

# Egyptian court says no to websites' ban

An attempt by an Egyptian judge to ban 51 websites to which he takes exception suffered a setback recently when a court ruled against him.

In a court ruling restoring hope to defenders of freedom of opinion and expression in Egypt, the Administrative Judicial Court issued a decision on 29 December 2007 in Case No. 15575 / 61, in which Judge Abdul Fattah Murad sought a ban on 51 Egyptian websites. The court rejected the request, emphasising support for freedom of expression and the importance of not compromising the freedom of these websites as long as they do not undermine fundamental beliefs or public order.

This historic sentence comes as the best conclusion to a year that witnessed a sharp retreat in press freedom and freedom of expression in Egypt. Such a retreat left many defenders of freedom of expression on the verge of despair and frustration. Yet this ruling emphasises that there is always a glimmer of light and that the struggle of defenders of freedom of expression is not in vain.

The ruling in support of freedom of expression is a blow to the new "Hesba" men, who are targeting freedom of expression and press freedom. It is also a blow to those who seek to impose a climate of fear and panic in the hearts of writers and Internet users.

"Minor victories give us hope and the ability to continue, and this sentence restored our confidence that our efforts in support of freedom in Egypt are not lost in vain," said Ahmed Seif Al-Islam Hamad, a human rights activist and former director of Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC).

"We are pleased with this sentence that restores things to normal and restores consideration for human rights, press institutions and blogs that have been unjustly described as 'terrorist'," said Gamal Eid, executive director of HRinfo. "The right of citizens to a free Internet and a free flow of information are now guaranteed by the judiciary in Egypt."

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