Otaibi traveled to Qatar in March 2017, after lifting his travel ban on the case, he claimed asylum in Norway, and on the evening of May 24, 2017, Qatari

authorities arrested Mohammed al-Otaibi at Hamad International Airport while traveling to a third country. He was handed over to the Saudi authorities the following morning before he could challenge his extradition decision.

### **The arrest of writer Turki Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Jaser**

Press writer Turki bin Abdul Aziz al-Jaser, from his home on the evening of March 15, 2018, was arrested by plainclothes police officers as the account holder of Kishkol, a specialist in the dissemination of information on human rights violations by members of the royal family and officials in Saudi Arabia, and in November 2018, Press news spread about Turki Al-Jaser's death under torture, but local authorities did not confirm nor deny that news.

### **Yemeni-born journalist Marwan Al-Marsi detained**

Saudi security forces arrested Yemeni-born journalist Marwan al-Marsi, 37, from his home on June 1, 2018, without announcing the place of his detention, for his activism on Twitter. Al-Marsi was forcibly disappeared for about a year until he called his wife by phone on May 13, 2019, in a short call for the first time since his detention as it was the first time for her to know that he is still alive. Marwan Al-Marsi is the owner of the account, "Samahti," and is famous for defending prisoners of opinion in Saudi Arabia, and for mocking religious scholars loyal to the Saudi authorities.

### **Arresting academic Omar Al Moqbel**

Saudi authorities, on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019, arrested professor in Sharia (Islamic law) in Qassim University, Omar Moqbel, for a video published showing him criticizing the entertainment body, led by Turki Al-Sheikh.

# Lebanon: Running in place

## Overview

The Lebanese state monopolizes the telecommunication infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Internet and telecommunication costs are among the most expensive in the Arab world because of making the users pay the VAT which forms the Lebanese government's highest revenues, not to mention the increase in operation costs of the ICT networks due to the rampant corruption in the government.

Despite the government's efforts to develop the legal structure, to suit the transparency conditions in administration and the right to information, as it ratified law no. 28 of the year 2017 concerning access to information, however, the law is nothing but ink on paper .

Though Lebanon used to be considered the most open Arab country which respects freedom of speech, it is worth mentioning that the country is witnessing a decline in freedom of expression in general, particularly when it comes to the Internet. This decline comes concurrently with the increase of the conservatives' influence in the Lebanese government which leads to more sectarianism .

## **1- Developments in the ICT Sector**

The ICT infrastructure develops slowly for many reasons, among these reasons: the Lebanese government's monopoly over the ICT sector, administrative corruption and divisions in the country due to sectarianism. The Ministry of Telecommunication controls the infrastructure for all telecommunication and Internet companies, through Ogerou, a public institution that is owned by the state .

Under a contract between the government and two companies: MTC touch, ran by Zain, a Kuwaiti company and ALFA, ran by the Egyptian Orascom Telecom Media and Technology. The two companies administrate and operate two cell phone networks while the Ministry of Telecommunication pays costs of expansion and preparations.

A parliamentary report issued on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019, asserted that high costs of cell phone services and Internet fees, imposed by the government, contributed to the decrease of Internet users. Moreover, the report stated that the operation costs are very high in comparison with other countries worldwide and that a whole vision to cover all Lebanon with better services and lower costs is absent .

Cell phone users in Lebanon reach approximately 4.4 million forming around 64.7% of the population, while fixed phone users are about 890 thousand .

## 2- Legal Environment for the ICT sector

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2017, the parliament ratified law no. 28 concerning access to information. The law was published in the official gazette in February 2017. The seventh article of this law obliged the administrative bodies to publish on their websites decisions, circulars, and memoranda, adding to all processes of paying public funds that exceed five million Lira, except for salaries and compensations for employers. The eighth article obliges the administrations to publish annual reports, assigning bodies that are responsible for supervising the judiciary to publish its reports. The ninth article states that all the above has to be published on websites of the competent administrations<sup>15</sup>.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2018, the parliament ratified law no. 81 titled “The e-transactions and data protection law”. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2018, the law was published in the 45<sup>th</sup> issue of the official gazette and came into effect starting 18<sup>th</sup> January 2019, three months after being published<sup>16</sup>.

The law is formed in five sections. The first section includes legislation of writing and documenting through electronic tools, the second tackles the e-transactions, the third has to do with transferring to the public through direct contact service without uncovering ID, the fourth tackles names on Internet and organizing granting and administrating names to sites inside the Lebanese region, the fifth section determines targets of dealing with private data, its restrictions and how to deal with illegal subjects .

## 3- Social Networks

Census is one of the most sensitive issues in Lebanon, it may be considered a taboo. That goes back to the sectarian tension between political parties. The World Bank statistics estimate the Lebanese population at about 6.8 million, citizens and residents<sup>17</sup>.

---

law no. 28, concerning access to information, parliament website, last visit: 15  
<https://www.lp.gov.lb/Resources/Files/f2c40698-6987-4425-966a-185f270b11df.pdf> 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019

law no. 81, concerning e-transactions and data protection, parliament website, last visit: 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019 <https://www.lp.gov.lb/Resources/Files/f67b348c-6d35-s42a0-8ddb-c18bcc2a5e8d.pdf> 16

population in Lebanon on the World Bank website, last visit 25<sup>th</sup> December 17  
<https://data.albankaldawli.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=LB> 2019

Statistics point to a slow increase in Internet users, as the numbers reach approximately 5.5 million. Concerning social media, statistics show that Facebook users exceed 3.8 million, while Twitter users are about 350 thousand .

#### 4- **Blocking and Surveillance**

Reports stated that Alfa company uses deep packet inspection (DPI) to uncover users' data and track their movement, it was stated also that Touch company is planning to acquire this technology. DPI determines and tracks a user's activity through cell phone, along with registering all applications and visited websites, not to mention tracing the user's contacts over unencrypted applications<sup>18</sup> .

During the period in which the ministry of telecommunication resorted to blocking websites either to appease conservatives or to prevent dissident voices that call for combating corruption and respecting human rights. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2019, the Lebanese authorities blocked "ThisisLebanon.org", which documents violations against foreign female workers in Lebanon. General Director of Investing and maintaining sector in Ministry of Telecommunication, Bassar Al Ayoubi, on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2019, issued a decision to ban Grindr, a dating application, used mainly by the LGBTQ community .

#### 5- **Persecution and Security Threats**

##### **Nine Cases Against Journalist Fidaa Itani for Facebook Posts**

The Lebanese judiciary summoned journalist Fidaa Itani, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2017, to be investigated before referring him to "the Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Bureau". Itani is facing nine lawsuits filed against him by Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, for Itani's comments on Facebook, as he criticized officials for inhuman treatment of Syrian refugees. The journalist used ended each post with the phrase: "a country that equals Gebran Bassil, you should be bigger than that ."

Itani refused to apologize or to sign a pledge not to insult Bassil. The case was referred to the judiciary. He was released ensuring his place of residence .

---

A report titled "the cave of telecommunications: a dubious deal and fears of security penetration/ who monitors the cell phone data?" published in Al Akhbar on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Last visit: 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019  
<https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/266440>

Itani traveled to the UK seeking asylum, afterward, a series of verdicts in absentia were issued against him. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, a judge in Baabda, Nadin Nejm, issued a verdict in absentia sentencing Itani to four months and a fine of 10 million Lira (6600\$) as compensation on charges of defamation, insulting and humiliating minister Gebran Bassil on social media, in accordance to a complaint filed against him by attorney Majed Boeiz, Bassil's lawyer .

The latest verdict issued against Itani monitored by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, was in January 2019, in the same case. As Ahmed Shehada, the judge in Baabda, who sentenced Itani to 22 months, fining him 74 million Lira (50,000\$) on charges of insulting Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil .

### **Summoning Activist Hanadi Jerjes on charges of Insulting the President s**

The Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Bureau, on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2017, summoned activist Hanadi Jerjes, 27 years, on charges of "humiliating, defaming and insulting the President", against the background of her comments on Facebook as she criticized Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil and President Michel Aoun.

In the midnight of 11<sup>th</sup> August, Jerjes was transferred to Hebeish prison, pending investigations. Her file was referred to the Public Prosecution of Appeals in the North in which she resides. She was transferred again, on 12<sup>th</sup> August to the judiciary headquarters in Tripoli. Her file was submitted to judge Ghassan Bassil.

On 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017, she was released from the judiciary headquarters in Tripoli pending case ensuring her place of residence. Her file was referred to a judge in Tripoli .

### **Investigating Journalist Hani Al Nassouli for Comments on Whatsapp**

On 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018, journalist Hani Al Nassouli, founder and director of "Beirut is my cause" website, appeared before the General Intelligence. He was interrogated for more than three hours in a complaint filed against him by Nader Al Hariri accusing him of "insulting, defaming, arousing sectarianism and damaging links with Arab countries", against the background of a voice note Nassouli sent in a Whatsapp group criticizing a photo of Nader Hariri with a businessman known for being close to Syrian authorities .

Investigators stated to Nassouli that Hariri has abandoned politics, therefore, Nassouli signed a pledge not to insult Hariri again as long as the latter is out of politics. He was released on the guarantee of his place of residence .

### **Arresting Dawood Mekheiber for a Video on Social Media**

Security forces arrested Dawood Mekheiber, on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019, on charges of "insulting and humiliating the President". This comes on the background of a video published on social media, showing the citizen sending a message to the President, Michel Aoun and his in-law, Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil, objecting to expanding high-pressure pipes near housing in al Mansouria district, north Beirut. He added that he is sorry for voting for al Tayyar members in the parliament and president Michel Aoun .

#### **Arresting Adnan Farahat for a Whatsapp Message**

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019, citizen Adnan Farahat was arrested by the judiciary police, from Habboush in Nabatia. The citizen carries a U.S. nationality. He was arrested for a voice note on Whatsapp, expressing his anger towards Lebanese politicians, in particular, Nabih Berri, head of the parliament, and his family. He was released two days later on bail of 500 thousand Lira (330\$) .

#### **Trying Mohamed Wahba for Humiliating the President**

Public Security arrested Mohamed Wahba, on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019, in Beirut airport. The citizen was turned in to the intelligence in order to be referred to trial before the military judiciary on charges of "humiliating and insulting the president as he accused him of being an agent" and publishing these comments on social media which may arouse sectarianism. On 30<sup>th</sup> July, the military court announced that it is incompetent to consider the case .

#### **A Lawsuit by Al Sayyad Publishing House Against George Taraboulsi**

Al Sayyad publishing house, during August 2019, filed a lawsuit against its representative in the syndicate of journalists, George Taraboulsi, before the Cybercrime and Intellectual Property Bureau, on charges of "insulting, defaming and humiliating", after Taraboulsi published the photo of Saied Freiha, the publishing house founder, blaming his sons for the deterioration of the publishing house. The owners considered it an insult .

## **Kuwait: Twitter is in agony**

### **1- Overview**

Internet and social media websites are of great interest to Kuwaitis, as Kuwaitis are among the highest worldwide users of social media websites, but on the other hand, the Kuwaiti government is relentlessly pursuing social media activists. The Kuwaiti government is considered one of the most oppressing Arab governments for tweeps, after publishing their opinions. Recently, the issue of fake social media accounts has been raised on the surface, which uncovered many corruption cases. The issue reached the National Assembly after Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, demanded that legislation be passed to regulate the telecommunication platforms that were full of those accounts.

### **2- Developments in the ICT sector**

Kuwait's population in 2019 reached about 4.2 million people, including about 1.2 million Kuwaitis, in addition to 3 million foreigners. The country achieved a huge spread of means of communication, as the number of mobile phone users reached about 7.1 million, with a prevalence of approximately 169%. The General Authority for Telecommunications and Information Technology (TRA) is responsible for supervising and monitoring the telecommunications sector. Unlike the landline services provided by the Ministry of Telecommunications, three companies operate the mobile phone lines, Zain, formerly known as Mobile Telecommunications Company - MTC. Ooredoo, formerly the National Telecommunications Company (NITC), and Kuwait Telecommunications Company (KTC), all of which are from the private sector, are under the control of the General Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA).<sup>19</sup>

---

The General Authority for Telecommunications and Information Technology, Report of the General Authority for Communications and Information Technology 2018, last visit, November 25, 2019, <https://citra.gov.kw/websites/ar/ReportsNdata/CITRA%20Final%20Report%202018.pdf> 19

The acquisition of Internet companies is the concern of local telecommunications companies. VIVA acquired quality Net, and Ooredoo acquired it by Fast Telco.<sup>20</sup>

### **3- The legal environment of the ICT sector**

The Kuwaiti National Assembly passed no law on Internet freedom from March 2017 to September 2019, but the flawed laws remained in force, including Act No. 63 of 2015, known as the Information Technology Crime Prevention Act, together with Act No. 8 of 2016 on electronic media. Such laws oblige those who seek to establish or operate electronic information websites and means were required to obtain authorization from the Ministry of Information.

### **4- Social Networks**

Internet users in Kuwait reach about 4.1 million, with a growth rate of about 98%, which is one of the highest in the world. Kuwait is one of the top countries in social media users. Facebook comes on top of the most popular websites in the country, where the number of Facebook users reaches about 3 million, Instagram users come in the second place, in terms of the number of users in Kuwait, where the number of users reaches about 1.8 million. While the violent pursuit of tweeps has reduced Twitter users to about 1.7

---

Al Rai's website, "acquiring Telecom Companies on Internet Providers: Acquiring International License and entering homes by Phone", posted May 19, 2019, last visit on November 25, 2019, <https://www.alraimedia.com/Home/Details?id=88bbce23-cd5e-4caf-b49d-ef56cd556311> 20

million users, driving Kuwait's tweeps to launch a Twitter campaign called #TwitterisnotaCrime, which is popular to limit encroachment on the right of tweeps to express their opinion and criticism.

### **5- Blocking and censorship**

The government is used to blocking websites without a judiciary ruling, calling it "electronic content blocking service". Telecommunications and Information Technology Authority has devoted a page on its website to receive requests to block any electronic content that "contradicts public interest, including public morality, the teachings of Islam, public order, national security, or otherwise prohibited under the laws of the State of Kuwait," the page said. A 2018 report by the General Authority for Telecommunications and Information Technology (TRA) said that 88% of website blocking requests came from the government, private parties. While individual reports reached 12%. The main reason for blocking is "violating public morals" by 43%, followed by violating intellectual property by 27%, offending the Islamic religion and the principles of society by 21%, then the online gambling websites by 9%.<sup>21</sup>

### **6- Prosecution and security threats**

#### **Al-Mulla acquitted of charges of offending Kuwait's Emir and offending Egypt**

---

A report by the Public Authority for Telecommunications and Information Technology 2018 published on the TRA website, last visit of November 25, 2019, <https://citra.gov.kw/websites/ar/ReportsNdata/CITRA%20Final%20Report%202018.pdf> 21

On March 13, 2017, the Court of Cassation (Kuwait's highest judicial level) rejected the appeal filed by the Public Prosecutor's Office against former MP Saleh Al-Mulla, and upheld the decision of the Court of the first instance and the Court of Appeal acquitting him of the charges of insulting the Emir of Kuwait and offending Egypt on the grounds of public tweets in January 2015., before Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's visit to Kuwait, he said, "Sisi is not welcome, only people of Kuwait have the right to enjoy its billions."

### **New verdicts against former MP Abdul Hamid Dashti**

Several Kuwaiti courts sentenced former MP Abdel Hamid Dashti, currently living outside Kuwait, for Twitter posts, to three years in absentia, where the Criminal Court on March 26, 2017, sentenced Dashti to three years in prison for tweeting. On the background of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz's visit to Kuwait, and on January 31, 2018, the Kuwaiti Court of Appeal upheld the sentence of imprisonment of Dashti, a year in effect and enforcement, on charges of insulting the judiciary, and the most recent verdicts issued on April 9, 2019. The Criminal Court sentenced Dashti to three years in prison in effect and enforcement for the offense of insulting Saudi Arabia through the social media network "Twitter".

### **Rania Al-Saad and Saleh Al-Said imprisoned for allegedly “offending Saudi Arabia”**

On March 27, 2017, the Court of Appeal sentenced the two tweeps, Rania Al-Saad, and Saleh Al-Said, to three years in prison for allegedly offending Saudi Arabia's King via Twitter, and annulled the first instance ruling that Rania Al-Saad and Saleh Al-said were acquitted of insulting Saudi Arabia on the social media website. That came after a complaint filed by the Saudi embassy on 27 August 2014.

## **Cassation court upholds the imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah**

Kuwait's Court of Cassation, on July 16, 2017, sentenced Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah to three years in prison in effect and enforcement for insulting the prince and some personalities, for publishing footage of him via the social media website Snapchat. The authority considered it offensive to the prince and some members of the royal family. Sheikh Abdullah continued to be in prison until his release on 14 November 2017, after receiving a special pardon in addition to the abdication of Sheikh Mohammed al-Abdullah.

## **Lawyer Hani Hussein imprisoned for 5 years on the pretext of spreading false news**

On October 8, 2017, the Criminal Court sentenced Hani Hussein to five years in prison for his report from the Ministry of Health accusing him of spreading false news, after tweeting about the presence of a "rigging Bengali doctor working in the Ministry of Health. He informed Interior Ministry officials of Bengali's identity and informed them of his original passports and forged Kuwaiti documents."

## **The final sentence of imprisonment against 5 members of the al-Fentas group**

Kuwait's Court of Cassation on Monday, May 15, 2017, ended the case of "al-Fentas Group", in which three defendants from the royal family: The brothers of the emir's brother, Adhby Fahad Al Ahmad, nephew of the prince, Al-Daoud Al-Sabah, and Khalifa Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The case was handed over to the Criminal

enforcement Prosecution, which asked the Interpol administration to seize the fugitive members of the group outside the country, to hand them over to Kuwait. The court decided once more to uphold the prison sentence against Adhby Fahd Al Ahmad Al Sabah, Ahmad Al-Daoud Al Sabah, Khalifa Al-Ali Al-Sabah, lawyer Abdul Mohsen Al-Otaiqi and lawyer Falah Al-Hajerif, for five years each on charges of "spreading false news that will damage the country and its security," "offending, defaming, and challenging judges and accusing them of bribery," as well as "phone abuse" for opinions published by activists on a group known as "al-Fentas Group." The court also upheld the innocence of Fawaz Al-Sabah and Yusef Al-Issa. Mohammed al-Jasim, Mashari Buyaes, Ahmad Siar, and Jarrah al-Zoufiri and decided that Sa'ud al-Asfour's appeal, who was arrested on 13 March 2017, could not be considered, which means supporting the sentence of one-year imprisonment in the same case. The sentence in absentia of 10 years' imprisonment, therefore, remains in force until his return and his appearance before the courts.

### **The pursuit of Abdullah Saleh for his tweets**

The Kuwaiti authorities pursued the Kuwaiti tweep Abdullah Mohammad Al-Saleh, who is currently living in Britain, with many cases for tweets published on his Twitter account, where the Kuwaiti Criminal Court sentenced Abdullah to prison on December 25, 2017, for five years, he worked and was charged with "offending Saudi Arabia" for tweets and videos, published via his Twitter account, to criticize Saudi Arabia for boycotting Qatar. On February 4, 2018, the Criminal Court sentenced Abdullah to five years in prison with labor and enforcement for insulting the UAE, and on April 28, 2019, the Criminal Court sentenced Abdullah to five years in prison with the job and for "spreading false news".

**In absentia sentences of imprisonment for tweep Saqr al Hashash for periods exceeding 80 years**

The Kuwaiti courts issued several sentences in absentia for the imprisonment of tweep Saqr Al-Hashash, who is outside Kuwait, for sentences which exceed 80 years, based on tweets published on his account. For example, on July 26, 2018, the Criminal Court sentenced Hashash to 10 years in absentia for "insulting the prince", and on January 15, 2019, the Criminal Court sentenced him to five years in absentia for "writing abusive statements to the majesty of the prince on Twitter, and on February 17, 2019, the Criminal Court sentenced him to three years in prison in absentia and confiscated the phone used in the case of insulting the prince.

**Hamed Turki Boiaes imprisoned and his phone confiscated**

On January 8, 2018, the Kuwaiti Criminal Court sentenced former newspaper Al-Shaab editor Hamid Turki Boiaes to two years in prison with a three-year suspended sentence for good conduct and the confiscation of his phone for alleged "insulting the princess", for writing several tweets in his Twitter account.

**Nasser Al-Duwaila detained for allegedly offending Saudi Arabia**

The Kuwaiti security services arrested the Kuwaiti politician and former member of the National Assembly, arrested Nasser Al-Duwaila on 28 June 2019 for allegedly offending Saudi Arabia, for tweeting on his account, then the Kuwaiti prosecution released him on bail two days after his detention.

### **Mossaed Moseilim sentenced for 5 years for criticizing UAE**

The Kuwaiti Criminal Court on May 27, 2019, in absentia, ordered the imprisonment of the Kuwaiti activist Mossaed Moseilim, for 5 years in effect and enforcement, and a fine of 10,000 dinars (about \$33,000), under accusations of "a hostile action against the United Arab Emirates, insulting the prince, spreading false news and abusing the phone". This is because of a tweet he published about the UAE.

### **Former National Assembly candidate arrested for allegedly offending Saudi Arabia**

Kuwaiti authorities arrested the activist and former candidate of the National Assembly, Mohammed Khaled al-Hajri, on May 20, 2019, for a three-year prison sentence, allegedly for insulting Saudi Arabia and Prince Muhammad bin Salman, on social media.

## **Jordan: Blocking is the Solution**

### **1- Overview**

The Jordanian government is looking forward to using the Internet in e-commerce. To pave the way forward for this, the parliament ratified drafts to facilitate the process. Moreover, the government developed an infrastructure that allows applying these laws. Now, most governmental procedures are applied over the Internet.

During the period between March 2017 to September 2019, the Internet and e-commerce tools varied in the Jordanian Kingdom. This period also witnessed numerous legislative and administrative events to facilitate using modern technology which has been introduced to governmental bureaus.

Developing telecommunications and the Internet, and its increasing use for e-commerce, led to an increase in Internet and social media users allowing them to express their opinions and beliefs. This bothered the government pushing it to impose control on e-media and social media.

### **2- Developments in the ICT Sector**

Telecommunication tools vary as there are: landlines and cell phones. It is to be noted that users of landline and cell phones are decreasing in comparison with 2017. In 2019, cell phone users dropped from 14 million to 8.7 million. The reasons for this drop go back to conditions and restrictions on selling cell phone lines in accordance to instructions imposed on cell phone sellers issued in 2017, in addition to taxes imposed on services and sales.

Thousands of families in Jordan abandoned the use of landline leading to the reduction of landline users from 370 thousand to 319 thousand because of the improved services offered by cell phone companies.



criminalized in accordance to the law, though, such a right is supposed to be exclusive to the judiciary.

On the other hand, the parliament, on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017, ratified the amended law for the Data Act year 2017. The law organizes the rules of acceptance to own telecommunication devices and lines. The law considers fax messages, telex and e-mails, and other telecommunication devices as official documents.

#### **4- Social Networks**

Internet users were enormously engaged on social media platforms to express their views. However, the Jordanian government got upset with the free criticizing opinions and calls for demonstrations, which led it to impose more laws and measures aiming at controlling these websites. Among the measures taken: threatening international companies to impose more taxes on Ads, as the Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, Mothanna Gharaibeh, stated on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2019 that the ministry is obliged to impose taxes on Ads and pages published on social media and Facebook.

The population in Jordan is around 10.4 million, while Internet users augmented to be about 9 million forming 86% of the population. Facebook users reached around 5.5 million, while Twitter users are approximately 533 thousand.

#### **5- Blocking and Surveillance**

The Jordanian government applies severe restrictions on publishing on the Internet, as it is obligatorily required to register online news websites to be licensed. The Media Institution has the authority to block websites without judiciary permission. Websites launched abroad were blocked too, though some young people established it abroad to have the benefit of western freedoms.

The Jordanian Media Institution, during March 2019, blocked around 45 websites after a warning sent to website admins to issue or renew their

license on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2019 under the Print and Publishing Act no. 8 for the year 1988 and its amendments no. 32 for the year 2012 as article 49 imposes on websites publishing news, interviews, articles and comments to register and issue a license. All legislation concerning printed and published outlets is applied to websites.

Blocking “Al Ordonia” news website:

Jordanian authorities blocked “Al Ordonia” news website hours after launching it on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019 without notice, under the pretext of violating license conditions mentioned in the Print and Publishing Act, as it publishes news about Jordan while being issued abroad.

Blocking My.Kali, a website specialized in queer news:

Lawyer Mohamed Al Qatishat, General Director of the Media Institution, decided on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017 to block My.Kali website under the pretext of violating article no. 49 of the Print and Publishing Act by not being registered or licensed. The decision came after a complaint filed by MP Dima Tahbob, against the website which is concerned with LGBTQ in Jordan.

It is worth mentioning that My.Kali is the first online magazine in the Middle East and North Africa focusing on the integration of people from different sexual orientations and transsexuals in society. The magazine was founded in 2007, by a group of students to counter homophobia and transphobia, and to defy the gender dichotomy in the Arab region.

Blocking “Watan- tweeting outside the flock”

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2017, Jordanian authorities blocked 'Watan-tweeting outside the flock' website without a judiciary verdict or warning, under article no. 49 of the Print and Publishing Act.

It is worth mentioning that the Watan website was launched in 1996, the next year, Saudi authorities blocked it, in 2010, the UAE blocked it.

After Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt decided to boycott Qatar, Egypt and Bahrain decided to block the website.

The blocking was not exclusive for the Media Institution, as the Ministry of Telecommunication shared in blocking applications and video games without judiciary permission:

Telecommunication blocks Jeni and Queeny applications which provide transportation services:

Mothanna Gharaibeh, Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019, vowed to block Jeni and Queeny applications, which provide transportation services after the parliamentary committee for services and transportation received demands from taxi drivers to remove the applications.

### Blocking PUBG

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority decided to block PUBG under the pretext of protecting users. The Authority issued instructions to the ISP companies to officially ban the game in Jordan.

### 6- Persecution and Security Threats

Jordanian government persecuted social media activists aiming at silencing criticizing voices and suppressing opposition:

**- Taha al-Daqamseh is imprisoned for “insulting the king”**

Security forces summoned activist Taha al-Daqamseh several times then he was summoned in the e-crimes unit. He turned himself in on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2019. He, then, was tried, unfairly, as he was interrogated about opinions he published on his Facebook account. His lawyer was not allowed to defend him. Two weeks later, Solh Gaza Amman court, on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019, sentenced Taha for one year under accusations of "insulting the king" under the e-crimes act articles.

**- Arab Organization for Human Rights and Countering Torture Director is jailed for Video published on Facebook**

The Public Prosecutor in Amman, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019, issued a decision to imprison the director of the Arab Organization for Human Rights and Countering Torture, Abdul Karim Al Sharida, for 14 days in Jowaida prison under accusations of "bad words" on the background of publishing a video on Facebook account, showing him criticizing the monarchy for assigning tribes Sheikhs. The public prosecutor approved releasing Sharida on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September with a bail.

**- Trying Hesham Ayasra for a video posted on Snapchat**

Security forces arrested the student movement activist Hesham Ayasra, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017, after posted a video on his Snapchat account expressing his opinions about the responsibility of the Jordanian leaders of killing a young man by an Israeli security guard in the Israeli embassy in Amman on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. Ayasra appeared before the state security prosecution which accused him of inciting against the political regime. He was detained until the state security court approved his release with a bail.

**-Jailing 5 activists under the e-crimes act**

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, public prosecutor detained: Islam Al Ayasra, director in chief of "Awa al Ordon" agency, Laith Al Kurdy, from

Jafra news website, Jihad Al Batayna from Mubasher 24 website, Ahmed Al Maghraby director in chief of Mehbash News, Morad Dawood Abo Eskandar, from Rassifa news, Amer Al Telawi, from Sakhr news and Ahmed Al Zebn, under accusations of insulting and defaming general secretary of the monarchy Youssef Al Essawi, under the e-crimes act on the background of publishing news about the alleged properties of Youssef Al Essawi.

After interrogating the activist and journalists, they were released except for Ahmed Al Maghraby who was detained for one renewable week in Jowaida Prison.

## **Iraq: Corruption did not spare the Internet**

### **1- Overview**

Telecommunications and Internet service in Iraq suffer from severe weakness and increase in prices due to several factors, including the destruction of parts of the network infrastructure by armed groups, weakness of the service companies, conflicts between owners of towers who provide citizens with the service, and the manipulation of some active companies in smuggling the Internet capacities and the introduction of smuggled capacities. The government is weakened by corruption, a sectarian division of power, and narrow partisan interests. Internet speed is considered the biggest challenge for investors in Iraq and Iraqi companies, banks and mass media lose millions of dollars as a result of weak and frequently cut Internet connection due to wrong governmental decisions.

### **2- Developments in the ICT sector**

Iraq suffers from political disorders since the US invasion in 2003, which is reflected in the weakness of the telecommunication sector's legal and physical infrastructure. The unrest also reflected in the government's policy toward users and Internet service providers. Communication services did not fulfill the ambitions of Iraqis, and Internet use in Iraq remains modest.

The Information and Telecommunications Authority and the Ministry of Telecommunications are responsible for the management and licensing of telecommunications companies. The Ministry of Telecommunications operates the General Company for Telecommunications and Mail and the General Company for Internet Services. The company is responsible for the optic fiber network, while the General Company for Telecommunications and Mail deals with Internet service and communication subscribers in Iraq, and provides wireless Internet service to government agencies. Three private companies offer telecommunications services in Iraq (Asiacell, Zain Iraq, Cork Telcom). The number of users among Iraq's population estimated by about 40 million in

mobile phone communication services is estimated at approximately 36 million subscribers, while the number of landline subscribers is estimated by about 2.1 million. Internet users in Iraq suffer from the imaginary capacities offered by Internet companies, and the rise of service prices. In addition to the repeated interruption.

### **3- The legal environment of the ICT sector**

The amended Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 applies to Internet users. The law contains many criminal defamation articles in which the penalty in publishing cases reaches the death penalty, life or temporary imprisonment, or confiscation of movable and immovable property and other penalties.

Since 2011, successive Iraqi governments have been trying to pass a law that can be used to control freedom of expression allowed by the use of the Internet and social media websites that have encouraged users to express their views. In 2011, the government introduced a draft law on "Cybercrime" to the parliament for discussion. But under pressure from civil society organizations, on February 6, 2013, the parliament had to return the draft law to the government to amend it.

On January 12, 2019, the House of Representatives began to discuss the "Cybercrime" law, which was submitted by the government for debate in Parliament. The Council completed the first reading of the law the same day, but the second reading of the bill was postponed after the escalation of human rights protests against it, which called on the parliament to entrust the relevant committees in the Council with reviewing the law and making the necessary modifications to its wording. On March 14, 2019, Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Hilbosi had already included the discussion of the bill on the agenda of the session, but the Human Rights Committee of the Council had requested that the paragraph on the draft law be removed from the agenda of the session, as had already been done.

The draft Code of crimes of Information contains four chapters, the first chapter contains definitions and objectives, the second

chapter contains penal provisions, while the third chapter contains procedures for gathering evidence, investigation, and trial, while the fourth chapter contains general and final provisions.<sup>24</sup> The law is a tool for silencing opponents and a threat to Internet activists. The law contains many harsh expressions of imprisonment, life and fine against Internet activists for vague crimes such as "harming the country's independence, unity, and safety or its economic, political, military or security interests", and "undermining public security or damaging the country's reputation", and "to damage the national economy and the financial confidence of the state."

On April 13, 2019, the House of Representatives also completed the first reading of the draft telecommunication and information law. On April 15, the first reading of the draft law of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology ended in preparation for voting on them in a public session.

#### **4- Social networks**

Iraqis rely on social networks to circulate news, shape public opinion, and organize mass protests, in the absence of effective social organizations. Social media have played an active role in exposing administrative corruption and the flaws in the country's political system. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information estimates the number of Internet users in Iraq at 11 million, 27.5% of a population estimated at 40 million, out of which 9 million are Facebook users, and 600 thousand Twitter users.

---

The draft law on "informatics crimes" was published on the Iraqi House of Representatives site on 12 January 2019 and the last visit on 17 October 2019 24

<http://parliament.iq/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/القرائة-الاولى-لقانون-جرائم-المعلوماتية.pdf>

## **5- Blocking and censorship**

The Internet in general, and social media websites in particular, are under the control of executive authorities, which incite security and intelligence services to arrest and torture Internet and social media activists. Several government officials and civil society activists have already been detained by the security services, according to reports from officials of the executive branch, on the background of criticism by activists of the level of public services, or widespread administrative corruption in service districts or ministries. As for blocking the Internet or social media websites, it has become commonplace in Iraq; the government often cuts off the Internet, blocks social networks, with school examinations, or peaceful protests. The government blames those it describes as "rioters". The Ministry of Telecommunications of Iraq, for example, announced on June 21, 2018, its intention to cut the Internet from Iraqi governorates, in conjunction with the holding of preparatory certificate examinations. The ministry explained its decision to cut the Internet by confronting the use of social media, notably "Facebook", in electronic cheating. In the early hours of July 13, 2018, Iraqi authorities partially cut the Internet, following protests in the south of the country, erupted on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, owing to high levels of unemployment and inadequate government services. NetBlocks then registered a complete Internet service shutdown, on July 14, 2018, in most Iraqi provinces, including in the capital Baghdad.

## **6- Prosecution and security threats**

### **Writer Samir Ubaid Hassan arrested for an article on Facebook**

Security forces raided the home of journalist Samir 'Ubaid Hassan, who holds both Iraqi and Norwegian citizenship, in the Qadisiya district of the capital Baghdad, on the evening of October 22, 2017. Security forces searched the house, confiscated numerous personal documents, his personal computers, and mobile phones. Then he was taken in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to an unknown location. After a four-day enforced disappearance, his family

learned that he was being held by the "intelligence service," because of an article he published on his Facebook account, on October 21, 2017, criticizing the prime minister.

Samir Ubaid Hassan was brought before an investigative judge in Baghdad several days after his arrest. He was charged with "spreading false rumors and news, and misleading public opinion" under article 210 of the amended Penal Code. Samir Ubeid's arrest, came on a complaint from the intelligence service, charging him of espionage until the Baghdad Central Criminal Court, on December 11, 2018, issued his release for lack of evidence.

### **Activist Bassem Khazal Khashan was sentenced to six years in prison for insulting state institutions**

On February 6, 2018, the Muthanna Criminal Court sentenced the activist, Bassem Khazal Khashan, to six years in prison for insulting state institutions in two cases filed by the City Council and the integrity Bureau, after posting a comment on his Facebook personal account, criticizing the integrity Board and the City Council for failing to take the documents he had submitted against officials. After extensive public claims and protests, the Federal Court of Cassation decided, on February 27 of the same year; Bassem Khashan, in one of the two counts, was released for lack of evidence, while in the other decision was overturned and revoked, in order to complete the investigations. It is worth mentioning that in the case of Khashan, he holds the American citizenship, and runs the "eyes on the law" organization. He worked through the law to expose the corruption of employees and officials in public jobs, winning some lawsuits, and bring billions back to the state treasury. Among the cases he won was the sentence against the former Director-General of the Department of Health in the governorate.

### **Arrest warrant against Hashem Al-Aqabi**

On June 26, 2018, the Karkh Investigation Court issued an arrest warrant for media figure, intellectual and leading political activist Dr. Hashem al-Aqabi, under article 226 of Iraq's Penal Code, alleging "the abuse of justice and the dissemination of lies through social media". Many journalists and organizations concerned with the defense of freedom of opinion and expression denounced the issuance of this memorandum and considered it an act of confiscation of freedom of expression.

### **The arrest of journalist Saif Al-Azzawi, owner of the page of "Al-Azamiya News"**

A special military force arrested journalist Saif Hilal Haqti al-Azzawi, the owner of the Al-Azamiya News page on "Facebook", from Al-Aazamiya, north of the capital Baghdad, on October 1, 2018, and took him to an unknown location. Al-Azzawi was released two days after his detention, on bail, after he was accused of blackmailing citizens and politicians through his news page, which is followed by more than one million and 200 thousand users on Facebook.

### **National Security detains Hussam Al Kaabi for criticizing a misspelling on Facebook**

The National Security Directorate in Najaf province, on the evening of March 8, 2019, arrested the NRT Arab correspondent in Najaf, Hussam al-Kaabi, before being released, on March 9, after he wrote a post on his Facebook profile, criticizing a misspelling of an "SMS" message from the National Security Service for citizens.

### **Activist Mohamed Jasem detained for criticizing Habanyia city mayor**

The local security services in Al Anbar governorate, arrested a civilian activist, Mohammed Jassim, from his home on 2 April 2019 after writing a "Facebook" post, criticizing the performance of the head of Habanyia city, a district in Khaldiya, west of Baghdad, after his city's streets were drowned in mud, due to a wave of rain, without the intervention of service devices in the city. Immediately after Jasim was arrested and held in custody, and before being questioned, the security forces, in violation of the laws, shaved his hair as an act of reprisal, insulting and humiliating. One day after his arrest, the investigating judge ordered Jasim's release on financial bail, after he was charged with "defamation", under article 433 of the Iraqi Penal Code.

### **Political activist Mohammad Kazem Al-Iraqi detained**

Security forces in Muthanna province arrested political activist Mohammed Kazem al-Iraqi on September 5, 2019, for criticizing the governor in a post on Facebook. The security authorities released him the following day, following demonstrations by dozens of Muthanna families to demand his release, accusing the government and the authorities of following the policy of muzzling voices, and targeting everyone who refuses corruption and administrative failure.

# Egypt: The Dark Tunnel

## 1- Overview

More banning, legal and security prosecutions of Internet activists are among the most prominent features of the situation of the internet in Egypt since 2017, where it has enacted special laws, formed governing councils, expanded security prosecutions and threats, and unreasonable or illogical blocking policies, even for a government hostile to freedom of expression.

Like other governments that are far from democracy, the Egyptian government wants to benefit from the Internet, but only according to its perception, which is the economy and the provision of the services it provides, without allowing citizens to benefit from it according to their perception, especially in the democratic struggle and expression of opinion. Therefore, Egypt became, with a population of about 100 million, almost vacant of genuinely independent journalists and the few credible professional websites are blocked.

## 2- Developments in the ICT sector

The telecommunications and information technology sector achieved higher growth than all other sectors in the country, reaching 16.4%. The share of the Telecommunications sector in the total local product reached about 8%. According to a report concerning the economic performance indicators for the second quarter of the current fiscal year 2018-2019 announced by the Ministry of Planning, Follow-up and Administrative reform.<sup>25</sup> However, this has not been reflected in the increasing number of Internet users, as their number stopped at about 56 million users. The weak service and the wider pursuit of social media critics, especially on

---

General Authority for Information, Planning: The Communications and Information 25

Technology sector tops the most developed sectors by 16.4%, published on 2 February 2019, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/story/182320/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%ae%d8%b7%d9%8a%d8%b7-%d9%82%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%aa%d8%b5%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%88%d8%aa%d9%83%d9%86%d9%88%d9%84%d9%88%d8%ac%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%88%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%8a%d8%aa%d8%b5%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%83%d8%ab%d8%b1-%d9%86%d9%85%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%8b-%d8%a8%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%a8%d8%a9-16.4%25?lang=ar> accessed September 2019.

Facebook, seem to have been one of the important reasons why the number of Internet users has been falling since 2017.

### **3- The legal environment of the ICT sector**

With the Cybercrime Prevention Act passed in August 2018, about 45% of Egyptians "Internet users in Egypt" are subjected to various reasons for imprisonment and fines for having given their political or religious opinions on social media, as well as criminalizing many aspects of Internet use. Besides, press and media regulations included penalties for imprisonment, fines, and blocking of websites, blogs, and even personal pages.

The Official Gazette issue No. 32 bis.C, of August 14, 2018, published the provisions of Act No. 175 of 2018, known as combating cybercrime. After being discussed in the parliament in April of the same year, until the end of September 2019, its executive regulations have not been issued yet, and the law provides for 29 penalties, including imprisonment from 3 months up to 5 years, and also a fine from 10 thousand Egyptian pounds to 20 million Egyptian pounds. The law also prevents publishing any information about the army's movements and conditions, or publishing the ideology of terrorist groups - a term not specified in the law - the law also allows the blocking of websites and pages based on those accusations, it carries clear aspects of a complete repression of the Internet<sup>26</sup>, and gives the right to search, monitor and control the data to the judicial authorities. The law includes four sections containing 45 articles and its bylaws have not been issued yet.<sup>27</sup> The

---

<https://www.anhri.info/?p=1176> Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, \_\_\_\_\_ 26  
after the absence of independent press, Internet use has become a risk in Egypt an analysis of the  
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information - ANRHI on the shortcomings of the Cybercrime  
Prevention Act, published September 19, 2018, Checked in September 2019.

, posted August 19, 2018, Al Youm Al Sabe: we publish the full text of the \_\_\_\_\_ 27  
Cybercrime Prevention Law after the President's ratification,  
<https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/8/19/%d9%86%d9%86%d8%b4%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%b5-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%85%d9%84-%d9%84%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%85%d9%83%d8%a7%d9%81%d8%ad%d8%a9-%d8%ac%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a6%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%86%d8%aa%d8%b1%d9%86%d8%aa-%d8%a8%d8%b9%d8%af-%d8%aa%d8%b5%d8%af%d9%8a%d9%82-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b1%d8%a6%d9%8a%d8%b3/3916593> accessed September 2019.

Parliament's Telecommunications Committee has also approved a bill on the protection of personal data, which consists of 49 articles, among the most prominent articles of the bill producing a public economic body called "Protecting personal data center" specialized at organizing, providing and dealing with data, moreover, its members have the right of judiciary seizure. The bill would also punish the workers with a term of imprisonment of not less than one year and a fine of not less than one hundred thousand Egyptian pounds or more than one million Egyptian pounds, or one of these two penalties, in the event of collecting, exchanging, processing, disclosing, divulging or making personal data available by any means other than legally authorized or without the consent of the person concerned.<sup>28</sup> The Press and Media Organization Act and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation were also passed after President Sisi ratified it in August 2018. Law No. 180 of 2018<sup>29</sup> provides some articles on online journalism, and many have generally called it the law that killed journalism.<sup>30</sup> The law considers any personal account on social media that has more than 5,000 followers a media platform applicable to media platforms rules, laws and penalties.<sup>31</sup>

---

Al-Ahram Gate, details of the electronic Personal Data Protection Bill. Prison and a 28  
one million Egyptian pounds fine, published August 7, 2018,  
<http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/1999248.aspx> Checked in September 2019.

Al Youm Al Sabee, Al-Sisi, approves the promulgation of the Law on the 29  
Organization of the Press and Information and the Supreme Council, posted September 1, 2018,  
<https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/9/1/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%b3%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d8%b5%d8%af%d9%82-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d8%a5%d8%b5%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%aa%d9%86%d8%b8%d9%8a%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%81%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%b9%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89/3933193> accessed September 2019

Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, increasing anger... 30  
Democratic path in Egypt 2018  
Checked in September 2019. <https://www.anhri.info/?p=4193>

France 24, Egypt: Social Media Users Control Act in force, published September 1, 31  
2018, <https://www.france24.com/ar/20180901-%d9%85%d8%b5%d8%b1-%d8%b4%d8%a8%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%88%d8%a7%d8%b5%d9%84->

#### **4- Social networks**

Among the 56 million Internet users in Egypt, Facebook is the leading website when it comes to the number of users in social networks, as the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information - ANRHI estimated them at 46 million, while YouTube is ranked the second with 35 million users, and the number of Twitter users increased to about 7.5 million.

#### **5- Blocking and censorship**

Blocking, banning and attempting to impose a total blackout on freedom of information and to confiscate freedom of the Internet, this is a summary of the situation of blocking and censorship in Egypt from 2017 until today, with the number of blocked sites reaching a staggering number of more than 500 blocked websites in Egypt from May 2017 to September 2019.

Among them are 108 press websites, the rest between blogs, human rights websites and services websites. Among the most famous blocked press websites are all Al-Jazeera Media Group, Al-Doc and Al-Jazeera English, Arab 21 News website, Sassa Post, Mada Masr, Masr Al Arabiya, Al-Arabi newspaper's website, which is based in London, Al Badil, Al Bedaya, Bawabet Yanayer, and 6 April Youth Movement websites.

Services, such as the Tor browser website used by users around the world, have been blocked for a long time. In August 2017, Egyptian authorities began blocking websites that provide VPN and proxy services that help bypass the blocking, including many websites, some of which were already blocked before blocking! The (I2P) project website and the (Free Internet) project website were blocked. They are websites that help to use the Internet while keeping users private and anonymous. The Egyptian authorities also blocked human rights websites, especially the independent ones, including the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders.

---

[%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%ad%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ac%d8%aa%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%b9%d9%8a](#), accessed September 2019.

The Egyptian authorities broke a record in the speed of blocking an opposition website, as the Egyptian authorities blocked the website of "Katib" only nine hours after it was launched.

### **Ministry of Education and the Online Examination System**

The Ministry of Education tried to apply the online examination system using a special tablet system distributed to students. It started to examine the system with the first year students in secondary schools in their examinations.

The ministry failed to hold the Arabic language exam on schedule on 24 March 2019, and the examinations continued to be disrupted due to "the system failure". Students complained that the electronic examination platform was not accessible in the new system, and the ministry explained this failure as "the System failed"<sup>32</sup>. The failure resulted in some demonstrations on May 21 in several governorates by secondary students who were subjected to security attacks and some students were arrested.<sup>33</sup>

## **6- Prosecution and security threats**

Before the Cybercrime act was finally issued, we observed hundreds of cases of arrests and verdicts against activists, politicians, and citizens who expressed their opinion on their pages, and with charges related to the Internet and mass media in general, we try to mention some of what we observed. We cite some examples of "Misusing social media" and "Publishing false news" charges.

---

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information; the Internet in the Arab world in the first quarter of 2019 32

<https://www.anhri.info/?p=7496> Checked in September 2019.

Arabic Network for Human Rights Information: Workers protests indicator 33  
<https://www.anhri.info/?p=8797> Checked in September 2019.

- "La Wennabi Ya Abdo – No please Abdo", a satirical campaign that was launched in November 2017 rejecting Sisi running for the elections for another presidential term. The founder of the campaign, journalist Ahmed Abdul Aziz, was arrested along with another 28 citizens on charges of "publishing false news". The campaign spread widely on social media, planning to collect signatures against Sisi running the elections. However, members were all arrested and charged in case no. 1 of 2018, state security. Nine of the defendants were sentenced to 5 years, including the founder, and 12 were sentenced in absentia to five years, the other 5 were sentenced in absentia to 15 years including actor Hesham Abdul Hamid. Two were acquitted in absentia.
- Case of "al-Karama"(Dignity) Party and "Al Tayyar Al Shaabi" (The Popular Current) Party, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2019, some activists and politicians gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution in Al Karama Party headquarters. Two years later, 6 of Al Karama members were arrested. Afterward, other defendants were included in case no. 1739 of 2018 State Security. Accusations, in this case, are: publishing false news and social media misuse. The case is pending investigations.
- Malak Al Kashef, Using a Facebook account to disrupt public order; is the charge for which Malak was arrested along with the charge of joining a terrorist group! Malak is a 19-year-old transgender girl. Malak Al Kashef was imprisoned in inappropriate circumstances because of her Facebook posts for about two months before being released in the same case; no. 1739 of 2018 State Security, in July 2019.
- Case 621 of 2018 Supreme State Security, another case that began in early 2018, involving suspects at various times and involving publishing false news, including a blogger, a political activist, a dentist, a lawyer, a proofreader, and some public figures. It also included Mohammed Khaled, a student who was arrested on the background of a video posted on his Facebook page, criticizing the presidential elections, as Ahmed Moussa, a talk show host, instigated the authorities to arrest him, and he was arrested at the same night!
- Amal Fathi, case no. 7991 of 2018 Maadi misdemeanors. She was arrested for posting a video criticizing a harassment incident she was subjected to and was emotional and criticized the country in general. She was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 Egyptian pounds. Accusations, as usual, are "publishing false news on the Internet".
- Syndicate activist, Sayeda Mohamed Fayed, and Wagdi Al Sayed Ali were arrested. Sayeda was included in case no. 29377 of 2018, Helwan misdemeanors. She was accused of publishing false news, for criticizing the nursing situation in Egypt on her personal Facebook account. While Wagdi was included in case no. 5053 of 2018, accused in the same incident of publishing false news.

- Writer Mahmoud Mohamed Imam, a defendant in case no. 1959 of 2018, al Khosous administrative. Accused of misusing social media, for publishing posts criticizing the regime on his Facebook account. He was detained for one year and a half and the case is still pending investigations.
- Mohamed Ramadan, a lawyer, and a human rights defender. He was arrested and included in case no. 140 of 2017, East of Alexandria felonies prosecutions. Charges are: insulting the president and misusing social media. He was sentenced in absentia to 10 years and house arrest for 5 years. Along with preventing him from using social media for 5 years! He appealed to repeat procedures, the case was considered until June 2018, then the court dismissed considering the case pending the Constitutional Court's decision in the case filed by the defendant's lawyer.  
At the end of the year 2018, Ramadan was rearrested in case no. 16576 of 2018 Awal Montazah, for publishing his photo on his account wearing a yellow vest, showing solidarity with the yellow vests movement in France. He was charged with publishing false news and inciting to demonstrate.

## **Bahrain: Such Hostility**

### **1- Overview**

After imposing a siege on e-media, imprisoning and torturing social media activists and human rights defenders, such as Nabeel Rajab, Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja and others who are unfairly detained in Bahrain, the authorities expelled some opinion-makers and criminalized following pages of opposing figures and human rights defenders considering such accounts "inciting and destabilizing". The Bahraini government is the first worldwide to criminalize the follow button.

### **2- Developments in the ICT Sector**

Bahrain is witnessing a remarkable change in telecommunication infrastructure. Users of broadband services are increasing. The government expanded the optic fiber cables, while cell phone users are decreasing. The Kingdom's population reaches around 1.6 million. Cell phone service users decreased in comparison with 2016, as it reached approximately 2.087 million while landline users reached about 226 thousand. The broadband users reached approximately 2.33 million. Internet users reached around 1.5 million, forming 94% of the population, out of which 1.3 million have access to the Internet through cell phones. The cell phone services are offered by three companies: 'Bahrain Telecommunication Company Balteco', VIVA Bahrain and Zain Bahrain.

### **3- Legal Environment for the ICT sector**

This period witnessed new legislation concerning the Internet, private data and Terrorism Act. The King, on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017, issued decree no. 38 of 2017, to amend a bunch of articles in the telecommunications

act concerning granting license for telecommunication networks and preventing monopoly...<sup>34</sup>.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018, he issued a decree no. 30 of 2018 concerning protecting personal data which was applied on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019. The law grants individuals and institutions the right to direct personal data and take control over their privacy. The law established a "Body of Protecting Personal Data" which is entitled to supervise protecting such data. The body includes seven members to manage it from different perceptions: Bahrain University, Cabinet, Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, Bahraini central bank, Trade, and Industry chamber and a body that represents businessmen in financial institutions along with a member specialized in technology.

The law states that whoever deals with data in an outlawed way or without notifying the body or without acquiring a license will be sentenced to one year in prison and fined 20 thousand Dinar (53 thousand US Dollars).

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, the King issued a decree no. 54 of 2018 to issue a law for emails, the law grants validity for the electronic archives concerning civil and trading deals proved in civil publications which has evidence under the law of proof in civil and trading documents as long as it copes with conditions<sup>35</sup>.

On 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2019, the King ratified the law no.8 of 2019 to amend article no. 11 of law no. 58 of 2006 concerning protecting society from

---

Legislation and Opinion legal website, decree no. 38 of 2017 to amend some articles in the telecommunication act issued with a decree no. 48 of 2002 – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017, last visit 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019  
[http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/AdvancedSearchDetails.aspx?id=145614#.Xe76DRtS\\_IU](http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/AdvancedSearchDetails.aspx?id=145614#.Xe76DRtS_IU)

terrorism. The new law states that whoever promotes, hails, justifies, encourages terrorist acts, in or outside the Kingdom, will be sentenced to 5 years in prison and fined to 2000 Dinar (\$5300)...<sup>36</sup>

#### **4- Social Networks**

Social media in Bahrain became a principal source for news, an open space for discussion and a developed tool in forming public opinion. Bahraini authorities are keen on using such a tool and occupy a wide space on social media aiming at controlling voices calling for reform, threatening and terrifying the public in order not to follow human rights defenders. The Administration of Countering Cybercrime published a tweet on its official account on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019, threatening citizens if they follow accounts considered inciting and destabilizing, adding to this, those who share posts from such accounts are going to be punished. The administration considered blocking such accounts a “patriotic act”.

The General Manager of the Administration of Countering Cybercrime, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019, asserted that sharing posts from human rights defenders' accounts, which he considered “inciting and destabilizing” or providing any support to them through comments holds individuals liable.<sup>37</sup>

---

law no. 8 of 2019 published on Legislation and Legal Opinion on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019 – 36  
last visit: 9 November 2019

[http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/196887.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscJUAh5wTFxPQnjc67hw%2Bcd53dCDU8XkwhyDqZn9xoYKj2QA8aA6TMDowGbQcbszWjaFdsihzbiJWQ%3D%3D#.XckdYq9S\\_IU](http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/196887.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscJUAh5wTFxPQnjc67hw%2Bcd53dCDU8XkwhyDqZn9xoYKj2QA8aA6TMDowGbQcbszWjaFdsihzbiJWQ%3D%3D#.XckdYq9S_IU)

News on Ministry of Interior website titled "responsible freedom of 37  
expression is available like other freedoms" - published on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2019 – last visit: 12<sup>th</sup>  
<https://www.policemc.gov.bh/news/ministry/92432> December 2019

Facebook users in Bahrain reach around one million, The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information states that Twitter users in Bahrain amount to around 600 thousand, while Snapchat users are about 825 thousand and Instagram users are approximately 700 thousand.

#### **5- Blocking and Surveillance**

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, in coordination with telecommunication companies working in Bahrain, is trying to control the electronic content and silence opposition through blocking websites that criticize the government and uncover corruption.

During this period the government blocked some websites:

Al Qatari websites, al Jazeera websites, and that were perpetuated in May 2017 after statements released by Qatari Emir concerning relations with Iran, Hamas and the Muslim brotherhood.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018, the government blocked “Awal”, one month after it was launched. Users found an electronic message stating: this site is closed for violating the Kingdom's laws”.

#### **6- Persecution and Security threats**

The Interior Ministry threatens human rights accounts' followers:

The Bahraini Ministry of Interior, on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019, threatened citizens residing in it to take legal measures against them if they follow “accounts targeting social security in Bahrain”. Calling to unfollow such accounts. The ministry, in a statement, accused Sayed Youssef Al Mohafza, a human rights defender residing in Germany, and Hassan Abdul Nabi, an activist who is residing in Australia of “running accounts targeting Bahrain's reputation”. Moreover, it accused Adel Marzouq, a journalist residing in London of “targeting stability among Bahraini sects”, on 21<sup>st</sup> May, the ministry threatened him and whoever promotes for him to be held accountable.

Sentencing Nabeel Rajab to 5 years for tweets criticizing the war in Yemen:

Nabeel Rajab, a human rights defender and director of Gulf Center for Human Rights, is spending a 5-year-sentence in prison on charges of "defaming a foreign country" on the background of tweets he published in which he was criticizing Saudi Arabia and its alliance against Yemen. Rajab is spending another one year sentence for making an interview with media outlets in which he criticized the Bahraini government.

It is worth mentioning that Rajab was arrested on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016 and held in solitary confinement for 9 months until he was transferred to the Ministry of Interior's hospital as he suffered complications from a surgery he underwent on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017.

Sentencing activist Najah Ahmed Youssef to 3 years:

Activist Najah Ahmed Youssef was summoned by Security Services Center in Al Moharaq province on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017 because she accompanied her son (14 years old) in an investigation concerning protesting without permission. Security forces interrogated Najah after interrogating her son on charges of "running accounts on social media publishing articles and videos inciting to hate the regime" as she runs a page that publishes news about protests against the Formula One race held in Bahrain.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, a Bahraini court sentenced Najah to 3 years on charges of "calling to changing the regime through social media accounts". The court did not take into consideration Najah's complaint concerning security personnel who physically assaulted her, tried to tear her clothes, touched her reproductive organs and threatened her with rape. The appeal court, in the first degree, upheld the verdict on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

Arresting and torturing Ibtisam al Sayegh, a human rights defender:

Security forces, on 3 July 2017, stormed Ibtisam Al Sayegh's house, a human rights defender and responsible for monitoring and documentation of violations in Peace Organization for Democracy and Human rights. This took place after tweeting about abusing detained females in a police station at Eissa city. Security forces led her to an unknown place without judiciary permission. Sayegh was held in solitary confinement in Eissa city and it was reported that she underwent torture and sexual abuse. On 18<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the public prosecution issued a decision to detain Sayegh for six months pending investigations under the Terrorism Act, on charges of "hiding behind human rights to correspond with Dignity for Human Rights Organization and provide them with false information about the situation in Bahrain targeting the state's image."

Sayegh underwent long interrogations and was detained away from other prisoners. She went on a hunger strike in July 2017 in protest of the abuse she suffered. She was released on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017 pending the case.

Imprisoning Sayed Al Derazi, a twitter activist, on charges of inciting hatred against the regime:

Security forces arrested Sayed Ali Al Derazi, a twitter activist, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2018, on charges of inciting to hate the regime and insulting the king on the background of posts published on twitter. The court, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, sentenced Derazi to two years on charges of "using social media to publish 200 posts for 5 years inciting hatred against Bahrain's government and insulting the King and his family."

Imprisoning Ibrahim Sherif for posts supporting the Sudanese demonstrations:

A Bahraini court, on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019, sentenced an opposition figure and a member of the central committee for Waad association (National Democratic Work Association), Ibrahim Sherif, to six months in prison and a fine of 500 Dinar (\$1325) to suspend the implementation of the prison sentence on charges of "insulting a president of a foreign state" on the background of a post published on Twitter on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2018, showing the photo of Al Bashir and stating "Go out man, 30 years ago Omar Bashir came on a tank claiming to be a savior and in his era civil wars erupted and Sudan was divided not to mention poverty, starvation and humiliating Sudanese people, it is about time for the Sudanese people to get their freedom and to oust this dictator".

Imprisoning Ibrahim al-sheik on charges of publishing rumors during wartime:

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 2019, the public prosecution decided to imprison journalist and writer in Akhbar al Khalij newspaper, Ibrahim Sheikh, after being accused of "publishing rumors during wartime", the accusations are based on a complaint filed by the Administration of Countering cybercrime, accusing Sheikh of "harming national security and public regime and damaging the public interest" for criticizing media coverage of the war in Yemen through an article published on his account on social media titled "media misleading and military catastrophe" he was released on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

Imprisoning lawyer Abdullah Al Hashem on charges of publishing false news:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, the public prosecution summoned Abdullah Al Hashem for investigation after receiving a complaint from the Administration of Countering Cybercrime accusing Hashem of "using his personal account to publish false news that may harm public order". The

prosecution decided to imprison him for a week pending investigations and confiscating his cell phone after accusing him of publishing false news that may damage the public system, on the background of posts published on twitter. He was released on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019 pending case.

Trying political activist Ali Jassem on charges of insulting God:

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 2019, public prosecution interrogated political activist and member of United Gathering, Ali Jassem, about a complaint filed against him by the Administration of Countering Cybercrime accusing him of insulting God in his Instagram account. The prosecution decided to detain Jassem pending the case and referring him to trial after accusing him of "attacking religion, insulting, defaming, and misusing social media".

## **Algeria: Facebook did it**

### **1- Overview**

Algerian authorities fear websites and social media after controlling traditional media outlets. During this period, Algerian authorities tried to control public opinion through blocking websites and occasionally the Internet. Moreover, it terrified online journalists and activists by arbitrary arrests and political trials. Nevertheless, the Internet and social media users are remarkably increasing. Citizens in Algeria now have access to numerous information sources, they even share in creating it. The Internet plays a great role in uncovering the authorities' corruption, mobilizing and organizing protesters who flooded the streets in February 2019, protesting the extension of Bouteflika's term, under the "No for the fifth term" slogan. The demonstrations led to ousting Bouteflika and trying a number of the regime's figures.

### **2- Developments in the ICT sector**

The Algerian population reaches approximately 43 million. The ICT sector witnessed a remarkable development during the period covered by this report. Statistics point that users of cell phones increased to around 51 million, users of landline reached about 4 million. Algeria has three companies providing cell phone networks services, while "Algerie Telecom" is monopolizing the landline networks and the ADSL services. "Algerie Telecom -SPA" is a public economic institution with social funds shares.

The three cell phone networks companies are Mobilis – Algeria Telecom, with 42% of the telecommunication market shares in Algeria, Orascom Telecom Algeria (GAZI), a branch of the Egyptian Orascom Telecom, with 30% of the market shares and "Watania Telecom Algeria", a shareholding company with 27% of the market shares.

### **3- The legal environment for the ICT sector**

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018, the parliament ratified draft law no. 18-04, determining general basics concerning emails and telecommunication. The draft came into effect after it was published in the official gazette on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018.<sup>38</sup> The law includes some procedures organizing the sector, as it asserts that emails and telecommunications are under state surveillance which determines and apply measures of establishing and using different services.

The parliament also, on the same day, ratified draft law no. 18-05K concerning e-commerce. The law was published in the official gazette on 16 May 2018, including some articles concerning e-commerce.<sup>39</sup>

Deceased President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in a speech recited by Minister of Justice on his behalf on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018, on the National Day of Lawyers, uncovered efforts to prepare a draft law to counter cybercrime, yet, he did not announce a date to submit the draft.

### **4- Social Networks**

Algeria witnesses an increase in Internet and social media users. Statistics point out that around 25.4 million inhabitants are using the

---

law no. 18-04 determining general basics concerning email and telecommunication – published in the official gazette no. 27 on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018  
<https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/JO-ARABE/2018/A2018027.pdf>

· Law no. 18-05 concerning e-trading – published in the official gazette no. 28 on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018  
<https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/JO-ARABE/2018/A2018028.pdf>

Internet, forming approximately 59% of the population. As for social networks, Algerians prefer mostly Facebook, with around 19 million users and around 480 thousand Twitter users. Instagram users exceed 4 million, while users of Snapchat reach around 2 million users.

Social networks, especially Facebook, had a prominent role in mobilizing thousands to demonstrate on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2019 protesting Bouteflika's fifth term. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019, protesters succeeded in ousting Bouteflika after 20 years in power.

#### 5- **Blocking and Surveillance**

Executive authorities cut the Internet during peaceful protests and high school exams. Moreover, websites were being blocked without judiciary permission aiming at restricting the impact of news websites and social media on public opinion. For example, protesters complained of the deterioration of the Internet speed on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

Among the news websites which were blocked: "Everything about Algeria" which was blocked since June 2019 for covering the protests. The same website was blocked on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 on Algerie Telecom and Mobilis networks without explanations.

As the high school exams launched during June, every year, the authorities ban access to social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube, along with Whatsapp. The blockage is sustained throughout the exams period to avoid the leaking of exams.

The governmental "Algerie Telecom" blocked Youtube and many google services in Algeria, on 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2019, the blockage was sustained till midnight. The procedure was carried out after a video was posted showing the former Algerian defense minister, Khaled Nazar, calling for Algerian soldiers to "comprehend people's demands", which was interpreted as incitement against army leader, Ahmed Qaied Saleh.

## **6- Persecution and security threats**

### **Trying the activist Haj Gharmoul**

Security forces, in Moaskar state (west of the capital), arrested the Human Rights Algerian Association activist and member in the National Committee for Unemployed Rights, Al-Haj Gharmoul on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2019 for publishing a photo on Facebook showing him with a colleague carrying a banner protesting the fifth term of Abdulaziz Bouteflika.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2019, the Moaskar State court issued a verdict sentencing Haj Gharmoul for 6 months and a fine of 30 thousand Algerian Dinars (250 US Dollars) on charges of "insulting a statutory body" under the article no. 145 of the criminal act. Haj Gharmoul spent six months in Sidi Emohammed prison in Moaskar state until he was released on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

### **Arresting human rights defender Kamal Al Din Fakhar**

Security forces, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, arrested human rights defender Dr. Kamal Al Din Fakhar, for posting on Facebook. He spent 48 hours in the judiciary police station in the security council of Ghardia state, he later appeared on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April before the Public Prosecutor in Ghardia court. Then he was referred to an investigative judge who sentenced him on charges of "disturbing public security, inciting to violence and insulting state institutions including the judiciary".

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019, Kamal Al Din Fakhar was announced dead in "Frantz Fanon hospital" in Balida (50 km from the capital), after complications due to a hunger strike he continued for two months.

It is worth mentioning that Fakhar was released on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2017 after being jailed for two years on the background of violent incidents which erupted between Malikis and Abadis in Ghardia in the year 2015 leading to the death of 20 persons and hundreds of injured.

### **Trying activist Ramzi Shakhab for inciting to demonstrate**

Lawyer and human rights defender Ramzi Shakhab was summoned by the cybercrime police of Khnashla state, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2019. The public prosecution referred the case to a misdemeanors court, accusing him of "inciting to demonstrate" through social media, on the background of a 4 minutes video published on his Facebook account in February showing his rejection of Bouteflika's fifth term.

### **Arresting journalist Ismail Gerbal for an article published on "Alg 24".**

Algerian intelligence, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018, arrested journalist Ismail Gerbal, editor-in-chief of Nahar channel, and editor of the French edition of the website, for publishing an article titled "The Information interests, where did it go?" on Alg 24 website of Nahar media group. In this article, Gerbal criticized Othman Tartak, head of the presidency intelligence. Hours later he was released under media pressure and demands to stop pursuing opinion-makers.

### **Sentencing blogger Marzouk Tawati**

The primary court in Begaya (east of the capital), on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018, sentenced blogger Marzouk Tawati, to 10 years and a fine of 50 thousand Dinar (\$430) on charges of inciting to demonstrate, calling for a sit-in in public squares, providing foreigner powers with intelligence information which may harm the military, diplomatic or economic positions of Algeria. The accusations were formed on the background of a video in which he interviewed the spokesman of the Israeli foreign ministry on his blog. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2018, the Begaya court reduced the sentence to 7 years. The supreme court repealed the verdict in January 2019 referring the case to the appeal court in Sakikeda (500 km east of the capital). On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, the court reduced the sentence to 5 years, two of them to be executed. Having already served these two years he was released.

### **Trying Journalist Adlan Malah**

Security forces arrested Adlan Malah, a journalist and editor-in-chief of the Dazayer Press website on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2018, on the background of a complaint filed by Anis Rahmani, owner of Nahar channel, after Malah published two articles on Algerie Direct website. Malah is the editor-in-chief of this website. Malah was tried on charges of “insulting public institutions, audiovisual recording without a license or permission and violating the sanctity of private life. Malah spent a month in detention then he was released pending the case. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Al Sharaka court acquitted Malah of 16 charges of insult and defamation filed by the general director of Nahar group and editor-in-chief of Algeria 24 following Nahar group.