

Egypt blocks dozens of websites, including media sites

Egypt has extended its assault on freedom of expression by blocking dozens of websites, including well-known media sites, United Nations experts have warned.



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The Egyptian authorities have reportedly blocked access to the websites of at least 21 news agencies, including well-known sources of information as *MadaMasr*, *RASSD*, *Al Watan*, and *Huffpost Arabi*, as well as the websites of human rights organisations such as Reporters without Borders, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, and the Alkarama Foundation.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, and the Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, have raised grave concerns with the Government of Egypt over its ongoing assault on freedom of expression.

The human rights experts expressed particular alarm over reports of the expanding list of websites shut down or otherwise blocked by authorities for 'spreading lies' and 'supporting terrorism', according to the state-run news agency MENA.

"The situation for journalism and the freedom of expression and access to information in Egypt has been in crisis for several years," the experts noted. "It takes many forms, including the unlawful detention and harassment of journalists and activists.

“Denying access to websites of all sorts, but especially news sites, deprives all Egyptians of basic information in the public interest,” they said, warning that around 130 websites may have been blocked so far.

However, the Special Rapporteurs added that the lack of public record and transparency about the blockings, and the lack of prior or subsequent notification, make it difficult to verify the total number.

“Limiting information as the Egyptian Government has done, without any transparency or identification of the asserted ‘lies’ or ‘terrorism’, looks more like repression than counter-terrorism,” they said.

The experts also noted that the authorities have not provided any evidence to prove that blocking websites would meet the tests of international human rights law. They recalled that, under international law, any such measures must be provided by law and be necessary and proportionate to meet a legitimate objective.

“In the case of the widespread blockings in Egypt,” the experts pointed out, “the blockings appear based on overbroad counter-terrorism legislation, and they lack any form of transparency and have extremely limited, if any, judicial control.”

The Special Rapporteurs and other UN human rights experts have previously urged the Government to release journalists, and to lift all restrictions on their freedom of movement. “We want to take this opportunity, to also remind the authorities of our grave concern for the rights of all those detained based on their writing or their work in public space,” they concluded.

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