



Journalism Testing Legal Boundaries: Media Laws and the Reporting of Arab News

20 June 2008

A conference for journalists, lawyers, human rights specialists, media practitioners and scholars to debate legal obstacles to the comprehensive reporting of Arab news, drawing on first-hand concerns and experiences and the findings of academic research.

Organised by

مركز الإعلام العربي
Arab Media Centre

Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster
(in collaboration with the Westminster International Law and Theory Centre)
with support from the UK Higher Education Innovation Fund.

Venue:

University of Westminster, 115 New Cavendish Street, London W1W 6UW

Speakers include:

- **Nacer Bedri**, UK News Editor, Al-Jazeera TV
- **Zaki Chehab**, Political Editor, *Al-Hayat* and LBC
- **Nicole Choueiry**, MENA Press Officer, Amnesty International
- **Nabil Khatib**, Executive Editor, Al-Arabiya News Channel
- **Hoda Rouhana**, Programme Officer MENA region, Article 19
- **Mohammed El-Sayed Said**, Editor-in-Chief, *El-Badil*
- **Jean Seaton**, Professor of Communications and Media History, University of Westminster
- **Hossam El-Sokkari**, Head of BBC Arabic Service
- **Aidan White**, Secretary General, International Federation of Journalists.

Media, Law and Arab News

It might be assumed that a proliferation of news media operating in Arabic would increase the scope for comprehensive reporting of Arab news, especially now that Arab and non-Arab news outlets are competing for audiences.

Yet media laws, both national and international, have a big impact on journalists trying to report on conflict and dissent in Arab countries. UN human rights treaties set international media freedom standards, while international humanitarian law protects journalists as civilians in war zones. So far, enforcement of these provisions remains in question, whereas national censorship laws are often tightly enforced.

Arab countries continue to criminalise many forms of media activity, spurred by international anti-terrorism efforts that have had negative repercussions for journalists detained or prosecuted in the US or Europe.

- How conducive is the global legal environment to informative reporting on Arab affairs?
- Do we know enough about the legal systems that govern news gathering in Arab countries or the breaking of Arab news stories in the Arab world and beyond?
- Is critical thinking in international law and legal theory keeping pace with the cross-jurisdictional development of organisations that cover Arab news?

Schedule

Session One

9.30am-11am

Senior representatives of media outlets in Arab countries and Europe compare notes on the legal obstacles their staff have faced and the action taken.

Session Two

11.30am-1pm

Representatives of organisations involved in defending journalists and media freedom address issues such as legal curbs on war reporting, laws on freedom of information and the impact of employment law on journalists' status.

Afternoon sessions

2pm-5.30pm

Academic research presented and discussed in parallel workshops on:

- Emergency laws and press laws
- Counter-terrorism laws, national security and Arab news
- Blogging, transnational media and the law
- Local laws and international ethical standards.