

Nilesat blocks transmission of Alhewar TV

Egyptian state-run satellite, Nilesat, stopped the transmission of Alhewar TV on 1 April 2008 without warning or giving clear reasons for their decision. Alhewar TV, which broadcasts from London, is viewed by thousands of people in the region via the Nilesat satellite. It is known for its credibility, courageous and critical coverage including on social and political issues in Egypt.

At the end of February this year, Nilesat also blocked the transmission of Al-zawraa and Al-Baraka stations, allegedly at the request of the US Administration.

"Such an act is a clear indication of the intention of the Egyptian Government to go ahead with implementation of the Arabic Charter on Satellite endorsed by the Arab information ministers this February. This is the latest in a series of attacks in Egypt against freedom of the press and the free flow of information. Egypt is on a roll. But it is going downhill," says Dr. Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19's executive director.

ARTICLE 19 once again strongly condemns the Arabic Charter on Satellite which stands in opposition to Article 32 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights that guarantees the right to information and freedom of expression. The organisation would also like to remind Egypt which is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of its obligations and pledges to human rights and freedom of expression in particular.

Arabic Charter

The charter was agreed to on Tuesday, 12 February 2008 at a special meeting of Ministers of Information of the Arab League states in Cairo held at the request of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. With the exception of Qatar and Lebanon, member states of the Arab League voted in favour of the non-binding document.

Although not legally binding, the document is considered a symbolic blow to freedom of expression and a regional attempt by Arab governments to restrict satellite TV, the only avenue for free expression in most of the Arab World. The document is particularly dangerous in that it threatens to "withdraw, freeze or not renew the work permits of media which break the regulations."

"Stations are required not to offend the leaders or national and religious symbols in the Arab world ... not to damage social harmony, national unity, public order or traditional values ... to conform to the religious and ethical values of Arab society and take account of its family structure ... refrain from broadcasting anything which calls into question God, the monotheistic religions, the prophets, sects or symbols of the various religious communities ... and protect Arab identity from the harmful effects of globalisation," are just some of the vague provisions prevalent in the document, which if implemented will inevitably mute all forms of political expression and hinder the only avenue for free expression in the region - satellite

TV.

In March 2008, the Lebanese National Audio-Visual Council declared its objections to the "Principles for Organising Satellite TV in the Arab World" charter. In the same month, 34 Arab human rights organisations issued a statement declaring their "total rejection" of the document that aims to impose new restrictions on the Arab satellite channels. According to the statement "the charter contains statements that correspond to the same charges targeting opponents of the Arab governments."

For further information on the Arabic regional charter on satellite broadcasting, see:

<http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/91466>

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