

# Media Freedom Status in Jordan

2007



مركز حماية وحرية الصحفيين

Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists



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## Once Again, Press Freedom in Jordan Remains at Standstill

Nidal Mansour<sup>1</sup>

Once Again, Press Freedom in Jordan Remains at Standstill..

This is the result we reached from the Press Freedoms Status Report for 2007.

Last year, we said that press freedom in Jordan is making no progress, which broke the doors of hell loose against us, with some scathingly lashing out at us, casting doubts, and even showering us with insults!!

Today, we are back to say that nothing has changed. All indications and realities point to vulnerable press freedom, and some findings are even regressing instead of progressing.

Unleashing words and playing the old tune of press freedom will vanish in thin air. We need to move away from this position and espouse a firm belief in the need to reform the media and its independence as they constitute the pillar of democracy and development.

We need institutionalized work and a strategic plan to boost press freedom -- one that views media as a partner not a rival.

The press freedom “at a standstill” means in this report that the government’s interference continues unabated. Denying information and coverage remains a practice from which many journalists have suffered. At times, this denial is even coupled with detention of journalists by force.

“At a standstill” means that journalists now fear from their freedom, thus exercising self-censorship in order not to be questioned or pressured.

Amending the media-related legislation would evoke optimism. However, the reality is that detention and imprisonment still exist and the shackles are still there, feeding on a legislative milieu grounded in the philosophy of prevention not permissibility.

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1 President / Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ)

Nineteen years after reviving the parliamentary life and preaching about democracy and political reform, we have the right to wonder when the press freedom will be protected. When will it depart from mere slogans to reality? When will this freedom break the shell of bargaining and deals?

The Press Freedom Status Report for the year 2007 is yet another attempt to cast light on the status of media in Jordan. We do not claim that it is a full-fledge effort; rather, we believe that it's an endeavor which we approached objectively as much as we could to develop scientific rules and methodologies in dealing with its implications.

This year's report on the status of press freedom includes the following:

**First Chapter:** An opinion poll of journalists on the status of press freedoms in 2007.

**Second Chapter:** The complaints filed by journalists on the "violations" they experienced.

**Third Chapter:** Status of media-related legislation in 2007.

**Fourth Chapter:** Studies and research

- Electronic media in Jordan: Current status and prospects
- How did the Jordanian media cover the 2007 parliamentary elections?

The efforts that have been exerted in this report are prodigious, starting with an opinion poll covering 500 journalists on the status of press freedoms, using innovative methods to document and track the complaints in addition to mechanism to follow up on them with the concerned and official authorities, and ending with the studies that cast light on controversial issues in the media circles, such as the electronic media and the media coverage of the parliamentary elections.

This report is not immune to criticism; in fact, we need and welcome this criticism if it identifies the flaws and glitches in our methodology, if any.

What we expect is criticism that would go deep into the details and offer suggestions and solutions, not affronts driven by rivalry and doubts by some who would not take the trouble of reading and examining the report and who like to bury their heads in the sand in order not to see the bare reality as it is.

Once again, we call upon the journalists to “knock on the walls of the tank,” as Ghassan Kanafani said in his “Men in the Sun.” They should not remain silent until their freedoms are violated and mouths muffled.

Without the journalists taking the initiative to reject the shackles and speaking about the problems they are facing, the media environment will not develop, nor will people be cognizant of their suffering or act to help them.

What’s praiseworthy is the cooperation of the official authorities with the complaints and their keenness to reply and clarify them, and this should be noted.

This is the sixth report on the status of press freedoms in Jordan. This is the tenth year since the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists was born. What we have been committed to after all those years is the same promise and the same pledge to remain in the trench of those who defend press freedom, democracy, and reform.

I should also thank all those who worked on this report because they believe that lighting a candle is a thousand times better than cursing darkness.





## Introduction

The Press Freedom Status Report for the year 2007 seeks to provide a realistic picture of press freedoms in Jordan. To this end, the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists set up “the Freedoms Committee,” which worked throughout the past year until the issuance of this report to build a methodology and a mechanism that would help identify the status of press freedoms, the problems standing in the way, as well as the violations journalists have been experiencing.

As regards the tool that has been used to develop the work mechanism, the “Freedoms Committee” members took part in a training workshop on how to document complaints. The documentation form was developed to be clearer and more reliable. Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists presented the opinion poll questionnaire for scrutiny and scientific examination to identify the questions that need to be re-phrased or replaced. It also added questions that deal with the current developments in the Jordanian media scene.

The CDFJ’s administration expanded the sample to include 500 instead of 250 journalists who took part in the 2006 poll, thus rendering it very representative.

The Press Freedom Status Report for 2007 was divided into a number of sections:

### First: Journalists’ Opinion Poll

A total of 501 journalists took part in the 2007 poll. The questionnaire, which included 114 main and secondary questions, was intended to know:

- To what extent are journalists satisfied with the status of press freedom?
- What is the journalists’ evaluation of the performance of the official media outlets as well as the independent institutions that oversee and streamline the media?
- What’s the impact of media-related legislation on the press freedom?

- What are the violations that journalists experienced in 2007?

The poll was conducted by a group of researchers, and the questionnaire was presented to experts to judge its validity

## Second: The Complaints

This section documents all the complaints that the center received, in addition to those published in the media or those tracked by the Freedoms Committee after receiving tip-offs on them.

The “Complaints” section in the 2006 report appeared under “Violations.” In this year’s report, it was replaced by “Complaints” to give a more accurate characterization.

Under this section, there are instances of “violations” according to legal definitions, and “complaints” which are associated with procedural or administrative problems. The problem we faced was that the center does not have the legal power to investigate those complaints and see whether the reported violations were indeed committed against journalists or not.

The positive phenomenon which we believe is praiseworthy is that the center received reply letters to most of memorandums it sent along with the complaints it received from journalists to the official and non-official authorities for investigation and clarification.

Away from the content of the replies which we received, the fact that those memorandums were answered opens the doors for dialogue to resolve the problems that encounter the journalists and helps build joint action plans to avoid the recurrence of such complaints in the future.

Most of the complaints presented in the report dwell on the denial of coverage and the access of information in addition to the administrative detention of journalists.

Among the problems that have to be dealt with under the “Complaints” section is the fact that journalists tend to avoid divulging the problems they faced publicly in order not to be questioned or pressured.

One of the problems that should be scrutinized and resolved is the rules governing journalists’ work in dangerous zones. The complaints we received show that journalists were banned from covering certain events and held in administrative detention under different pretexts and justifications, most notably of which is that such measures were taken to protect them and keep them safe.

This situation entails that journalists on the one hand and the government and security services on the other agree on transparent measures that would allow journalists to provide independent coverage and at the same time ensure they safety. Such measures are internationally recognized.

The report presents under this section the complaints as narrated by the journalists and the actions that have been taken to this effect in addition to the reactions to them by the center and the concerned authorities.

In the next year, we hope to train a legal and a media team on the mechanisms of investigating, and not only documenting or tracking, those complaints in order to arrive at hard evidence on whether a violation has indeed occurred or not.

### **Third: The Status of Media-Related Legislation**

This section keeps track of the latest developments of the legislation that is closely connected with the media or restricts its freedom.

In this section, the report shed light on the Press and Publication Law and the Right to Access Information Law which were endorsed by the parliament in 2007.

The thorough study conducted by Lawyer Muhammad Quteishat, director of the Media Legal Aid Unit, discussed a pivotal question: To what extent did the two laws contribute to boosting press freedoms? Do they impose restrictions on press freedom?

This section reviewed the status of the existing legislation which governs the audio-video media and tackled the electronic media and the attempts that have been made to enforce the Press and Publication Law on it.

This section also discussed the role of the Media Legal Aid Unit, which is affiliated with the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists and has been defending journalists in courts since 2002. The unit was entrusted with defending journalists in 39 lawsuits in 2007.

#### **Fourth: Media Studies**

The center has found that the two pressing issues that warranted study and research last year are the controversy around electronic media and the attention that it has received in the Jordanian society, especially in the political and media elites circles, as well as its prospects and role, whether it will achieve success or face pressures and professional, financial, political, or even ethical crises. Our colleagues Muhammad Umar and Bassam al-Antari, who work in electronic media, were entrusted with this study which is probably the first in Jordan.

The second study was dedicated to the role of Jordanian media in covering the 2007 parliamentary elections. The parliamentary elections received keen attention from the media. Special supplements and pages were dedicated to covering them.

The outstanding question that remained unanswered: Did the Jordanian media manage to provide independent coverage in line with the international standards in this regard? This will be followed by a research into the oversight role of the media in elections and its role in uncovering electoral crimes and giving equal opportunities to the candidates.

These and other questions are viewed as benchmarks of the success of media outlets in playing their role. Our colleague Walid Husni, a journalists specialized in parliamentary affairs, was entrusted with this important study.

# Executive Summary



## Executive Summary

### First: Journalists' Opinion Poll

An opinion poll conducted by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) about the status of press freedoms for the year 2007 with the participation of 501 journalists has revealed that 94% of the surveyed journalists exercise self-censorship. Clearly, the result gives a negative indication about the status of press freedom in Jordan and reflects the magnitude of dangers, problems, and violations that encountered journalists over the past years, thus prompting them to exercise self-censorship to spare them any problems that might arise as a consequence of working freely and independently.

Since the revival of parliamentary life in 1989, working in the media in Jordan has yet to witness stability. Journalists have continued to complain about legislative restrictions at times and interference and pressures at others. The question that such a stunning result would pose is: What if journalists did not exercise self-censorship? What would their status be? What kind of problems would they have grappled with?

In this vein, most journalists, 46%, believed that the status of freedoms did not change, while 28% said they advanced and 25% said they dwindled. Around 47% the polled journalists described the status of press freedoms last year as low or moderate compared to only 3% who described them as excellent. Those figures are almost a replica of the findings of the 2006 report.

80% of the surveyed journalists said that they avoid criticizing the security services, 75% avoid criticizing leaders of Arab and foreign countries, 57% believe that criticizing the government is a red line, and 56% do not tackle sexual issues in their writings.

28.8% of the polled journalists said they still face pressures, harassment, and interference in their work. A total of 23 journalists, accounting for 5% of the polled journalists, said they were subject to administrative detention, while 8% said they stood trials in media-related cases.

41.3% of the journalists said they support the restoration of the Ministry of Information five years after its demise. 55.3% said that creating the position of minister of state for media and communication affairs is tantamount to a revival of the role of the Ministry

of Information, while 49.4 percent supported the cancellation of the Jordanian Media Center, notwithstanding the fact that the survey was conducted before the government's decision to shut it down. Again, the surveyed journalists, 79.1%, said that the Higher Media Council has no impact. The efforts exerted by the administration of the Higher Media Council could not win the journalists' confidence. Over the past six years, most journalists remained convinced that the council is ineffective.

A total of 501 journalists were surveyed in this opinion poll which was organized by a team of experts who worked under the CDFJ's supervision and was conducted between 18 and 28 February 2008. The poll was intended to shed light on the status of press freedoms in Jordan, whether they progressed, regressed, or remained unchanged. It also sought to sound out journalists on the performance of the media institutions and the impact of legislation on them and attempted to identify the problems and violations they are facing.

For the purpose of this poll, a questionnaire containing 114 main and secondary questions was designed. The questions were presented to several experts to judge their accuracy and validity. The audience of the poll was the journalists who were members of the General Panel of the Press Association until 18 February 2008, totaling 730, in addition to journalist who were not members of the Press Association but were registered in the CDFJ's lists.

The poll adopted the stratified random sampling method. The sample was distributed into two strata, namely:

- The journalist who work for the Jordan News Agency (Petra) and the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, totaling 83.
- The journalists who work for private media organizations, print media, radio and television stations, totaling 418.

The information gathering was conducted over telephone.

The overall indications stemming from the findings of the journalists' evaluation of the status of press freedoms reflect a mounting negative trend and a conviction that all the measures on the ground did not yield positive outcome. What might be perceived as an exception of the overall trend is the drop in the percentage of journalists who believe that legislation restricts their freedom.



The results showed that 39% of the polled journalists believe that legislation shackles press freedom, compared with 61.6% in 2006. However, those who believe that the legislation supports press freedom rose from 10.4% in 2006 to 17.4 % in 2007.

Evidently, the efforts exerted by the government and parliament last year to promote the Press and Publication Law and the Right to Access Information Law as supportive of the press freedoms have paid off.

Journalists still believe that the Press and Publication Law followed by the State Security Court are the toughest restrictions on press freedom. This is a normal finding because the two are closely related to the press profession, and most of the lawsuits facing journalists have been filed in accordance with the two laws.

Similarly, the detention of journalists and the hefty fines are two articles that were labeled as the most restrictive of press freedoms, according to the surveyed journalists.

Regarding the role of the Press Association in defending press freedom, 41% said that the association's role in defending press freedoms is moderate while 18% said that it plays a big role and 17% said it has a slightly effective role. 23.7% believed that the association has no effective role at all in defending press freedoms. In comparison with the findings of last year's poll, those who believed that the association does not have an effective role at all rose from 9% to 24%. One can notice that the role of the Press Association in improving the professional status has declined. 37% of the polled journalists said that the association's role is not effective at all, while 35% said that its role is relatively effective, 18% said that its role is slightly effective, and only 9% believed that it has an effective role.

Years after wagering on the privately-owned television stations' role in uplifting the ceiling of freedoms, yet 60% of the polled journalists believed that those TV stations did not contribute to boosting press freedoms, against 19.2% who believed otherwise.

The fact that no independent and effective television stations were launched in Jordan could be the reason behind this result, especially since ATV, Al-Ghad Television, has not begun is broadcast yet.

The indicator of the privately-owned radio stations remained in a better position than the television stations, with 41.1% believing that they contributed to uplifting the level

of press freedom. One could attribute this finding to the fact that the privately-owned radio stations are more diverse and more controversial in media circles and opens up new horizons for diversity, though most of them are mainly entertainment stations.

The polled journalists reiterated that the media institutions that have been created in recent years, including the Audiovisual Commission, had no impact on the overall press freedoms. Two thirds of the polled journalists, 64.9%, said the commission has no effect, which is close to the 2006 percentage when 68.8% said the same. Only 12% said that the commission supports press freedoms, compared to 22.8% in 2006.

On the apprehension and administrative detention of journalists, 23 journalists, 5% of the polled journalists, said they were apprehended, a percentage higher than that registered by the center under complaints. The discrepancy indicates that some of them did not confess to being apprehended. A comparison of the percentages in 2006 and 2007 reveals that apprehension and detention are on the rise. In 2006, the percentage stood at 2% only, but in 2005 and 2004 it was as low as 1.3%. The rise could be ascribed to the fact that the sample covered in the 2007 poll is twice the size of the sample covered in the 2006 poll. In addition, many journalists believe that administrative detention is equivalent to apprehension. 43.2% of those who were apprehended or held in administrative detention said that they were detained against the backdrop of press and publication cases, while 37% said they were detained after they were barred from filming or covering demonstrations or sit-ins.

This phenomenon is apparently related to the increasing calls by journalists for their right to coverage and access of information in the absence of “understandings” or professional codes of conduct to streamline these rights and uphold them in a transparent manner in accordance with clear rules acknowledged by the government agencies and the security services in particular.

The libel and vilification cases topped the list of charges leveled against journalists with a ratio of 57.6% followed by the violation of the Code of Honor with a ratio of 14%, and lack of balanced reporting and objectivity with a ratio of 12%.

The records of the CDFJ’s Media Legal Aid Unit, which has been defending journalists in a large number of lawsuits, in addition to the study conducted by the center under the title of “The Final Say,” which documents the lawsuits filed against journalists between 2000 and 2006, show that most of the lawsuits filed against journalists are based on the charge of violating Articles 5 and 7 of the Press and Publication Law, pertaining to lack of balanced reporting and objectivity, followed by the lawsuits of libel and vilification. In most cases, journalists are prosecuted on different charges.

The poll showed that 29% of those who stood trial were issued contestable rulings that can be appealed while this percentage stood at 33% in 2006. 75.7% were fined in 2007 and 24.3% were cleared for lack of specialty.

In a new question in the poll, 39% of those who came under pressures and harassment said that they had to give up, out 28.8% of the polled journalists who said that they came under pressures and harassments.

Journalists continued to believe that the government interferes in the media, with a ration standing at 65.9%. This reflects journalists' belief that the government does not interpret its slogans of no interference in the media into practical terms on the ground. The alarming part about this indicator is that 83% of the polled journalists believed that the government's interference contributed to suppressing press freedoms.

Advertisement companies, according to 81% of the surveyed journalists, continued to greatly interfere in the policies of media organizations. 53% said that newspapers undergo prior-censorship. When asked about the newspapers that undergo such prior-censorship, Al-Majd weekly newspaper ranked first with 22.8% votes.

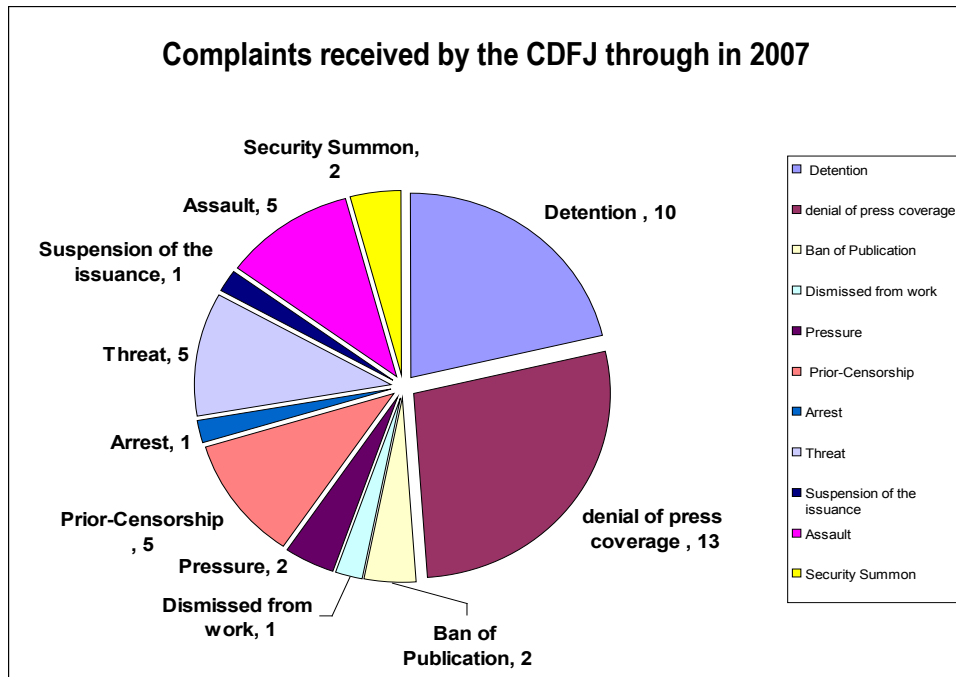
As regards the television, the overall indicator of freedom dropped when 30% of the surveyed journalists said that it does not enjoy any freedom at all against 32% who said that it has a moderate level of freedom.

By contrast, the margin of freedom goes up when talking about the Jordan News Agency (Petra) with 43.5% saying that it enjoys a high level of freedom, while 40% said it has a moderate level of freedom and 19% said it does not enjoy any freedom at all.

Turning to the Internet, the polled showed that 32% of the surveyed journalists believed that the government blocks electronic websites, while 50% did not believe so. Internet censorship continued to spur controversy after the spread of electronic news websites last year. 26.1% of the polled journalists noted that Ammun tops the list of news websites that undergo censorship.

## Second: Complaints

The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists has received and tracked an increasing number of complaints about the problems that faced journalists and which they considered a violation of their freedoms in 2007. The center received 47 complaints compared to 28 in 2006.



The striking thing is that most of the complaints received, monitored, or documented by the center are related to denial of the right to coverage, with a total of 13 cases in 2007. Perhaps this is indicative of the journalists' growing feeling of the importance of enabling them to access information and the controversy that the law witnessed at the Parliament before and after it was passed.

Several complaints about denial of coverage were coupled with other punitive measures taken against some journalists, such as administrative detention, beating, and assaults.

The complaints underscored the need to take immediate measures to protect the journalists' right to coverage and access of information in line with the international standards of press freedoms and the international conventions to which Jordan is a signatory, particularly Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Although government agencies confessed to committing unintentional mistakes while banning journalists from coverage, yet in many instances those agencies justified their actions by saying that they did so to protect them especially in what they perceived as

dangerous zones or by saying that they did not know that they were journalists.

These findings entail that official and non-official agencies in coordination with the journalists embark on charting policies and taking measures that would allow journalists to provide independent coverage and at the same time ensure their safety.

It's important to underline the cooperation of the government-affiliated agencies and even some independent institutions when responding to the complaints received by the center, which is a positive indication that such complains could be resolved and verified in the future to hold those involved in violating journalists' freedom accountable.

In this context, Colonel Mahir al-Shishani, chief of the Human Rights and Complaints Office at the Public Security Department (PSD), visited the center and attempted to clarify the PSD's position toward most of the complaints that they have received.

The complaints received by the center are not only confined to the denial of coverage and detention, but goes beyond to include prior-censorship, especially against the weekly press.

In many instances, journalists don't report about the harassment and measures that restrict their freedom although the poll has revealed that they are victims of such practices, in addition to the permanent problems that they faced in past years. This prompted 94% of the polled journalists to admit that they exercise self-censorship.

Although we are hopeful that the efforts to rescue the Access to Information Law -- despite the existing reservations about this law -- will minimize these problems, yet the deep-seated issue that casts doubts on these hopes is that most of the punitive measures and harassments against journalists, such as prior-censorship, are a breach of the constitution and the law. However, such practices are continuing, though covertly.

The complaints received and followed by the center revealed different types of pressures and problems facing journalists in their work. In this executive summary, we will present samples of the complaints received by the center in an attempt to cast light on the suffering of some journalists.

## ▪ Detention and Denial of Press Coverage, 9 January 2007

The security forces banned three journalists from covering the arrest of three wanted persons belonging to Al-Qa'ida Organization in Irbid. Afterwards, the security forces arrested the three journalists: Hazim al-Sayyahin from Al-Dustour daily; Ahmad al-Tamimi from Al-Ghad newspaper; and Ashraf al-Ghazzawi from Al-Ra'y newspaper. The three journalists said in a complaint to the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists on 10 January 2007 that "we were apprehended and banned from covering the pursuit of wanted persons from Al-Qa'ida Organization conducted by a group of Fursan al-Haqq, an off-shoot of the General Intelligence Department, and the Public Security in Irbid.

The complaint stated that "Ahmad al-Tamimi and Hazim al-Sayyahin, who were at the scene of the incident to cover the pursuit of the three Al-Qa'ida operatives, were apprehended by the Preventive Security men at the Irbid Police Directorate for over three hours and that their cellular phones which they used to film the operation were seized, in addition to their press badges. Besides, the Public Security men offended Al-Sayyahin and attempted to assault him."

Hazim al-Sayyahin said in his statement to the CDFJ over telephone that "at 1:30 on 10 January 2007, I was asked to cover the pursuit at 2030. I went to the scene and covered the first hour without any problems. Approximately two hours later, I came closer to the scene of the pursuit to take photos. At that moment, two Public Security men assaulted me and asked me what I was doing. I showed them my press badge and introduced myself. Then, they took my press ID and cellular phone which I used to take photos. Following this, five other Public Security men joined them and they started pushing me violently. One of them pushed me violently and I repeatedly tried to introduce myself as a journalist from Al-Dustour newspaper. Then, one of them pushed me into the police van and asked me not to speak at all. One of them rode the van with me and starting beating me. I asked him to stop hitting me and to leave the van. I remained locked into the van for 15 minutes until I called one of the police officers. Afterwards, they contacted the Preventive Security men in Irbid who requested that I be brought to the police center."

He added: "I was also assaulted by a security man, known as Faris, at the police center. I tried repeatedly to ask them to talk to my chief at the office but they refused, while several members attempted to assault me at the center. One of them held me from the neck and pushed me with his leg on the chair, asking me to shut up. This is in addition to the verbal abuse that I was showered with."

In the complaint filed by the three journalists to the Center for Defending Freedom

of Journalists, they said: “We were also banned from making phone calls with our newspapers to report about our detention. We were asked to sign an undertaking to abide by the laws and regulations and the rules of conduct and pledge not to be engaged in any a similar incident for a year; otherwise, we will have to pay a 500-dinar bail. We refused to sign this undertaking since it constitutes a violation of the principles of journalism and the right to access information and cover events.”

The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists issued a statement following this incident in which it expressed its deep concern for apprehending the three journalists during the pursuit of Al-Qa’ida operatives. In its statement, the center said: “Apprehending the three journalists for hours and asking them to sign undertakings and bails is rejected and cannot be tolerated no matter what the pretexts and justifications are.” The center called on the government and its agencies to enforce the legal articles that uphold the journalists’ right to access information.

In the same context, the Press Association represented by its President Tariq al-Moumani asserted its rejection of banning journalists from exercising their duties in covering events and relaying information to the public, in defense of their right to knowledge as published by Ammon news website, available at [www.ammonnews.com](http://www.ammonnews.com).

Al-Moumani noted that “banning journalists from covering the pursuit of Al-Qa’ida operatives by the security elements is at odds with his majesty’s call for upholding the right to access information and his assertion that the freedom of the press is as high as the sky.”

Commenting on what happened with the three journalists, PSD Media Spokesman Major Bashir al-Da’ajah said: “The three journalists were present at the wrong time and place. Out of fear for their safety and in order not to be harmed, the Preventive Security men asked the journalists to leave the area. However, they insisted on staying in the area to cover the event, which prompted the Preventive Security men to escort them to the Irbid Police Directorate where they were informed of the circumstances surrounding the situation. The three journalists were freed without taking any measures against them and were handed their cameras and cellular phones.”

CDFJ Director Nidal Mansour sent a memorandum about the incident to Prime Minister Ma’ruf al-Bakhit on 13 January 2007, numbered 2007/017, asking him to investigate the complaints received by the center. He also sent copies of the memorandum and complaints to Government Spokesman Nasir Joudah; President of the Higher Media Council Dr Sima Bahhouth; PSD Director Muhammad Majid al-’Eitan. The center didn’t receive a reply letter from the prime minister on the memorandum which included a

copy of the complaint.

The center re-sent a memorandum with all the complaints to PSD Director Brigadier General Mazin al-Qadi on 6 January 2008, numbered 2008/001/U/5, who in turn referred it to the director of the PSD Human Rights Complaints Office Colonel Mahir al-Shishani.

Colonel Mahir al-Shishani visited the center and said in reply to this complaint that “journalists were issued firm instructions not to overstep the designated area due to heavy gunfire. Out of fear for their safety, they were apprehended after bypassing this area.” He added: “The journalists didn’t express a desire to file a lawsuit or lodge any complaint about what happened to them, noting that the undertaking signed by the three journalists is a mandatory routine measure at any police station.”

- Prior-Censorship and Ban of Publication, 29 April 2007

Al-Majd weekly newspaper was subject to prior-censorship and banned from publication on Monday 30 April 2007. Chief Editor Fahd al-Rimawi said in a complaint sent to the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists on Monday, 30 April 2007: “Regretfully, I would like to inform you that the prior-censorship exercised by the security services without any legal grounds interfered yesterday evening to stop the printing of Al-Majd weekly at Al-Ra’y Printing House against the backdrop of publishing a lengthy report about the multinational plan which aims to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and support its security services.”

He added: “We tried our utmost to defend our legitimate right to publish the paper by informing his excellency the prime minister through his media adviser Abdallah Abu-Rumman and later by contacting our colleague Tariq al-Moumani, president of the Press Association. However, our efforts which lasted for hours ended up in failure.” In his complaint, Al-Rimawi called for allowing him to stage a sit-in at the premises of the Higher Media Council and the Press Association to relay what he termed as his voice to all freedom-loving people.”

Commenting on this case, Government Spokesman Nasir Joudah said that “the reports and information published by Al-Majd often rely on information from intelligence sources that encroach upon the homeland’s security and interests.”

President of the Press Association Tariq Joudah earlier told Jordan News Agency



(Petray) that the administration of the Jordan Press Foundation, Al-Ra'y, confirmed that Al-Majd was banned from printing as the paper contained material that violates its bylaws which prohibit the publication of any press material that the foundation believes would encroach upon the national security and defames a sisterly country.

The CDFJ, in a solidarity letter to Chief Editor Fahd al-Rimawi, expressed its rejection of prior-censorship and underscored his right to print the paper, noting that the claim of upholding the national interests and maintaining positive relations with Arab and foreign countries should not be a pretext for censorship on newspapers and media outlets as it constitutes a violation of the law. It stressed that the judiciary should have the final say against those who violate the law."

Majid Toubah, member of the Press Association's council, issued a press statement on 2 May 2007 in which he voiced his dismay and protest over the stance of the president of the Press Association toward the ban on printing Al-Majd. He said: "I am surprised that the president did not consult with the association's council. At least I am positive that he did not consult with me over his statement in which he tried to justify the decision to ban the printing of Al-Majd. He even leveled accusations against the newspaper similar to those made by the government whose official spokesman could not find a more meaningful comment than the statement issued by the president of the press association in his description of the problem."

Banning the printing of newspaper is within the context of prior-censorship which the National Center for Human Rights referred to in its report in April 2008. This is in addition to local and international human rights organization which said that seizing press information is one form of violating the press freedom and the people's right to knowledge.

- Denial of Press Coverage and Ban on Entry of Football Fields,

3 June 2007

The Football Federation banned Muhammad Hasiba, a journalist, from entering football stadiums and covering a press conference on 26 June 2007. In a complaint to the CDFJ, he said that "the Football Federation decided to prevent me from entering football stadiums without any justifiable reasons." Hasiba, who works for the newspapers of Al-Shahid and Al-Mala'ib and Rum News Agency, said that "the decision was taken against the backdrop of my views that are critical of the federation, as far as I know." He noted that "what aroused the federation's anger was my reporting about the entire press conference that was held by the chairman of Al-Faysali Club, Sultan al-Udwan, although I accounted for Al-Udwan's views and the counter views."

Hasiba sent the letter that was addressed by the Football Federation to the chief editor of Al-Anbat daily to the effect that the federation's Board of Directors decided during a session, numbered 8/2007, on 3 June 2007 to prevent Muhammad Hasiba from entering all football stadiums where the federation's activities are held." The federation's letter called on the newspaper's management not to designate Hasiba to cover any activities sponsored by the federation, notwithstanding the fact that his press ID was withdrawn.

In his complaint, Hasiba pointed out that the federation's rules do not include any provision stating that journalists could be banned from entering football stadiums." Hasiba described the decision as "unjust and one that obstructs the press freedom."

In another complaint by the same journalist to the CDFJ, he noted that the Football Federation, through its Secretary Muhammad al-Irsan, prevented him from covering the press conference which was held at the federation's premises on 26 June 2007. He added: "The secretary insisted on preventing me from covering the press conference although the invitation I received was addressed by FastLink and the Schools Sports Federation, and not the Football Federation."

#### ▪ Death Threat, 19 July 2007

Ashraf al-Ra'i, a journalist working for Al-Ghad newspaper, received death threats from unidentified persons after publishing a press report on transferring the residents of Al-Shallalah neighborhood in Aqaba to Al-Karamah neighborhood.

In a complaint to the CDFJ, Al-Ra'i said: "After writing reports about the situation in the area of Al-Shallalah in Aqaba and the problems that it abounds with, some citizens took that as a sign of disrespect for their honor. Therefore, they made threats against me over telephone and through SMS messages." He added: "I've told the chief editor about the problem. He later told me that he reported this to the security authorities." Al-Ra'i went on to say: "441 people from the area filed a lawsuit of libel and vilification against me."

On 15 May 2007, Al-Ra'i reported in Al-Ghad daily that " the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority is preparing to transfer the residents of Al-Shallalah neighborhood in the governorate during the next three months to a new neighborhood that was built recently at a cost of 21 million dinars according to the infrastructure and services commissioner Umar al-Rusan." In his report, Al-Ra'i added: "Al-Shallalah is suffering from

different social ailments according to Al-Rusan who noted that the authority conducted a survey of the residents of the area, which was described by Quest Scope Foundation for Middle East Development in a report issued earlier as a remote island detached from its social surrounding.” The report noted that “the problems in Al-Shallalah are due to the deteriorating educational situation and rampant unemployment in an area that is considered one out of 20 poverty-stricken pockets in the kingdom, where over 54% of its residents are poor.”

#### ■ Denial of Press Coverage, 31 July 2007

Four journalists from Al-Sabil weekly -- Amjad al-Isa, Tamir al-Smadi, Izz al-Din Ahmad, and Osama al-Khreisha -- were banned from covering the municipal elections on 31 July 2007. The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists received complaints from the four journalists who provided different accounts for banning them from coverage.

Amjad al-Isa, a correspondent for Al-Sabil weekly, was banned from covering the municipal elections in the area of Al-Yarmouk. In a complaint to the CDFJ on 1 August 2007, Al-Isa said: “We received awful treatment from the Electoral Committee chaired by Muhammad al-Faqih and its member Ahmad al-Hadbah. At the very outset, the Committee members did not reply to our greeting. Justifying, Al-Faqih said that they do not deal with journalists.” He added: “I told them that I have a permit to cover the elections, but they took it lightly and rejected it. When I engaged in a chart with the delegates, Al-Faqih didn’t like that and asked the security men to take me out by force.” He continued: “When I refused to go out, he said that I had to leave the room whether I like it or not.”

In the same context, security men apprehended journalist Tamir al-Smadi and prevented him from covering the municipal elections in Al-Zarqa. In a complaint to the CDFJ on 1 August 2007, Al-Smadi said: “I received abysmal and humiliating treatment from the security services and the deputy governor of Al-Zarqa while covering the municipal elections.”

He added: “While touring the polling station, the deputy governor yelled at me and told me in front of the citizens who happened to be there: Go out. You are not allowed to enter without my permission” When I told him that I was a journalist and that I had a permit, he called the security men who pulled me and pushed me out of the polling station.” He continued: “Before leaving the polling station at Prince Hamzah School, other security men took my camera and papers by force and held me in custody at the school’s premises until they have completed their security contacts.”

Journalist Izz-al-Din Ahmad, from Al-Sabil Newspaper, was banned from covering the municipal elections in Al-Rusayfah City.

In his complaint to the CDFJ, sent on 1 August 2007, Ahmad said: “I would like to convey to you what I was exposed to during my coverage of the municipal elections in Al-Rusayfah City, which contradicts with the simplest human rights and the freedom of the press, which should be guaranteed for each and every journalist.”

He added: “Members of the security agencies and the representative of Al-Rusayfah district officer prevented me from covering the elections both inside and outside the polling center in the city although I showed them the press license signed by the minister of municipalities and my press card issued by the Jordanian Media Center.”

He went on to say: “At the Jumanah School Center, the security agencies asked me not to cover the elections even outside the polling center, saying: ‘We do not want any brouhaha outside or you will be arrested.’”

Al-Sabil Chief Editor Atif al-Jawlani had sent a memorandum to the CDFJ in which he said: “We would like to inform you that our journalists were prevented from exercising their professional and constitutional right to cover the municipal elections, which were held on 31 July 2007, by the heads of election committees in the capital, Zarqa, and Al-Rusayfah although they were carrying press cards for covering the elections issued by the Ministry of Municipalities.

Moreover, journalist Usamah al-Khuraysha, from Al-Sabil newspaper, was detained and banned from covering the municipal elections in the Sixth Constituency in Zarqa City. In his complaint to the CDFJ on 1 August 2007, Al-Khuraysha said: “I was touring the polling centers to inspect the representatives of candidates and to know the latest developments at King Abdallah II School for Excellence, which is part of the Sixth Constituency in Zarqa City, when the security guards checked the authorization that was issued to me by the minister of municipalities to cover the elections. I entered the school and introduced myself to Abd-al-Jalil al-Salman, head of the elections committee in the city, and showed him the authorization that I was carrying.”

He added: “As part of my efforts to cover the elections impartially and professionally, I asked him about the violations and rigging cases reported by many candidates and their representatives. He was confused and ordered the security men who were around him to withdraw my authorization, although he was escorted by a large number of journalists carrying similar authorizations.”

He added: “I rejected his order, because the authorization was issued by the minister of municipalities and not by the head of an elections committee, and because he had not right to withdraw it from me. He ordered the security elements escorting him to detain me. I was surprised when five or six security men, some wearing the uniform of the Public Security and others in plain clothes, ordered me to hand my authorization. After I refused to do so, they started shouting and insulting me, and treated me in a bad and humiliating manner which does not even befit animals. They dragged me and forced me out of the school. Afterward, a police captain intervened to stop that farce.”

He added: “After I handed the authorization to the captain, he took me to a police patrol where the case was officially documented at the orders of the head of the elections committee. After shuttling among three police patrols, I was detained at Al-Hussein Security Center. They ordered that I be put in prison. However, I strongly rejected that because there were a number of criminals there. A sergeant understood my situation and kept me in the office of Judicial Investigation from 0940 until 0300, when the head of the Al-Hussein Security Center came. After having a look at the document, he ordered that I be moved to the governor’s office.”

He said: “I was treated in a humiliating manner at the governor’s office...after intensive contacts from deputies and journalists, the governor ordered my release without any interrogation.” The CDFJ sent a memorandum to the director of Public Security, containing the complaints of the colleagues from Al-Sabil Newspaper.

Colonel Mahir al-Shishani, head of the Complaints and Human Rights Office at the Public Security Directorate, asserted that the orders that were issued against the journalists did not come from the Public Security Directorate, but rather from the administrative rulers. He noted that the security men were ordered to check the press cards of journalists, saying that the security men acted upon the orders issued by the administrative rulers.

- Press Coverage Denied, 26 December 2007

The Islamic Action Front prevented journalist Khalaf al-Tahat from covering a news conference held inside the party’s premises.

In his complaint to the CDFJ, Al-Tahat said: “In continuation of the Islamic Action Front’s threats to press freedoms and during the news conference held by the IAF secretary general on Tuesday 26 December 2007, I was surprised when an employee from the

office of the secretary general told me that instructions were issued by the party banning me from entering the party's premises and covering the news conference, and that I should leave the building."

He added: "While I was inquiring about the reasons for the ban, Ahmad Abu-Ishah, director of the secretary general's office, told me that instructions were given to him to ban me from entering the party not only this time but also in all future occasion. He said that a decision by his superiors considered me and Al-Ra'i Newspaper persona non grata."

In its meeting on Sunday 30 December 2007, the Executive Bureau of the IAF issued a statement on preventing the correspondent of Al-Ra'i from covering its news. The statement denied that a decision was made to prevent the newspaper from covering its news.

The statement said that what happened was the result of a dispute with the journalist himself in view of his positions and repeated insults. The party tried several times to publish its clarification, but the newspaper insisted on ignoring the other opinion, thus violating the Press and Publications Law and the Code of Press Honor.

Al-Ra'i Newspaper had published a report to the effect that the IAF prevented its representative from covering the IAF's activities and news conferences. It said that it tried to contact more than one leader in the IAF and the Muslim Brotherhood to know the reasons for the ban, but to no avail.

The CDFJ issued a statement in which it said that the party's decision conflicted with the freedom of the media and that it put restriction on the journalists' right to have access to information and to report news to the people. The CDFJ said that the political parties should be the most concerned about enabling the journalists to carry out their professional duties, regardless of their political stands.

IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani-Irshayd had sent a letter to the head of the Journalists Union in which he asserted that the IAF did not prevent the correspondent of Al-Ra'i from covering its activities. He explained that Khalaf al-Tahat was banned as a result of his clear, repeated, and deliberate insults to the IAF, saying that this showed lack of objectivity and impartiality and a violation of the Press Code of Honor.

## **Recommendations:**

In order to stop these violations against the journalists and to find solutions to the journalists' problems and complaints, we recommend the following:

- Some of the complaints that were received had to do with the mechanism of informing the journalists of the cases filed against them or of the verdicts issued against them without their knowledge, which sometimes leads to detaining them. Thus, there should be a legal notification system by the judicial execution in order dispel any suspicions that journalists are targeted deliberately.
- It is necessary for the media people to wear special badges and clothes in dangerous areas so that they will not be banned from covering developments, so that they will be allowed to have access to information, and so that the official agencies, particularly the security agencies, will not say that they did not know that these were journalists and that the measures that were taken against them were unintentional.
- An agreement should be reached with the official agencies, particularly the security agencies, on a professional code of conduct for coverage in dangerous areas that allows the journalists to work freely and at the same time enjoy protection.
- Banning journalists from covering developments and having access to information account for the majority of complaints this year. This is a right enshrined in the Constitution, international treaties, and Article 19 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights to which Jordan is a signatory. However, there are no transparent, declared mechanisms that guarantee this right in the official institutions although the Law on the Right to Access to Information, which we have many reservations about, is in effect.
- The media people are still facing administrative detention and even imprisonment not according to the Press and Publications Law but according to a set of Jordanian laws, like the penal code and the law on violating the sanctity of courts, which impose restrictions that violate media freedoms. This requires a comprehensive revision of these regulations so that they will be compatible with the international criteria.

### Third: Status of Legislative Freedoms for 2007

The present study seeks to study the legislations related to the freedom of the press and the media and the role of the legal texts related to journalism and the media in terms of raising or lowering the ceiling of freedom. This will be done through highlighting the impact of these legal texts on the media people. This study is based on a review and analysis of the regulations which govern and directly or indirectly affect the freedom of the press and the media. Mainly, these regulations are the Jordanian Constitution, the Press and Publications Law No 8 for 1998 and its amendments, the Press Association's Law, the Law on the Right to Access to Information No. 47 for 2007, the penal code, the law on the violation of the sanctity of courts, the law on protecting the secrets and documents of the state, the law of the State Security Court, the civil law, and the execution law. The aim was to study the positive and negative aspects of these laws which support or restrict the freedom of the press and other mass media. This study will serve as a proper groundwork for any legal proposal that would contribute to developing the freedom of the press and media away from contradictions among legislations, and to showing the urgent need for legal amendments to raise the ceiling of freedom.

The study mainly relied on the assessment of the legislative amendments contained in the Press and Publications Law No. 8 for 1988, and the assessment of the modern Jordanian experience with regard to the right to the access to information based on the Law on the Right to Access to Information No. 47 for 2007. The study also reviewed the legal provisions related to the electronic press. The study also relied on legal precedents to explain the legal texts and how they can be used on the ground by the public prosecution or the judiciary.

#### The Study's Conclusions and Proposals:

Discussing the legislative aspect of the press and media for 2007 required a research of the effective laws on two levels:

First Level: Legislative amendment to the press and media laws in 2007.

Second Level: The current legal framework governing the freedom of the press and media.



## First Level:

### Legislative amendments to the press and media laws in 2007:

First: Outcome of the research into Law No. 27 for 2007 amending the Press and Publications law No. 8 for 1998.

- The legislator expanded the circle of incrimination as he considered the Press Code of Honor an additional penal code and that anyone who violates it should be incriminated.
- The legislator expanded the circle of incrimination by adding an incriminating article which did not originally exist, containing four loose paragraphs.
- The Legislation maintained the imprisonment penalty in press and publications cases.
- The legislator reduced prior censorship imposed on the media messages coming from outside and on the published books, but kept it on specialized publications.
- He did not use the necessary legislative phrasing to ban the detention of journalists against the background of press and publications cases. He rather used phrases that do not prevent the implementation of other penal laws which sanction detention.
- The legislator increased financial punishments by raising fines up to 20,000 Jordanian dinars for some crimes.

Second: Outcome of the research into the law on Guaranteeing the Right to Access to Information No. 47 for 2007.

- There is bureaucracy in the mechanism of giving information due to the presence of the Information Council, which plays the role of mediator between the seeker of information and the agency that has the information.

- The 30-day period that was specified for giving information to those seeking it is too long and might render the information useless.
- The agency that has the information is the only side that decides whether the information is classified. This is done without any monitoring. In addition, the right to contest such classification is denied.
- It did not cancel the laws on classified information that are still applicable and added new categories to them.
- The legislator set a condition that the seeker of the information should have a legitimate interest or goal for getting the information and left it to the government agency and the Information Council do decide this.
- The legislator did not address the cases when the information is destroyed deliberately, and did not stipulate a punishment for the employee who destroys the information.

## Second Level:

Outcome of Research into the current legal framework governing the freedom of the press and media:

- The circle of incrimination is still too large as too many actions are considered crimes, which conflicts with the principle that a person is innocent until proven otherwise.
- The Jordanian legislator's policy with regard to incrimination is ambiguous and vague given the usage of ambiguous and loose terms that cannot be understood by the ordinary people, which violates the principle of the legitimacy of the crime and punishment.
- The laws force the journalists against whom lawsuits are filed to pay compensation to the complainant.
- The penal laws still allow the imprisonment of journalists in press and publications cases.
- The penal measures laws still allow the detention of journalists in press and publications cases and force them to appear before court throughout the trial.
- The laws still give the State Security Court the right to look into some press and publications cases.

- The government still controls the administration of the Radio and Television Corporation. The financing of the corporation is one of the most important means through which the government controls it.
- The legislator imposes hefty restrictions on licensing radios and gives the Council of Ministers the authority to reject the licensing applications without giving the reasons.
- The way in which licenses are granted do not boost the multiplicity and pluralism that are demanded by the various segments of society, especially since high fees are imposed on broadcasting newscasts and political material.

## Fourth: Media Studies

### 4.1 Electronic Press Websites in Jordan: Reality and Horizons<sup>1</sup>

The municipal elections held in Jordan in mid-2007 and the legislative elections which were held a few months later constituted a golden opportunity for the independent media websites in Jordan to attract attention to themselves as the sources of information on the electoral process and local news in general. These websites, which were visited by a limited sector of Jordanians for years, managed to win an increasing popularity after their coverage of the elections. This is because these websites, which enjoy a bigger margin of freedom than the print press, fulfilled the ambitions of a large sector of Jordanians seeking updated news from independent sources offering an angle different from that which they were used to from the radio, television, and news agency.

In addition, they allowed their readers to comment, relatively freely, on the news and reports which led to the formation of groups chatting and exchanging views on these websites.

These websites, which have increased in number during the past three years, face many difficulties and are still fumbling their way to prove that they are successful media outlets.

If we exclude the websites of the five daily newspapers and some weeklies, the number of independent electronic media website has become nine, in addition to Petra News Agency. This study, which seeks to have a general look at the reality of the electronic press in Jordan, shows that the most prominent challenges curbing the development of these websites is the fact that those in charge of these websites have a low professional level and awareness of the concept of electronic media and its applications, as well as lack of resources. In addition, these websites face pressure from the government, advertisers, and some non-official sides, in addition to self-censorship practiced by these websites on what they publish and on the comments they receive.

In the first section, the study gives an overview of the development of electronic press in the world starting from the emergence of Chicago Online in the United States in 1992 and the launching of Al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper's electronic version in 1995.

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<sup>1</sup> A study prepared by Muhammad Umar, chief editor of Al-Bawaba Electronic website, and Bassam al-Antari, an editor at Al-Bawaba website.

The second section discusses the electronic press's features, concepts, and added value in terms of the usage of multimedia (print and audiovisual material), providing infinite information through networking, and providing a more flexible interactive environment for feedback.

It also discusses other features in the electronic press which are not available in other mass media, like speed, easiness, unlimited space, and the possibility of deleting material. This means that they give the readers the information they need at any time. Another feature is the possibility of retrieving information through the search section.

In the third section, the study discusses the relationship between freedom and social responsibility and the wrong misconception that the Internet gave the journalists and mass media absolute freedom which was not available in the past. The study shows that this belief – which prevailed due to the hugeness of the Internet, that fact that it is part of the cyberspace and cannot be subjected to laws – is not fully true.

In the fourth section, the study views education and training in the electronic press in Jordan which is almost nonexistent. The fact that the law of Press Association does not include those working in this field has prompted the latter not to give attention to training and development.

In the fifth section, the study deals with the reality and challenges facing the electronic press in Jordan, which is witnessing a significant growth in Internet users. This section reviewed the positive aspects of the independent media websites, led by creating an unprecedented activity in the Jordanian media.

The study also shed light on the professional level of those working in these websites, which is generally low due to the fact that this kind of media is new, that there is no journalistic experience on the part of most employees, and the fact that there is lack of training on working in this field.

It also shed light on the impact of the low professional level and inexperience on the content of these websites, which is generally incompatible with the potential of the electronic press. The content is mainly taken from printed press, particularly weeklies.

After that, the section discussed the margin of freedom available to these websites. Although these websites are way ahead of other mass media, they are still subject to many considerations that restrict their freedom. These include the pressure which the officials in charge of these websites said they are exposed to either by the government, the advertisers, or society institutions. This section discussed the fact that those working in the electronic press are not members of a union, which deprives them of an umbrella that provides them with protection, defends their rights, and develops their professional levels through training.

The sixth section of the study examined the problem of financing and advertising in light of the fact that all independent media websites in Jordan are the result of personal initiatives of journalists, which means that the funding is limited. In addition, it is difficult for these websites to secure advertisements which constitute the mainstay of the mass media in general.

This section discusses the very limited spending on advertising in these websites compared to the overall spending on advertising in Jordan, which amounted to around 275 million in 2007. It also shows that these websites pin hopes on advertising to cover their overheads without seeking other sources of financing, like subscription and selling content given that they are not able to produce exclusive material that might attract subscribers or potential buyers.

The seventh section reviews the legal status of the electronic media websites in Jordan in light of the fact that these websites do not have a commercial registration whether inside or outside Jordan. These websites are only names at the site hosting companies. This section discusses how the Jordanian legislator deals with the Internet websites in general and the crimes committed by them, in addition to the fact that there are no laws organizing the work of electronic press.

The eighth section studies the popularity of the independent media websites in Jordan, the local and world rankings of the websites of dailies and weeklies, and the geographic distribution of their visitors based on the world Alexa standards.

The ninth section was devoted to reviewing the spread of blogs and the phenomenon of the citizen journalist as the rapid spread of the Internet, which has surpassed that of any other mass media, has led to increasing the popularity of electronic media websites.

In the past two years, Jordan witnessed a growth in the number of blogs. There are

now 10,000 blogs whose qualitative is still low and lags behind the progress in blogging in other Arab countries.

The tenth section discusses the future horizons of the electronic media in light of the growth in the number of electronic websites in Jordan, which have generated activity in the Jordanian media.

The study is a made up of (40) pages.

#### **4-2 Jordanian Media Coverage of the 2007 Parliamentary Elections<sup>2</sup>**

The press and other mass media started to give attention to the parliamentary elections as early as when the 14<sup>th</sup> House of Representatives was still in session. The parliament was dissolved according to a royal decree issued on 19 August 2007. The press and other mass media formed press teams to cover the parliamentary elections in a traditional way. The newspapers and other mass media formed work cells from the majority of their correspondents without paying attention to the capabilities of these correspondents and without giving them training courses on how to cover the elections or on the international standards related to covering parliamentary elections in the democratic countries. This led to a violation of the principle of adherence to the local and international standards in covering parliamentary elections, especially with regard to airing electoral propaganda at an early stage and not giving all candidates time to speak and appear on radios and television or space in printed press to address the voters. Some print mass media showed very clear bias toward some candidates at the expense of others.

The 2007 parliamentary elections gave the first chance for issuing a local blog on the yardsticks of media coverage of the elections. The blog, which was issued little bit late, was issued by the Higher Information Council in collaboration with the Press Association. The negative thing about the blog was that it was not discussed with the journalists or media institutions. It was only announced by those in charge of it at an official meeting at the headquarters of the Higher Information Council, which was attended by the minister of interior.

The mass media did not make efforts to achieve the principle of “balanced coverage for all candidates” and equality in publishing their news and analyzing their electoral stands or propaganda, including slogans. It seemed that the newspapers did not think of doing this at all.

٢. A study prepared by Walid Husni, a journalist specialized in parliamentary affairs in Al-Arab al-Yawm

Newspapers also gave clear preference to some candidates at the expense of others. They made a serious confusion between “media” and “advertising” as some newspapers and electronic websites published reports about potential winners and dedicated pages and corners titled: “The elections’ bourse.” This can be considered indirect interference by the mass media in the voters’ trends and choices, which contradicts with the principle of impartiality of the press and equal treatment of all candidates.

The various mass media – particularly the print and electronic media – violated Article 17 of the Election Law at an early stage when they started publishing electoral advertisements for the candidates in the form of announcements by families and tribes expressing support for a certain candidate. That was an implicit violation of the law.

The study also discussed four reports issued by civil society organizations which monitored the Jordanian media’s performance in covering the parliamentary elections. The study hailed the issuance of this report for the first time in the history of elections and Jordanian press. These reports are:

- The report of the National Alliance for Monitoring the Performance of the Media in Covering Parliamentary Elections.
- The report of the Higher Information Council.
- The report of Amman Center for Human Rights Studies on monitoring the media coverage of the 2007 parliamentary elections.

The report of the National Human Rights Center:

The mass media did not follow up or examine the transparency and fairness of the procedures. They only reported the official version of the news. In few cases, they commented on these reports, which kept the press and media away from scores of cases in the electoral process. This is one of the major negative aspects of the media.

The media poorly referred to a large number of procedures which coincided with the electoral process. The negative aspect about the media’s performance was its failure to follow up most of the cases it referred to or revealed. It remained content with reporting news only. In very limited cases, the mass media published investigative reports about some of these cases, which the media thought should be followed up.



The press and other mass media did not discuss the influence of the official organization supervising the elections. They did not include this issue in their agenda, list of priorities, or even in their daily agenda.

The mass media's discussion of the influence of the official establishment remained at a minimum. The mass media broadcast very modest reports about the criticisms leveled by some sides, particularly parties and civil society organizations, to the official measures. There were also few articles by writers who criticized the official measures. The mass media's discussion of the influence of the official organization in charge of the elections was given little attention by the Jordanian press and other mass media.

The press and other mass media did not discuss the clear absence of the role of the judiciary in supervising the elections, the impartiality of the committees, and the mechanisms of providing protection for the voters, candidates, and even ballot boxes. They also failed to discuss the government's interference in favor of certain candidates.

The "security authority" affiliated with the government was also not among the topics of interest for the mass media. This authority was not discussed although reports were published on the Election Day to the effect that the security authorities did not intervene in the polling centers where violations took place, like those which happened in the Central Bedouins Constituency. The press did not question the abstention of the security from intervening to protect the election procedures. Why did these agencies stand idly by?

The various mass media gave special attention to the continuous demands of the Jordanian civil society organizations to play a role in monitoring the elections. Despite the government's continuous rejection of the form and content of such monitoring, the civil society organizations acted as a monitoring body that is not accepted by the official agencies. Before the Election Day, the two sides reached an agreement according to which observers were allowed to work outside the polling centers. The debate between the civil society organizations and the Ministry of Interior and the government over these organizations' demands to monitor the election procedures and ballot boxes continued to be reported by the various mass media. The press allocated space to the official story. The organizations were given less space on the pages of newspapers.

The mass media exhibited a clear weakness in discussing the Election Law, which was not amply discussed in the run up to and after the elections. The Election Law was not given sufficient attention by the press and other mass media.

The mass media did not demonstrate a clear interest in the electoral platforms of the candidates, which were few. Apart from very few articles and modest reporting that were restricted to the electoral platforms of the Islamic Action Front and opposition parties, the various mass media did not give any attention to this aspect.

The performance of the mass media in terms of encouraging the voters to take part in the elections was good, although it varied from one medium to another. The study notes that the official media, particularly the television and radio, played the biggest role in this regard. Print press highlighted the official statements calling on people to participate in the elections.

The press focused on supporting women as part of reporting on activities and seminars on the role of women and their chances in the elections. The mass media did not hesitate to publish reports on the status of women in the elections.

The emphasis on women's role and chances in the elections was more evident in the governorates than in the big cities due to the quota system in the Election Law, in addition to the emphasis on the role of the tribe in supporting women to reach the 15<sup>th</sup> parliament.

It was noticed that the official mass media, particularly the television and radio, underscored to a very large extent the role of the youth in the elections in their capacity as the "knights of change." There were few reports in the print press about the role of the youths in the elections. The emphasis on the role of youths in the elections was weak.

Traditionally, the press and other mass media gave attention to the role of the tribes in elections. This role leads to the win of tribal deputies the majority of whom have no electoral platforms or have no direct political support from the parties.

The striking thing in the media coverage of the role of tribes was the exaggerated emphasis that the "institution of the tribe" has become stronger than the "institution of the party," and that in the absence of parties and their popular role the tribes now play this role to serve their goals and trends.

In their coverage of the elections and the activities of the parties with regard to participation in the elections and their mechanisms, the mass media gave great attention to the Islamic Action Front.

The press played a remarkable role in revealing election-related crimes in 2007 elections. The problem, however, was that they were unwilling to follow up these crimes and the legal measures taken by the government against the violators.

It should be admitted that the press was responsible for revealing the phenomenon of “election money or political money” in the 2007 elections as some candidates bought votes. It was the press which prompted the official side to look into this phenomenon.

The various mass media played a commendable role in revealing this phenomenon, which strongly emerged in the 2007 elections. This phenomenon was so clear that even the official mass media could not ignore it. The official mass media competed with the press in tackling this issue in a frank and clear manner, which is a precedent in the history of the official mass media’s coverage of the Jordanian parliamentary elections.

The mass media’s performance with regard to following up the phenomenon of transferring voter was different from that with regard to political money despite the integral relationship between the two phenomena, their common dangers, and negative impact on the fairness of elections and equality among candidates. The mass media showed greater interest in the phenomenon of political money than in the phenomenon of transferring voters. The transfer of votes was related to the buying of votes or “electoral money.” Thus, it is unfair to separate the two phenomena. The press and other mass media only spoke about this phenomenon and analyzed its reasons, attributing it to poverty which the voters suffer from and which allowed the candidates to buy and transfer votes.

The study is made up of (71) pages.

