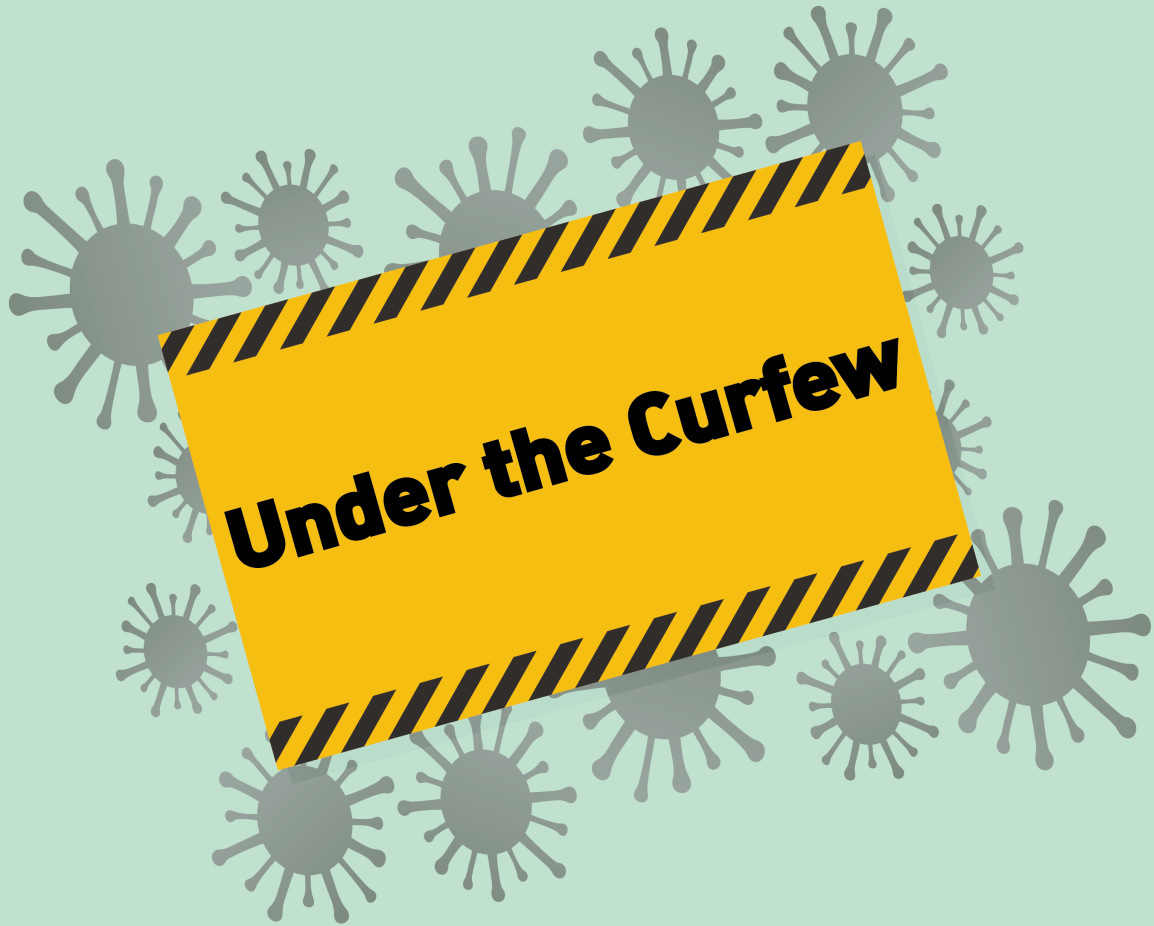


# The Status of Media Freedom in Jordan Under the Coronavirus Pandemic



**2020**





# Under the Curfew

The Status of Media Freedom in Jordan  
Under the Coronavirus Pandemic

2020



مركز حماية وحرية الصحفيين  
Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists

## Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ)

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## Introduction

As risks from the ramifications and effects of the Coronavirus pandemic exacerbated, Jordan announced the activation of the Defense Law<sup>1</sup> as of March 19th, 2020. The Law and related defense orders issued according permit the imposition of exceptional measures and procedures that render some articles of the law inactive and restrict some basic rights such as the right to free movement and travel, and the commitment to a lockdown aimed at protecting public health and safety.

As His Majesty King Abdullah II ratified this law, he requested in a letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Dr. Omar Al-Razzaz, «that the implementation of the Defense Law and the orders issued under it will be within the most limited scope possible, without infringing on Jordanians' political and civil rights, but, rather, safeguarding them and protecting public liberties and the right to self-expression enshrined in the Constitution and in accordance with regular laws currently in effect, and guaranteeing the respect of private property, be it real estate, or movable and immovable funds. For the goal of promulgating this exceptional law is to provide an additional tool to safeguard public health, protect the wellbeing of citizens, enhance performance, and increase coordination among all to counter this epidemic.»<sup>2</sup>

Immediately after the ratification of the Defense Law, the government issued orders to impose a general and partial curfew that restricts movement and specifies the hours where movement is permitted. Printed newspapers were prohibited to circumvent the spread of the Coronavirus. Journalists were permitted to move to perform their tasks by

<sup>1</sup> The Law was published in the Official Gazette issue number 5626 on 19 March 2020. It is available on the Prime Ministry's official website and can be accessed on <http://www.pm.gov.jo/upload/files/Order-Defense-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> King Abdullah II letter to Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz after the issue of the Royal approval of the Cabinet of Ministers' decision announcing the activation of the Defense Law. Available on King Abdullah's official website on <https://bit.ly/3h8Xlvs>

issuing permits for them to use their vehicles to cover events. This function was entrusted to the Prime Ministry, the National Center for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM), and the Media Commission, which communicated with licensed media institutions «registered» with it for the purpose of regulating the process of issuing these permits according to criteria related to the size and type of work of these media institutions. These criteria, however, were not announced or published. The Media Commission's General Manager, Theeb Al-Qaraleh, said that the Commission issued 900 paper permits on the first day of the curfew, which were later replaced by electronic permits.<sup>3</sup>

The government stopped holding press conferences to report the repercussions of the Coronavirus and resorted instead to organizing a daily press briefing at the NCSCM, in which the State Minister for Media Affairs and the Health Minister announced the health situation and the number of cases, as well as the instructions and the defense orders. This activity frequently involved the participation of some ministers who talked about affairs related to their functions. The government considered the information issued by it as sufficient to inform the public of developments and news about the virus.

The government did not, until much later, pay much attention to the media policies that should be followed in such circumstances and did not announce its plan or strategy to confront this crisis. It did not address the fact that Defense Order number (8) represents a restriction on the freedom of expression and the media. It resorted to detaining journalists based on defense orders and/or legal articles in current legislations that are not compatible with international human rights standards and criteria or legal obligations regarding the

<sup>3</sup> In his statement during a meeting organized by CDFJ on 16 May 2020 on ZOOM.

freedom of opinion, expression, and access to information.

Although the government gained the understanding of media outlets and the people particularly during the early weeks of the pandemic regarding the imposition of some emergency restrictions and measures, voices criticizing these policies started to be raised demanding the revision of the mechanisms with which the government deals with the freedom of expression and the media during the pandemic.

This report attempts to evaluate the government's policies and measures regarding honoring its legal obligations as related to the freedom of expression and the media, the manner in which it deals with journalists and media institutions, and the new emerging challenges that affected the freedom of the media in view of the Coronavirus pandemic.





# Executive Summary

Freedom of Expression and the Media in Jordan  
in view of the Coronavirus Pandemic





## Executive Summary

This report, prepared by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) comes at a time when numerous parts of the world witness new challenges to the freedom of expression and the media as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

There is no doubt that as the pandemic has spread throughout the world since December 2019, the voices of organizations defending the freedom of the media were raised, together with demands by the United Nations to respect the freedom of expression, particularly guaranteeing the right to access information during pandemics as one of the most important issues that should be preserved and which is more needed during this pandemic than any other time.

CDFJ believes that this report is one of tens of reports, studies, and data published on daily basis regarding the new threats and challenges imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic on the freedom of expression and the media. They all represent efforts and interpretations based on international human rights standards aimed at contributing to mitigating violations that may touch on the freedom of the media and to assist in confronting the new emerging challenges resulting from the spread of the pandemic.

After risks mounted from the ramifications and effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, Jordan announced the activation of the Defense Law as of March 19th 2020. According to this law, exceptional measures and procedures were imposed that deactivate some articles of the laws and restrict some basic rights such as the right to movement and travel, and commitment to the health lockdown to protect public health and safety.

After the Defense Law was ratified, the government issued orders to impose a general and partial curfew that restricts movement

and specifies the hours where movement is permitted. Printed newspapers were prohibited to circumvent the spread of the Coronavirus. Journalists were permitted to move to perform their tasks by issuing permits for them to use their vehicles to cover events. This function was entrusted to the Prime Ministry, the National Center for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM), and the Media Commission, which communicated with licensed media institutions «registered» with it for the purpose of regulating the process of issuing these permits according to criteria related to the size and type of work of these media institutions. These criteria, however, were not announced or published.

Although the government enjoyed the understanding of media outlets and the people particularly during the early weeks of the pandemic regarding the imposition of some emergency restrictions and measures, voices criticizing these policies started to be raised demanding the revision of the mechanisms with which the government deals with the freedom of expression and the media during the pandemic.

This report attempts to evaluate the government's policies and measures regarding honoring its legal obligations as related to the freedom of expression and the media, the manner in which it deals with journalists and media institutions, and the new emerging challenges that affected the freedom of the media in view of the Coronavirus pandemic.

CDFJ believes that most comments raised by the participants during the discussion sessions and interviews held for the purpose of preparing this report, which are related to the flow of information, referred to the right to access information, and that restricting the movement of journalists and their participation

in the government's press briefings has contributed to this. The Minister of State for Media Affairs commented in this respect saying that «public safety and protection measures prevented journalists from attending the press briefings. Dana Al-Sabbagh, the Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka channel, commented, saying: «We all sometimes face a scarcity in the sources of information or even delays in responding to our questions and enquiries, or in participation with us.» Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, agreed with opinions that information from the government was not sufficiently clarified and was not convincing or did not reach smoothly to the people. He gave examples of this in explaining and clarifying some defense orders related to work and the reasons behind the total lockdown and delays in opening business sectors and the continued closure.

The report found that the government measures and the defense orders led to reducing the flow of information and restricting the movement of journalists, and that granting movement permits to journalists was not based on clear and declared criteria, and that disclosing information about the pandemic was central and connected to the ministers of media and health and the Operations Director at the Crises Cell, Brigadier General Mazen Al-Faraya.

The report indicated the size of losses sustained by the printed newspapers as a result of the decision to halting printing them, and the living and economic repercussions on journalists and media institutions. In addition to the introduction and the executive summary, the report is distributed over five sections as follows:

**Section One:** Background on the Legal Obligations Regarding the Freedom of the Media, Opinion, and Expression and Access to

Information in International Criteria in View of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**Section Two:** Government Measures and Procedures Stated in the Jordanian Defense Law and its Orders and their Effect on the Freedom of Expression and the Media According to the International Human Rights Law.

**Section Three:** Monitoring Violations against the Freedom of the Media and Journalists Resulting from the Government Measures to Address the Coronavirus Crisis for the Period March 17th - 10 June 10th 2020.

**Section Four:** Journalists Survey: Challenges that faced journalists in Jordan during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**Section Five:** In-Depth Discussions and Interviews Regarding the State of Media Freedoms in Jordan in View of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**Following is a brief summary of the report's main conclusions organized according to the report's five sections as follows:**

**Background:** Legal Obligations Regarding the Freedom of the Media, Opinion, and Expression and Access to Information in International Criteria in View of the Coronavirus Pandemic. The report presented in its Section One the International Human Rights Law's basic requirements as recognized by the United Nations regarding Jordan's commitment to its human rights and legal pledges as related to honoring the freedom of expression and the media in view of the Coronavirus pandemic, in addition to what was issued by local organizations in this respect.

The report noted that the Human Rights law requires countries to take all possible arrangements available together with due diligence to protect human rights to life and health positively. These arrangements are to include as a minimum spreading information about public health and that the arrangements made by the state should not violate human rights without justification,

including the freedom of expression. These are the arrangements that states should take into consideration not only during exceptional circumstances such as the COVID 19 pandemic but also when these rights are subject to restrictions and/or violation.

The report also noted that the Human Rights Law recognizes that restrictions imposed on some rights in the context of the serious threats to public health and public emergencies that threaten the life of a nation can be justified when they have a legal basis and are absolutely necessary based on scientific evidence, and when implementing them is neither arbitrary nor discriminatory, for a specific period of time, respect human dignity, are subject to review, and are proportional in order to achieve the sought objective.

### **Governmental measures and arrangements in the Jordanian Defense Law and its orders and their effect on the freedom of expression and media according to the International Human Rights Law.**

In its Section Two, the report presented the effects of the governmental measures and arrangements as stated in the Jordanian Defense Law and its orders on the freedom of expression and media according to the International Human Rights law.

It stated that measures to grant journalists permits to travel and move did not meet with full acceptance by the journalists. 27% of the journalists' sample in the survey conducted by CDFJ for the purpose of preparing this report expressed their complete dissatisfaction with the travel and movement permits system granted to journalists by the Media Commission. Furthermore, in issuing these permits, the government relied on the lists of names submitted by licensed media institutions registered with the Media Commission, based on specific ratios for each media institution. These ratios were

not announced, and the mechanism utilized to identify media institutions' needs was unknown.

The report indicated that the government chose to approve special permits issued by the Prime Ministry and NCSCM, quoting a comment by the General Manager of the Media Commission, Theeb Al-Qaraleh, during a meeting organized by CDFJ about media policies for the purpose of preparing this report, that they issued permits to 279 Jordanian, Arab, and foreign media institutions. They also issued 900 permits to journalists during the first six hours of the lockdown.

The report noted that the government approach to issue special reports was not fully accepted. CDF received complaints and protests from some journalists that they did not receive permits for movement which was affecting their work.

Regarding stopping the printing of paper newspapers, the report referred to the Jordanian Council of Ministers' decision issued on March 17th 2020, which included some preventive measures to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, including stopping the printing of paper newspapers as they contribute to spreading the virus. The report noted that this decision was issued even though there was no sufficient evidence indicating that the virus can be spread through printed materials. Newspapers were stopped from printing from the date the decision was issued until 2 June 2020 after a moratorium of more than two months.

The report showed that during the period the newspapers were not permitted to print, their revenue from advertisements contracted with tens of companies and government entities stopped completely. In addition, their revenues from the sale of and subscription to the newspapers stopped, reflecting severely on their revenues.

Regarding the flow of information, the report noted that with the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, the announcement of the curfew, and the closure of public and private institutions, the journalists' movement was also subjected to restrictions. With the exception of journalists who were granted permits to move, the others could not do so.

This applied to the government, including the minister of state for media affairs, which stopped holding press conferences to cover the pandemic. The only channel left for the flow of information to journalists was the minister of state for media affairs, together with the health minister if the information was related to the Coronavirus. The same applied, though to a lesser extent, to the Pandemics Committee at the Health Ministry and the Director of the Coronavirus Crisis Cell, Brigadier General Mazen Al-Faraya. This circumvented the direct questioning by journalists.

The report also noted that the flow of information was central in nature. The press briefing was not held in the presence of journalists to ask questions but was broadcast directly through local television channels (Al-Mamlaka, Jordan Television, Ro>ya, and Al-Haqiqah International), whose cameras were permitted at the press briefing venue. It noted that the Defense Order number (8), which maximized penalties against anyone proved to promote rumors, represented unprecedented pressure on media outlets, pushing them to be reluctant before broadcasting information, particularly that which contradicts the information provided by the state systems on the state of the pandemic and the average number of cases, as an example.

He said that detaining the General Manager and owner of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, and the channel's News Chief Editor, Mohammad Al-Khalidi, after broadcasting a television report was considered an incitement to violate

defense orders, representing a direct threat to all media practitioners. It pushed them towards being more careful and increased the level of prior self-censorship on the media content.

The report noted the material losses incurred by media outlets as a result of the decision to halt printing them, and the decrease in their revenues from advertising, as well as some journalists suffering from random dismissal by the management of their institutions with the excuse that those losses were incurred as a result of defense orders to combat the Coronavirus, with the absence of any compensation from the government. Many journalists also complained from dismissal and receding income.

Publishers and Chairmen of Boards of Directors of daily print papers complained during the interviews held to prepare this report that the decision to stop printing newspapers to circumvent the spread of the disease led to losses reaching 100% of their revenues.

Similarly, the results of the survey, which was conducted for the purposes of this report over the government's performance and the challenges faced by journalists during the Coronavirus, showed that media outlets face increasing challenges during the pandemic, and will probably continue after it is over. Most surveyed journalists (73.5%) believe that the most important threat is the receding financial revenues, followed by decrease in commercial advertising (66%) and the halt on distributing printed newspapers and magazines (51.5%). These are followed by the reduction in salaries and bonuses for journalists and threats of dismissal respectively.

## Monitoring violations against the freedom of the media and journalists resulting from government measures to address the Coronavirus during the period March 17th - June 10th 2020.

Section Three of the report addressed the violations against journalists and institutions as a result of the government measures to combat the Coronavirus during the period from March 17th - June 10th 2020. The report stated that the CDFJ, through its program «Ayn» for Monitoring and Documenting Violations against the Freedom of the Media in Jordan, managed to observe, during this period, 17 violations against 4 journalists and journalists, including three individual cases of detaining the General Manager and owner of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, and its News Chief Editor, Mohammad Al-Khalidi. The Bengali Television reporter Kabir Salem (he identifies himself as Salim <Ukash) was also arrested because of a report about the living conditions of his country's workers in Jordan during the curfew. Mohammad Al-Maghaydah, photographer for Al-Ghad daily newspaper, was assaulted and prevented from covering the arrival of Jordanian students returning from abroad as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. There was one group case manifest in a circular sent to the Directorate of Health Affairs and hospital managers prohibiting them from making statements to media representatives except with the approval of the Health Ministry.

Number of Violations	Number of Journalists Subjected to Violations	Number of Cases		
		Individual Cases	Group Cases	Total
17	4	3	1	4

As for violations that the «Ayn team believed took place in the monitored cases, they included repeated «deprivation of freedom» (4 times), repetition of each of «security investigation,» unjust trial,» and «random detention» twice. The violation «deprivation of

residency,» random arrest,» «prevention from coverage,» «harassment,» «physical assault,» «infliction of injury,» and «prevention from publishing and distribution.»

No.	Type of Violation	Recurrence
1	Restriction of Freedom	4
2	Security Investigation	2
3	Unjust Trial	2
4	Random Detention	2
5	Deprivation of Residency	1
6	Random Arrest	1
7	Prevention from Coverage	1
8	Harassment	1
9	Physical Assault	1
10	Infliction of Injury	1
11	Prevention from Publishing and Distribution	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>

The «Ayn team believed that all 17 monitored violations were related to five basic rights according to the International Human Rights Law, topped by touching on the right to freedom and personal safety through violations of restriction of freedom and random detention and arrest. These were repeated seven times and represented 46.7% of the total number of violations, followed by violations affecting the right to the freedom of opinion, expression, and the media in the second place which were repeated 5 times through security investigation, prevention from coverage, harassment, and prevention from publishing and distribution at 20% of the total number of violations monitored.

The «Ayn team believed that violating rights in the judiciary through unjust trials, in addition to violating the right to personal safety and not to be subjected to torture or other forms of harsh, inhumane, or humiliating treatment through physical assault and infliction of injury, came in the third place. In the fourth and last place was violating the right to residency to

which the official Bengali television reporter was subjected for covering the state of Bengali workers living in Jordan during the curfew.

It should be stated that the results of the opinion survey conducted by CDFJ for the purpose of preparing this report showed that 25.8% of surveyed journalists were subjected to violations during the Coronavirus pandemic.

### **Journalists Survey: Challenges that faced journalists in Jordan during the Coronavirus**

In its Section Four, the report presented the results of a public opinion survey of a random sample of journalists working in media different local institutions from different sections. The survey was conducted by CDFJ with the aim of examining the positions of journalists and journalists from the challenges that they faced in their media work and the problems and violations they were subjected to, as well as the government's commitment to deal with the media without bias and with credibility and transparency during the Coronavirus pandemic, in addition to evaluating the mechanism of information flow during the pandemic.

The survey was conducted during the period 24 May to 1 June 2020 and 159 journalists participated in it. A questionnaire was used in the survey and was distributed electronically to the participating journalists, in observance of public health and safety standards, using the Google Forms software program.

The survey enquiries were distributed over 6 themes and included 17 direct questions as follows:

1. How the government dealt with media outlets?
2. Ensuring the flow of information.
3. Movement permits.
4. Challenges and problems facing journalists' work under the Coronavirus pandemic.

5. Violations.
6. Approaches to support media outlets after the Coronavirus pandemic.

The survey results showed that 8.8% of surveyed journalists of the journalists whose opinions were surveyed believe that the government's performance in dealing with media outlets during the Coronavirus pandemic was poor. Most journalists showed satisfaction, with 35.8% considering the government's performance as good, while 37.7% said it was medium.

Regarding the flow of information, the survey results showed that only about 22% of the surveyed journalists saw that the government guaranteed the flow of credible information to a large extent, whether to the people or to the media outlets. Most answers, however, at the rate of about 70%, found that the government guaranteed the flow of credible information to a small or medium extent whether to the people or to the media outlets.

25.8% of journalists found that the government's commitment to offer a press briefing on daily basis was not sufficient at all to answer their enquiries and questions. 13.8% found that it is sufficient to a large extent.

Regarding the permits for travel and movement, 27% of surveyed journalists expressed their opinion of total dissatisfaction with the movement permits system granted to the journalists by the Media Commission. In return, 25.8% answered that they were satisfied to a large extent. The majority (46%) answered that they were satisfied to a small to medium extent.

In the same context, most surveyed journalists affirmed that movement permits formed a restriction to journalists' and media institutions' freedom to work. 45.9% said they formed a restriction to a large extent while



39% said that they formed a small to medium restriction. 13.8% answered that they did not form any restriction.

76.1% of the surveyed journalists said that they applied for permits. Results showed that 72.4% of those who applied for permits received them, while 27.6% said they did not receive any permits.

The survey results showed that 42.8% of journalists believed that the ideal way the government should have followed to ensure the continuity of the media institutions' work and the freedom of journalists' movement was to give all journalists movement permits based on lists of their names from their media institutions. 38.4% believed that the ideal way is to adopt the press card of the Media Commission. 11.9% only see that adopting the Press Association card is the ideal way.

The survey results showed that restricting information to specific sources is the most important challenge facing journalists during their work under the Coronavirus pandemic at the rate of 44%, followed by the inability to move always to follow stories and press reports at the rate of 40.8%, followed by preventing officials from giving statements to the media outlets at the rate of 38.9%, followed by stopping press conferences at the rate of 37.7%.

Regarding violations, survey results showed that 25.8% of surveyed journalists were subjected to violations during their work during the Coronavirus pandemic. 5.7% answered that they may have been subjected to violations but they were not certain about that. 68.6% affirmed that they were not subjected to any violations.

Withholding information ranked at the top of violations that journalists faced, registering 37.3%, followed by prevention from movement and work during the curfew at the rate of

35.3%. Journalists mentioned many violations to which they were subjected, including random arrest and detention and random dismissal from work, threats of inflicting harm, and harassment.

Surveyed journalists affirmed that media outlets face increasing challenges during the Coronavirus pandemic, and that these challenges are likely to persist after it. A majority of them (73.5%) believe that the most important challenge faced is the receding of financial revenues, followed by receding commercial advertising (66%), the inability to distribute printed newspapers and magazines (51.5%), followed by reducing salaries and bonuses of journalists and threats of dismissal of journalists.

Journalists did not give much importance to defense orders, particularly order number (8) which constricts their freedom, as it came as the last challenge mentioned, whereby only 42.7% considered these orders to form a major challenge that restricts the work of newspapers and media outlets.

Regarding approaches to support media outlets after the Coronavirus pandemic, journalists participating in the survey noted a number of approaches to support media outlets after the Coronavirus pandemic and ensuring their efficient operation and their diversity, freedom, and independence. They believed that the best approaches would be reviewing legislations to purge them of restrictions on the work of journalists and media outlets and their compatibility with international media freedom standards (71.7%), followed by developing the law on freedom of access to information to ensure easy access by journalists to information (71%), and setting government policies to ensure the access by journalists (67.9%), and pursuing perpetrators of violations against journalists and media outlets and preventing impunity (66%), and the establishment of an

independent fund to support media outlets and setting fair and transparent criteria for managing it (59.1%).

Structuring media outlets and dismissing journalists who are not qualified came at the bottom of the list of approaches among surveyed journalists with 43 responses at 27%.

### **In-depth discussions and interviews on the reality of media freedoms in Jordan in view of the Coronavirus pandemic.**

In its Section Five, the report provided the details of two in-depth discussions organized by CDFJ on ZOOM. The first was allocated for discussing media policies in Jordan during the Coronavirus pandemic. Among the participants was the Minister of State for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh, in addition to a select group of journalists. It was held on 16 May 2020. The second was allocated for discussing «the challenges and violations facing the freedom of expression and the media during the Coronavirus pandemic.» It was attended by a select group of journalists, legal professionals, and activists in the field of the freedom of expression, and was held on 22 May 2020.

In addition to the two discussion groups, CDFJ interviewed nine chief editors, publishers, and board chairmen of seven widespread media institutions in Jordan including government, public, and independent institutions, focusing on the reflection of the Coronavirus pandemic on the journalists' living security, the losses of media institutions, and the policies taken by the government in dealing with media institutions.

The State Minister for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh, affirmed during the discussions in the first in-depth session that «the government felt during the Coronavirus pandemic the poor capacities of the public institutions, particularly those that are vital in dealing with

the media.»

He said that «the weakness and absence of self-organization of the media institutions in Jordan increases the challenges in managing communication with media platforms.» He added that «the print media is facing structural challenges and it is necessary to find solutions that permit its financial sustainability.»

Minister Al-Adayleh stressed that «the Jordanian state dedicated its efforts during the pandemic to access citizens through briefings that he considered an important tool to ensure the flow of information,» noting that protection and public safety measures prevented the presence of journalists at the press briefings.»

Some people accused the government of favoritism in their media policies, giving special attention to specific media outlets. They noted that a great deal of information offered by the government in the press briefings lacked clarifications, explanations, and justifications.

The General Manger of the Media Commission, Theeb Al-Qaraleh, noted that «279 Jordanian, Arab, and international media institutions were granted movement permits. He affirmed that 900 permits were granted to journalists during the first hours of the lockdown.»

Participants in the second in-depth session affirmed that the government succeeded in controlling the media during the Coronavirus pandemic, affirming that the defense orders contributed to increasing worries and self-censorship among journalists.

They warned that the government and the media violated the privacy of Coronavirus patients during the pandemic, and that government officials were the first to commit this mistake.

They criticized the absence of media outlets and considered the government to have offered a one-sided story about the events. Lawyer Omar Al-Atout said that the government has a wrong understanding of the defense law and hence, some ministers appeared wearing a military uniform at the start of the pandemic.

The General Manager of the Phenix Center for Studies and Information, Ahmad Awad, noted that the Human Rights system is fragile and has become more so with the government measures during the Coronavirus pandemic. Fateh Mansour affirmed that the media institutions do not have strategies or plans to deal with crises including guaranteeing journalist security and safety.

In order to listen to the opinions of media institutions' leaders in media policies and challenges during the Coronavirus pandemic, CDFJ held interviews with nine editors in chief, publishers, and board chairmen of seven widespread media institutions in Jordan, including government, public, and independent institutions.

The interviews, presented here in alphabetical order, with each of the following: Former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra'y newspaper, Ayman Al-Majali; Former News Director at the Jordan Television, Anas Al-Majali; Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka, Dana Al-Sabbagh; Director General of the Jordan News Agency (PETRA), Fayege Hijazeen; Owner and Manager of Ro'ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh; Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Dustour daily newspaper, Mohammad Dawudiyeh; Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani; and Chief Editor of Al-Ghad daily newspaper, Mohammad Alayan.

During these interviews, the former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra'y newspaper,

Ayman Al-Majali, demanded the immediate intervention to save the print newspapers, noting that «what the newspapers need are not loans that increase their debt but for the government to pay staff salaries for 4 months so that life goes back to normal.»

He said that newspapers sustained direct damage during the Coronavirus pandemic and the government should support them and stand by their side. Newspapers have always been the main channel for information in society during the crisis.» He described the government's management of the media issue during the pandemic as good and noted that «the government's address enjoys credibility.»

Al-Majali said that «the press briefings were sufficient for the people and perhaps there was need for a dialogue with journalists to highlight some points that were unclear.» Former News Director at the Jordan Television, Anas Al-Majali, affirmed that «media policies during the crisis were outstanding.» He noted that «for the first time in four years, he felt the smoothness of work and the speed of response in offering information.»

He added: «Response by the government and the crisis team during the pandemic was better than it was before the crisis.»

He noted that news reporters and agents at the Television received 140 permits at the beginning of the crisis. They were later increased to 180 allocated for the news section, with the exception of permits received by TV reporters in governorates directly from the local rulers whether in locked-down areas or during the general lockdown.»

The Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka channel, Dana Al-Sabbagh, denied that there was favoritism by the government and the state systems in favor of Al-Mamlaka channel. She said that «it should be noted that the

attention to news increased in society during the Coronavirus pandemic, and Al-Mamlaka was the only news channel in Jordan. It is only natural for it to be the main platform to deliver the state address to the people. There is, however, no favoritism or bias in dealing with us. We sometimes faced scarcity in news sources or even delays in responding to our questions and enquiries or sharing with us.» Al-Sabbagh went on: «During the crisis, we were running after the government to follow-up on news, chasing them with questions everywhere in order to report new developments to the audience.»

She explained that Al-Mamlaka channel received 199 permanent permits for journalists working with it, including reporters. These were later increased to 205 permits.» She noted that «permits during the total lockdown were 140 for two days, or 70 daily permits for the days (Thursday and Friday).»

The Director General of the Jordan News Agency (Petra), Fayeq Hijazeen, said that «the Coronavirus pandemic circumstances imposed a new form of dealing with media outlets, and so the press briefing replaced direct press meetings and conferences.» He described the flow of information from the government and its systems during the Coronavirus pandemic as «positive.» He said that «there was no comment that we passed to the government or the National Center for Security and Crisis Management that were not addressed immediately.»

He affirmed that «the government is not restricting the movement of journalists.» He added: «They gave us at PETRA what we needed and what we wanted in terms of permits. On the first lockdown day, we received 100 permits, and after that, all staff members received permits. Even during the total lockdown, we had between 30 and 40 permits carrying serial numbers, allowing them to move freely.»

The Manager and owner of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, affirmed that «the government succeeded media-wise during the Coronavirus pandemic and dealt much better compared to crises it went through.» He added: «There is no doubt that the press briefing was closed and the information was flowing in one direction. It would have been better had there been interaction with media outlets.»

He considered «the government's commitment to spread information was successful.» He backtracked that «it was not sufficient,» in addition that some information was incomplete and untrue.» He added: «The documents and information we had reveal truths and events that contradicted what was being said.»

He noted that «the government's media policies were centralized and many ministers and officials were not given permits. The government offered one address.»

Al-Sayegh said that he was not against the government being biased towards its official institutions and to utilize the crisis to make them succeed, but he demanded that this discriminatory treatment should not be at the expense of the other media institutions. He said: «the permit system for the media outlets was unfair for Ro>ya channel. We only received 40 permits for all programs and news. We were then given 10 to 15 permits every two weeks until Ramadan was over. We only had 50% of the permits for our staff at the channel, which forced us to cancel some programs.»

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Dustour daily newspaper, Mohammad Dawudiyeh, described the government's media performance as «professional and excellent,» noting that «the Minister of State for Media Affairs was transparent and answered all the questions he was asked,» considering

that «the government provided information regularly for the people throughout the pandemic.»

He affirmed that the print newspapers including Al-Dustour sustained damage after it stopped printing during the Coronavirus pandemic, reaching 100%. He noted that «the newspapers committed to the Defense Order which requested that they stop printing in order to avoid transferring the disease and because all institutions were closed and movement was restricted.»

Dawudiyeh estimated the damages sustained by Al-Dustour at JD600,000, noting that «monthly salaries amount to JD12,000.» He noted that «the media institutions» revenues stopped, even our rights from government advertising before the pandemic, amounting to JD700,000 for the three newspapers were collected later. Al-Dustour»s share of them was JD80,000. For this reason, we found great difficulty in collecting staff salaries during the pandemic months.»

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani, said that «the headline of the government»s media policy during the pandemic was openness and accuracy in delivering information on regular basis.»

Al-Momani agreed with the opinions saying that the information received from the government were not sufficiently clarified, were not convincing, and did not reach the people smoothly. He gave examples about explaining and clarifying some defense orders related to work and about the reasons behind the total lockdown and delays in opening business sectors and the continued closure. Al-Momani preferred that the media institutions» badges and identification cards were used as the basis to grant permits for movement to journalists during the pandemic

so that their work is not restricted. He noted that he understood from the government»s talk that permits are for everyone without exception. He noted that the «Radio and Television Corporation received perhaps 600 permits.»

The Chief Editor of Al-Ghad newspaper, Makram Al-Tarawneh, said that «the managements of daily newspapers sent a letter to the Prime Ministry demanding compensations for the damages sustained as a result of stopping printing and the resulting decline in their revenues which reached zero.»

He added: «Until this minute, the newspapers did not receive a response to their letter and do not know the position from it.» He explained that the newspapers stopping printing came as part of the Defense Order based on the recommendation of the «Pandemics» about the importance of stopping printing newspapers since there was a possibility that newspapers can spread the coronavirus.» Al-Tarawneh noted that «the movement permits represented another obstacle for the movement of all journalists during the pandemic.» He noted that «Al-Ghad newspaper received 20 permits at the start of the pandemic and then had 50 permits. They ended up with 75 permits that covered journalists, administrators, and technicians.» Al-Ghad daily newspaper»s publisher Mohammad Alayan affirmed that «the paper press was amongst the most affected during the Coronavirus pandemic.» He affirmed «the need to support it so it can recover.»

Alayan added: «The daily newspapers continued to be published without printing but with almost no revenues.» He warned that 95% of their revenues stopped with the exception of some advertising online. Alayan showed that the volume of material damage that Al-Ghad sustained during the months of the pandemic amounted to over JD600,000.

## Recommendations

The report derived its recommendations through the information, indicators, and comments it documented whether through its theoretical and scientific material or through the opinions and perspectives of journalists, media leaders, experts, and human rights activists. 19 recommendations were made, including 12 related to civil and political rights and 7 related to economic, social, and cultural rights as follows:

### In civil and Political Rights:

1. Announce the deactivation of the defense law and/or defense orders as well as the exceptional measures that impose restrictions on the freedom of expression and the media.
2. Guarantee society's right to express its opinions through the media outlets and their online platforms.
3. Call on the government and the various governmental institutions to build a plan and an announced visualization for dealing with the media during crises.
4. Urge the government to attend to developing media strategies for public institutions and to build their capacities in communications and to ensure the flow of information to the people.
5. Approve the use of press cards issued by media institutions as an identification that permits journalists to move freely to perform their functions.
6. Develop and approve interactive online mechanisms with the media outlets to ensure the flow of numerous and varied information during crises.
7. Make legislations relevant to the freedom of expression and the media compatible with international standards and stop referring journalists to extraordinary courts.
8. Rapid and independent investigation in journalists' complaints when they are subjected to violations by law enforcement agencies.
9. The government to approve and adopt announced media policies that are just, and to avoid favoritism and bias in dealing with media outlets, and to investigate any complaints received in this respect.
10. Stress the need and importance of protection and safety of journalists in times of crises

and that they are not exposed to risk when performing their work.

11. Ensure the independence of media institutions when enacting any laws and/or regulations or instructions and encourage and strengthen the public media.
12. Encourage media institutions to build self-organization mechanisms and overcome any legal obstacles facing them.

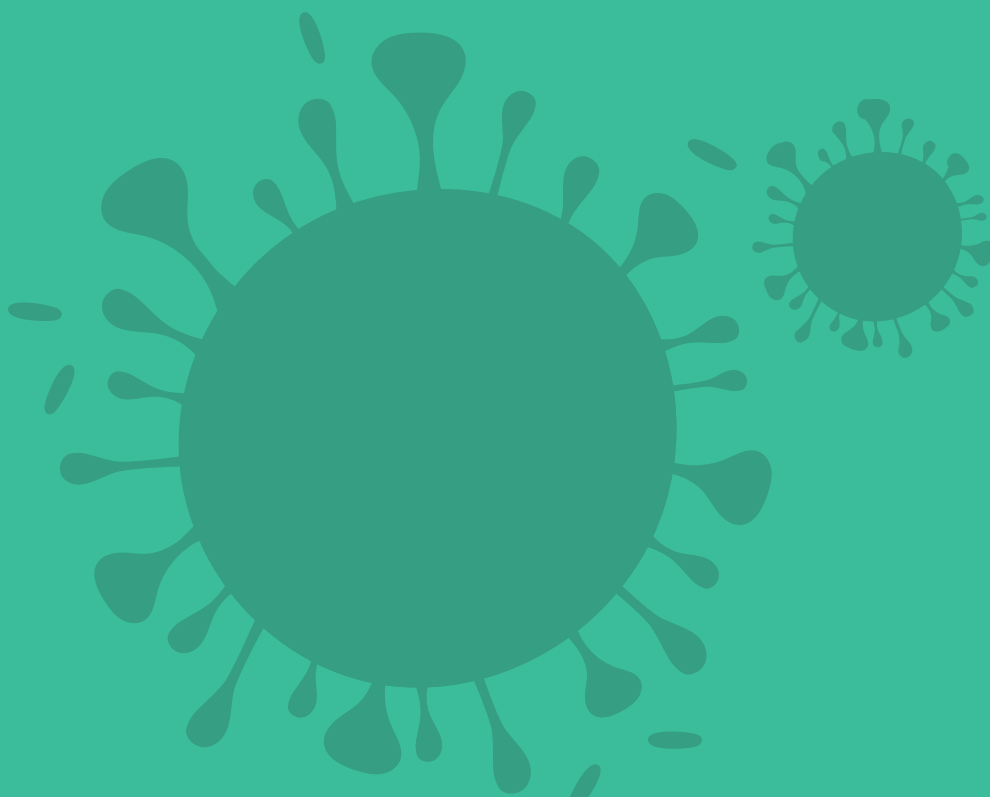
### In Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

1. Establish a financial fund to support independent media institutions according to fair and transparent announced standards.
2. Compensate media outlets for the losses they incurred during the Coronavirus pandemic, particularly the daily newspapers which stopped printing in compliance with a government decision.
3. Provide interest-free or soft loans to assist media outlets in confronting their exacerbating financial crisis as the result of the Coronavirus pandemic.
4. Ensure that journalists whose salaries or bonuses were reduced or who were terminated are assisted.
5. Call on media institutions to avoid dismissing journalists or reducing their salaries, and to adopt financial policies to provide for expenses away from affecting the interests of staff members whenever possible.
6. Request media institutions that will resort to restructuring processes to set fair and announced standards to be adopted on the basis of qualifications and efficiency.
7. Negotiate with search engines and social media platforms to reach an understanding on agreements that ensure financial resources for media institutions in return for the use of their media content.

# 01

## Section One:

Legal Obligations Regarding the Freedom of Media, Opinion, Expression, and Access to Information in International Criteria in view of the Coronavirus Pandemic







## 01

## Background: Legal Obligations Regarding the Freedom of Media, Opinion, Expression, and Access to Information in International Criteria in view of the Coronavirus Pandemic

As the Coronavirus pandemic spread throughout the world since December 2019, attention to the freedom of the media, opinion, and expression an increasingly important focus of interest. The voices of media freedoms defense organization increased with demands launched by the United Nations to respect the freedom of expression, particularly, ensuring the right to access information.

Most reports and data published by human rights organizations and defending the free of expression and the media referred to and stressed that the circumstances accompanying the pandemic were used by governments to increase restrictions on the freedom of expression and the media, and that many governments imposed emergency measures that were abused.

We first present requirements by the International Human Rights Law regarding the freedom of expression and the media, and secondly the implementation of international standards for human rights protection. Thirdly, we present what was issued by human rights organizations that are recognized by the United Nations regarding Jordan's commitment to its human rights and legal pledges regarding respecting the freedom of expression and the media under the Coronavirus pandemic. Fourthly, we present what was published by local organizations in this regard as follows: International Law for Human Rights

### Requirements Regarding the Freedom of Expression and the Media

1. The Human Rights Law requires countries to take all possible measures and arrangements available to them

and performing due diligence to protect human rights to life and health positively. These measures should include, as a minimum, publishing information about public health, and that measures taken by the state do not violate human rights unnecessarily such as the freedom of expression. Such measures should be observed by countries not only during exceptional times such as COVID-19 but also when these rights are vulnerable to restrictions and/or violation.

2. The International Human Rights Law guarantees every person the right to the highest level of health that can be achieved, and requires countries to make arrangements to prevent threatening public health and to provide healthcare to whoever needs it. The Human Rights Law also acknowledges that the restrictions imposed on some rights in the context of serious threats to public health and general emergencies that threaten the life of a nation can be justified when they have a legal basis and are absolutely necessary, based on scientific evidence. Their implementation should not be random or discriminatory, and should be for a limited period of time. They should respect human dignity and be subject to review and are compatible proportionate in order to achieve the sought objective.
3. According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights which was ratified by Jordan on May 28th 1975 and was published in the Official Gazette on 15 June 2006, the government is compelled to take

effective measures for «The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases.»

4. According to the International Human Rights Law, governments are required to protect the right to freedom of expression: «Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.» Restrictions permitted to the freedom of expression for reasons related to public health should not subject this right to risk.

5. Clause No. (3) of the General Comment number (14) by the Committee of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in its session number 22 in the year 2000 regarding the right to enjoy the highest attainable level of health stipulates that: «The right to health is closely related to and dependent upon the realization of other human rights, as contained in the International Bill of Rights, including the rights to food, housing, work, education, human dignity, life, non-discrimination, equality, the prohibition against torture, privacy, access to information, and the freedoms of association, assembly and movement. These and other rights and freedoms address integral components of the right to health.»<sup>1</sup>

6. The Siracusa Principles approved and adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1984 note that any restrictions or derogations that may be imposed on human rights should abide by the following standards:

- Should be specific and applied in accordance with the law.

- Directed towards a legitimate objective in a democratic society to achieve a specific objective.
- Should be minimal in interfering in or restricting the achievement of a goal.
- Should be based on scientific evidence and not random or discriminatory when applied.
- Should be time-specific, respectful of human dignity, and subject to review.

7. These standards are also in agreement with the comments by the Human Rights Committee regarding states of emergency and the freedom of movement, and is considered a binding directive to governments for their measures to be legal, proportionate, necessary, and time-bound.

### Implementing International Standards to Protect Human Rights

1. As of the time this report was published, the government had issued 14 Defense Orders in accordance with the Defense Law number (13) for the year 1992, with the premise of protecting society's public health from the risks that may be caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Defense Order number (1) was issued on March 19th 2020 and was published in the Official Gazette number 5626<sup>2</sup>
2. The government sent notice to the Secretary General of the United Nations in accordance with article 4/3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in which it identified the measures adopted in the emergency state according to Defense Order number 13 for the year 1992 to ensure that the Coronavirus spread is contained. The notice mentioned that it is permissible in emergencies the commitments stated in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights are mitigated since Jordan is party to the Convention, particularly articles 12, 17, and 21.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838d0.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pm.gov.jo/upload/files/Order-Defense-1.pdf>

3. According to the notice, the measures taken by the government do not contradict the commitments imposed according to the international convention and do not represent or include discrimination based on ethnicity, color, sex, religion, or social origin, as was stated in the notice sent from Jordan's UN mission in New York on May 1st 2020.

### Judicial and Legal Obligations the Jordanian Government should Implement as in International Organizations' data

#### 1. Directives by «Article 19» Organization on Addressing Misleading Information<sup>3</sup>

The «Article 19» organization warned in a document published on March 6th 2020 that the Coronavirus may have a negative effect on the freedom of international information. The organization highlighted in a report entitled «Ensuring the Public's Right to Know in the COVID-19» a number of threats to government obligations regarding access to information and public health according to the Human Rights Law. It called on governments to ensuring that the public can access information on important health and environmental laws.

#### 2. Comments by the Director of Policies and Strategies regarding communications and information in UNESCO as related to fake news on the Coronavirus<sup>4</sup>

On April 13th 2020, the UN News Page published an interview with the Director of Policies and Strategies regarding communications and information in UNESCO (Guy Burger).

Burger said in response to the question: «What can be done to ensure publishing the right information which help the public on a wide scale?» that «what is required is improve the provision of the right information and ensure that requests are met.» He added: «To combat rumors, governments should be more transparent and offer more information in line with laws and policies related to the right to access information.»

<sup>3</sup> <https://bit.ly/30j9EEF>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bit.ly/2Ao4DQB>

Burger affirmed that «this is not considered an alternative to acquiring information from the media. For this reason, we are focusing our efforts to convince the authorities to see a free and professional media as an ally in the war against misinformation, particularly that the press media works openly in public domain while a lot of misinformation comes from unreliable sources and social media.»

UNESCO demanded that governments not impose restrictions on the freedom of expression because such restrictions would harm the important role played by a free media, and to acknowledge that the media is a power against misinformation even if it broadcasts documented opinions and information that may annoy decision-makers.

#### 3. Statement of the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights regarding the Coronavirus pandemic and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

On April 17th 2020 the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations issued a statement regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and economic, social, and cultural rights.

The committee said in paragraph 3 of the statement that «the COVID-19 pandemic clearly personifies the importance of the indivisibility and cohesion of human rights. This pandemic represents, basically, a threat to international public health, but it also involves many ramifications that affect enjoying civil and political rights because some measures taken by countries combating the pandemic impose strict measures on the freedom of movement and other freedoms. And hence, it is important that measures taken by states to combat the pandemic be reasonable and proportionate to ensure the rights of all people.»

The statement recommended in paragraph 18 ensuring access to information. It stipulated

that «Accurate and accessible information about the pandemic is essential both to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus, and to protect the population against dangerous disinformation. Such information is also crucial in reducing the risk of stigmatizing, harmful conduct against vulnerable groups, including those infected by COVID-19. Such information should be provided on a regular basis, in an accessible format and in all local and indigenous languages.

#### **4. United Nations High Commission for Human Rights: The Right of the Public to all Information related to COVID-19.**

On April 24th 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelette announced in a statement published by the Commission on its official website that she was «was alarmed by restrictive measures imposed by several States against the independent media, as well as the arrest and intimidation of journalists, saying the free flow information was vital in fighting COVID-19.»

Bachelette went on to say: «Some States have used the outbreak of the new coronavirus as a pretext to restrict information and stifle criticism,» Bachelet said. «A free media is always essential, but we have never depended on it more than we do during this pandemic, when so many people are isolated and fearing for their health and livelihoods. Credible, accurate reporting is a lifeline for all of us.»

Bachelette went on: «This is no time to blame the messenger. Rather than threatening journalists or stifling criticism, States should encourage healthy debate concerning the pandemic and its consequences. People have a right to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, and an independent media is a vital medium for this.»

She affirmed: «Being open and transparent, and involving those affected in decision-making builds public trust and helps ensure

that people participate in measures designed to protect their own health and that of the wider population and increases accountability. Additionally, independent media provide medical professionals and relevant experts a platform to speak freely and share information with each other and the public.»

She concluded, saying: «Journalists are playing an indispensable role in our response to this pandemic, but unlike the grave threats posed to other essential workers, the threats media workers face are entirely avoidable. Protecting journalists from harassment, threats, detention or censorship helps keep us all safe.»

#### **5. Statement by the Human Rights Committee Regarding Cases of Non-Compliance with the Provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic**

On April 30th 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee CCPR issued a statement regarding cases of non-compliance with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paragraph C of the statement stipulated that «States parties should not derogate from Covenant rights or rely on a derogation made when they are able to attain their public health or other public policy objectives by invoking the possibility to restrict certain rights, such as article 12 (freedom of movement), article 19 (freedom of expression) or article 21(right to peaceful assembly), in conformity with the provisions for such restrictions set out in the Covenant, or by invoking the possibility of introducing reasonable limitations on certain rights, such as article 9 (right to personal liberty) and article 17 (right to privacy), in accordance with their provisions.»

The committee allocated in paragraph E of the statement what concerns the freedom

of expression, stipulating that «Freedom of expression and access to information and a civic space where a public debate can be held constitute important safeguards for ensuring that States parties resorting to emergency powers in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic»

#### **6. Human Rights Watch: Jordanian Authorities should not Exploit Corona to Restrict the Freedom of expression.**

On May 5th 2020, Human Rights watch issued a statement which said: «Jordanian authorities have arrested media workers and others and issued a vaguely worded emergency decree that could chill online discussion about Jordan's COVID-19 response.»

«The Jordanian government has acted decisively to protect its citizens and residents from COVID-19, but recent measures have created the impression that it won't tolerate criticizing the government's response to the pandemic,» said Michael Page, Deputy Director of the Middle East Department at Human Rights Watch. «The authorities should protect Jordanians' ability to discuss Covid-19 online and share news and concerns without fear of arrest.» He added that «Jordan is confronting unprecedented challenges as it deals with COVID-19, but the crisis should not be used as a pretext to limit free expression.»

In its statement, Human Rights Watch criticized the Jordanian authorities for its intolerance with any criticism of its measures to confront the Coronavirus, warning against using «the crisis as an excuse to restrict the freedom of expression.»

Based in New York, the organization which defends human rights said in a statement that the authorities arrested media workers and others and issued a vaguely worded emergency decree that could chill online discussion about Jordan's COVID-19 response.»

#### **7. The International Press Institute (IPI) Condemns the Arrest of journalists from Ro'ya.**

On April 14th 2020, the International Press Institute issued a statement in which it said: «Media executives and leading journalists for press freedom, today condemned the arrest of Ro'ya TV channel owner Fares Sayegh and News Director Mohammad Al-Khalidi by Jordanian security forces. The arrest took place on April 10th 2020 after the TV channel aired a segment in which people from impoverished neighborhoods of Jordan's capital, Amman, were seen complaining about the lockdown imposed by the government to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country.»

(IPI CONDEMNS THE ARREST OF TWO TV EXECUTIVES IN JORDAN - INTERNATIONAL PRESS INSTITUTE)

#### **Legal Obligation the Jordanian Government should Implement in Statements by Local Organizations**

On April 29th 2020, the Civil Society's Institutions' Coordination Committee published a legal interpretation entitled «Defense Order (8) Does not Observe Jordan's Commitments to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights» in which it called on the government to abandon loose texts in dealing with crimes of expression, publication, and media. Regarding the freedom to publish and freedom of expression, it said:

«While affirming the importance of verification of sources and not to circulate erroneous information during the current situation or other circumstances, and whether before or after the Defense Law becoming effective, current legislations addressed regulating the practice of this right and criminalized acts considered as violations of its practices penalizing them and setting limits to these penalties, whether depriving the perpetrator of freedom or financial penalties in the form of fines. Perhaps the most prominent of these legislations are the penal code, the Press and Publications Law, and the Electronic Crimes Law. It is stressed that the

right to expression is guaranteed constitutionally in article 1/15 which stipulates that «The State shall guarantee freedom of opinion. Every Jordanian shall be free to express his opinion by speech, in writing, or by means of photographic representation and other forms of expression, provided that such does not violate the law.»

Hence, current legislations may not come and restrict this right in a manner that prevents its practice according to article 128 of the constitution which stipulates that laws issued in accordance with the constitution to regulate rights and freedoms may not affect the core of these rights or touch on their principle foundations.

The Jordanian law includes restrictions that regulate the practice of the right to expression. This practice was also restricted by the press code of honor and the morals of the journalism profession for practitioners in this field. These restrictions do not include the right to discuss public policies and what is issued by the government for the purpose of administering public affairs. They do not also include discussing announced information of importance to the public opinion in which a person expresses his opinion in matters concerning his life even if connected to the Coronavirus pandemic. The right to addressing these issues is rather considered part of a citizen's right in holding the government accountable and drawing its attention to matters of urgency and issues concerning his life so it would undertake its responsibilities and find adequate solutions.

As for what was stated in the Defense Order and the loose statements it used, we see that it is possible for them to touch on the right to expression, restricting it in a manner that violates the provisions of the constitution. What was stated in the Royal decree and the interference by a large group of publications and news under news that could terrify people through the media outlets or social media, the statement «terrifying people» is a very loose

statement, and includes a large group of news such as figures, ramifications of the disease from different sides, and others. They could also include the mechanism through which the government deals and the parties concerned in this pandemic. Criminalization in this loose manner could lead to mitigate the ability of media outlets to perform their analytical and control functions which the country is in serious need for in times of emergency.

Hence, it is possible to say that what was stated in the Defense Order in this respect is considered a premise for more restrictions to the freedom of expression and it is possible to affect the practice of the right itself. It would have been possible, however, to deal with the undocumented news or the videos and material circulated on this issue, and are untrue or exaggerated or to spread rumors and fake news through the legal texts stated in the applicable laws which are considered sufficient.

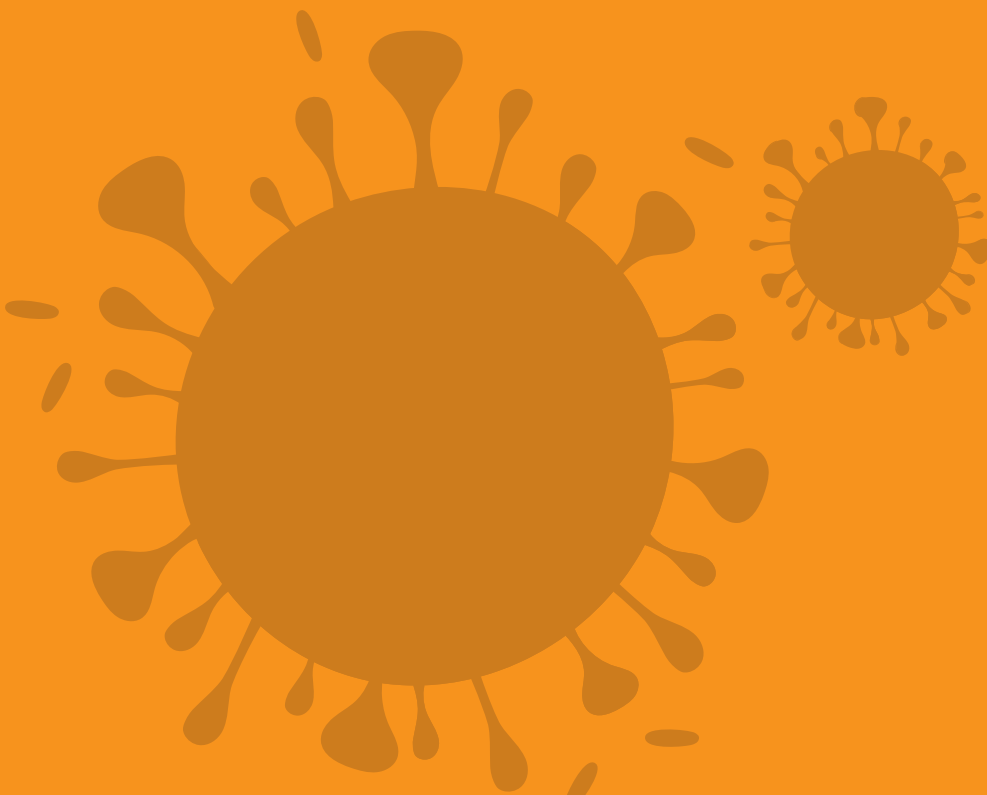
In the context of discussing this issue, one cannot ignore that the previous practices to issue the Defense Order and even to declare a state of emergency affected to a large extent the act of resorting to the use of legislations with loose texts such as the Anti-Terrorism Law, in confronting issues of opinion, publishing, and trying the perpetrators of these acts before the State Security Court. Hence, we affirm here the need to refrain from using current legislations in a different location than that the legislator intended. Resorting to the anti-terrorism law, for example, and relying on the idea that publication in these conditions leads to terrifying individuals represents a large expansion over interpreting the texts stated in the said law which was originally legislated to deal with terrorism crimes and is not specialized with publication crimes.

Resorting to it as an initial adaptation leads to giving jurisdiction to the State Security Court in specific crimes exclusively with no margin for expansion.

# 02

## **Section Two:**

Government Measures and Procedures Stated in the Jordanian Defense Law and its Orders and their Effect on the Freedom of Expression and the Media According to the International Human Rights Law







## 02

## Government Measures and Procedures Stated in the Jordanian Defense Law and its Orders and their Effect on the Freedom of Expression and the Media According to the International Human Rights Law

According to the human rights standards stated in the International Human Rights Law, expert monitors of freedom of expression and the media in the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media at the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) expressed in a statement «their concern that some strategies, which government and public health experts put in place to protect the health and life of individuals from COVID-19, could undermine basic rights.» They called on the government to «ensure the protection of those rights,» affirming that «human health does not rely on accessing health care only, but also rely on accessing credible information about the nature of the threats and methods of protecting oneself, families, and the community.» They considered that «freedom of expression and the right to search for, access, and share information, regardless of borders and in all places and for all people, the basis for that.»

These experts recommended the importance of governments providing genuine information about the nature of the threat of the virus and the importance of providing credible and easy information and ensuring people's access to Internet service in times of crisis and emergency. They stressed the importance of exerting exceptional efforts to protect the journalists, because they are performing a necessary mission and job under an emergency health circumstance and because they are the link to inform the public of latest developments.

In the same context, UNESCO called for giving priority to the safety of journalists, who are

covering the coronavirus events, particularly the journalists on the frontlines to provide citizens with the largest possible of accurate and sound information.

The Jordanian government's measures adopted during the pandemic could be seen in light of these restrictions and human rights standards. We believe that this requires a review of the effects of the Defense Law and orders and the extent of their respect for rights, particularly the freedom of expression and the media, especially the following effects:

- The curfew and the inclusion of journalists in it and the issuance of movement permits for the journalists.
- Stopping the printing of newspaper.
- Guaranteeing the flow of information.
- Violations against journalists and the freedom of expression.
- The effect of the Defense Law on the professional and living situation of journalists and media institutions.

Examining the effects of the Defense Law and orders issued pursuant to it allows us to say that some of the articles and/or paragraphs of articles stated in its orders did affect in one way or another the right to freedom of opinion, expression, and the media. This is if they are to be contrasted with the International Human Rights Law and with the restrictions on freedom of expression in the Siracusa Principles.

It should be noted that the results of the journalists' opinions survey, which was carried out by CDFJ for the benefit of this report regarding the journalists' evaluation of the government's handling of the media

outlets during the corona pandemic, showed that 8.8% of surveyed journalists found that the government's performance in dealing with the media outlets during the pandemic was excellent. This compares with 17.6% who saw it as weak, 35.8% who saw it as good, and 37.7% who saw it as average.

The following is a presentation of the effects of the Defense Law and its orders on the freedom of expression and the media:

### 1. Curfew and permits:

Defense Law orders did not exclude journalists from the comprehensive and partial curfew decisions. The government issued permits to a group of journalists in the early days of the curfew and used name lists provided by the media institutions, which are licensed and registered with the Media Commission, to issue the permits according to set percentages for each media institution. These percentages were not announced and the mechanism used to determine the needs of the media institutions was not known.

In all cases, the use of permits, regardless of its effectiveness, remains a restriction on the right of journalists to move to practice their work unhindered.

Since the start of the pandemic, the government discussed the mechanism that should be adopted to allow the journalists to move during the curfew in a limited manner. There were several ideas, the most prominent of which were:

- Using the press card issued by the media institution as a document allowing its holder to move and work.
- Using the press card issued by the Jordan Press Association.
- Issuing special permits by the Media Commission.

The government chose to adopt the special permits issued by the Prime Ministry and the National Center for Security and Crisis Management. These were paper permits at first and then became electronic. In a talk organized by the CDFJ to discuss media policies and in which the Minister of State of Media Affairs participated as a speaker, the Media Commission's General Manager, Theeb Al-Qaraleh, said that permits were issued for 279 Jordanian, Arab, and foreign media institution, adding that 900 permits were issued for journalists in the first six hours of the curfew.

The government's move to issue special permits did not enjoy complete acceptance. CDFJ received complains and protests from some journalists about not getting permits to move and travel around and that this affects their work. In turn, Al-Qaraleh says that the Media Commission carried out a study about the level of satisfaction with granting the permit and it concluded that 95% of the journalists who were given permits expressed their satisfaction, but the remaining 5% were not objecting to the permit system, but, rather, they had wanted to get more permits.

However, the owner and Director of the independent Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, saw that the permit system for the media outlets was not fair to Ro>ya channel, which was given, according to him, 40 permits for all the programs and news programs. Then it was given 10 to 15 permits every two weeks until the end of the month of Ramadan. The channel only had 50% of the permits for the workers in the channel, which forced them to cancel some of the programs.

The government had concerns about using the media institutions' identification cards for fear that they would be given to non-beneficiaries, particularly in view of the absence of sufficient oversight over their issuance. At the same time, using the membership card of the Jordan

Press Association would deprive hundreds of media outlet workers, who are not members of the Association, of their right to work. That is why the government used the permits that it issued, but the standards it adopted in issuing these permits were not clear and transparent, and their fairness was not examined. Media institutions complained that the number of permits given to them was not enough to carry out their work, while there was circulating information that a large number of permits were given to other media institutions.

Through search and follow-up, CDFJ believed that granting and issuing movement permits did not rely on clear, announced, and transparent standards. This is what lawyer Marwan Salem said during his participation in the discussion on the government policies with media outlets during the coronavirus pandemic. He said that «there is a problem with giving the permits and the inequality of giving them.» Also, Mohammad Shamma, the journalist specialized in human rights issues, said that journalists face a problem and the independent journalists face a bigger problem in getting the movement permits, because they are not included in the permit by their media institutions, and they also suffer from getting the information they need.

In view of the 50% permits that were given to the independent Ro>ya channel, Makram Al-Tarawneh, Chief Editor of Al-Ghad daily newspaper, said, during interviews that CDFJ carried out for the purpose of preparing this report with directors of media institutions, that «movement permits constituted an obstacle for the movement of all journalists during the pandemic.» He indicated that «Al-Ghad newspaper got 20 permits at the beginning of the crisis, which then became 50 permits, and ended up with 75 permits that include journalists, administrators, and technicians.» Meanwhile, Anas Al-Majali, former News Director at Jordan TV, said that «the TV>s reporters received 140

permits at the beginning of the crisis, which then increased to 180 permits for the news department.» Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, said that the government>s remarks were understood to mean that the permits were for everyone without exception. He indicated that the Corporation may have received nearly 600 permits, while Al-Mamlaka Chief Executive Officer, Dana Al-Sabbagh, said that «Al-Mamlaka channel received 199 permanent permits for its journalists, including the reporters in the governorates, and they later increased to 205 permits.» She indicated that «the permits during the general lockdown were 140 permits for two days.» The Director General of the Jordan News Agency (PETRA), Fayeq Hijazeen, said that «the government does not put restrictions on the movement of journalists. They gave us at PETRA the permits we needed and wanted. On the first day of the lockdown, they gave us 100 permits. After that, the entire staff got permits, and even in the general lockdown we had between 30-40 permits that allowed them to move.»

In the survey carried out by CDFJ about the government>s performance in dealing with the media outlets during the coronavirus pandemic, 27% expressed their complete dissatisfaction with the system of permits given to the journalists by the Media Commission. In turn, 25.8% said that they were greatly satisfied, while the majority, which is 46%, said they were had little and average satisfaction.

In the same context, the majority of the surveyed journalists said that the permits were a restriction on the freedom of the work of the journalists and the media outlets. 45.9% said that they were a restriction to a great extent and 39% said that they were a restriction to a small and average extent, while 13.8% said that they were not a restriction at all.

76.1% answered that they applied for permits. Results showed that 72.4% who applied for permits received them, while 27.6% did not receive permits.

- There were numerous reasons as to why journalists who applied for permits did not receive them, mainly:
- Limited number of permits for each media institution, and the inability of media institutions to request permits for all their staff.
- Some institutions in Jordan had not completed the procedures for licensing.
- The temperamental behavior of the permit issuer, in addition to the temperamental nature of some institutions in dealing with its journalists.
- Some media institutions are not members in the Social Security Corporation.
- Some media institutions are not members of the Press Association.
- Lack of a mechanism to communicate with the Media Commission and the difficulty of communication with it. It is impossible to communicate electronically.
- The website for permits was down.

It is noteworthy that the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights attended in article (12) to the right to free movement, residency, and travel. The committee concerned with the civil and political rights had submitted its general comment number 27 on article 12 of the convention, involving the freedom of movement in its sixty seventh session. The committee identified the restrictions that can be imposed on paragraph 3 of the article 12 which stipulates that «the above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.»

The main points expressed by the committee

in its comment on the article concerned with the freedom to travel and move and the restrictions that can be imposed on this right will be presented here as per the original text:

«ARTICLE 12, PARAGRAPH 3, PROVIDES FOR EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH RIGHTS UNDER PARAGRAPHS 1 AND 2 MAY BE RESTRICTED. THIS PROVISION AUTHORIZES THE STATE TO RESTRICT THESE RIGHTS ONLY TO PROTECT NATIONAL SECURITY, PUBLIC ORDER (ORDRE PUBLIC), PUBLIC HEALTH OR MORALS AND THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF OTHERS. TO BE PERMISSIBLE, RESTRICTIONS MUST BE PROVIDED BY LAW, MUST BE NECESSARY IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THESE PURPOSES AND MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH ALL OTHER RIGHTS RECOGNIZED IN THE COVENANT.»

- The law itself should identify the conditions where it is permissible to restrict rights. Hence, country reports should identify the legal foundations on the basis of which restrictions are imposed. Those restrictions that are not stipulated by the law or those that are not compatible with the requirements of paragraph 3 of article 12 will represent a violation of the guaranteed rights according to paragraphs 1 and 2 of the covenant which stipulates that 1. Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence. 2. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.
- The states should, when ratifying laws stipulating restrictions permitted in paragraph 3 of article 12, should always be advised by the principle saying not to hinder or constrain the right's spirit and core as a result of the restrictions. The relationship between the right and restriction should be turned between the rule and the exception. The laws that permit the implementation of the restrictions should use precise standards. They should

not permit the officials responsible for implementing them unbridled freedom to act according to their estimates.

- Paragraph 3 of article 12 indicates clearly that it is not sufficient that the restrictions serve the permitted causes. They should also be necessary to protect them. The restrictive measures should also be compatible with the proportionality principle. They should be suitable to achieve their protective function. They should be the least invasive means compared to other means that can achieve the sought result. They should be compatible with the interest it is protecting.
- It is necessary to respect the principle of proportionality not only in the law that identifies the parameters of the restrictions but also in implementation by the administrative and judicial authorities. The states should guarantee the speed of completing any measures related to practicing or restricting these rights, and should ensure the provision of means justifying the implementation of restrictive measures.
- Many a time did a state fail in proving that implementing its laws restricting guaranteed rights in paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 12 is compatible with all the said requirements mentioned in paragraph 3 of article 12. Implementing the restrictions in any individual case should be based on clear legal foundations and should fulfil the necessity condition and the proportionality requirements.
- Implementing the restrictions permissible in accordance with paragraph 3 of article 12 should be compatible with the other rights guaranteed in the Covenant and the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination. Hence, restricting the rights stipulated in paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 12 by any form of discrimination whether on the basis of ethnicity, color, sex, religion, political or non-political opinion, national or social origin, ownership,

birth, or social status, represents a clear violation of the Covenant.

- Examining and reviewing the comments by the committee concerned with civil and political rights and reflecting them on the measures taken by the Jordanian government, it is possible to say that they did not offer sufficient clarifications.

Furthermore, it did not set any specific foundations for the restrictions it imposed on the freedom of movement including for journalists. This is not compatible with the permitted restrictions in accordance with paragraph 3 of article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or compatible with other rights guaranteed by the Covenant as well as the basic principles of equality and non-discrimination, keeping in mind the following:

- Risk to health and public safety that could result from allowing all journalists the freedom of movement to practice their work.
- Justifications to preventing the use of movement permits for journalists during a general lockdown.
- Failure to announce standards and criteria for granting movement permits for journalists.
- Accusations that the government was lax in granting the permits to official institutions and restricted this right to private media institutions.

Journalists not receiving permits due to the absence of fair distribution between the media institutions› two sectors, public and private, in addition to the government adopting the policy of giving permits to journalists from registered and licensed media institutions with the Media Commission only does not take into consideration the principle of hindering the spirit of the right as a result of the restrictions. What is meant by the right here is the right to the freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the government did not use accurate standards in granting the permits, and did not provide accurate standards or legal justifications that permit the imposition of restrictions on the freedom of movement for journalists, particularly that the journalists who received permits adhered to the standards and conditions of public safety that preserve their own personal safety. In this context, the World Health Organization concentrated its efforts in its directives to preserve public health, together with international and local organizations defending the right to expression which were calling on journalists throughout the lockdown period to adhere to preserving public health under the Coronavirus pandemic through manuals, directives, and awareness campaigns. CDFJ also organized in cooperation with the Health Ministry a special awareness campaign for journalists in this respect.

Comments on article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights allow us to also to state that the criteria for issuing permits were not based on clear legal foundations and did not fulfil the criteria of necessity and proportionality.

## 2. Halting Printing Paper Newspapers

On March 17th 2020, the Council of Ministers decided to take some precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus, including stopping the printing of paper newspapers as they contribute to spreading the disease. This government decision came in spite of the absence of sufficient evidence that indicate the virus could be carried by printed material. The ban on printing newspapers continued from the day the decision was issued until June 2nd 2020 when they started printing again after stopping for more than two months.

During the ban on printing newspapers, their revenues from advertising contracted with advertising companies and government agencies stopped completely, in addition to

revenues from sales and subscriptions which stopped as well, reflecting on their income. On another hand, numerous indications came from boards of directors and publishers of newspapers regarding the damages sustained as a result of the ban on printing. Until now, these newspapers have not announced the size of the losses they incurred. At the same time, the government did not pledge to compensate them for the losses they incurred as a result of their decision to stop newspapers from printing.

The government issued its order to stop printing newspapers based on the Defense Law number 13 for the year 1992 which derives its force from the text of article 124 of the constitution which stipulates that «In the event of an emergency necessitating the defense of the Kingdom, a law, which shall be known as the Defense Law, shall be enacted giving power to the person specified therein to take such actions and measures as may be necessary, including the suspension of the operation of the ordinary laws of the State, with a view to ensuring the defense of the Kingdom. The Defense Law shall come into force upon its proclamation by a Royal Decree to be issued on the basis of a decision of the Council of Ministers.»

Although article 15/4 [should be 15/3] of the Constitution stipulates that «Newspapers shall not be suspended from publication nor shall their permits be revoked except in accordance with the provisions of the law,» and that paragraph 5 [should be 15/4] of the same article stipulates that «In the event of the declaration of martial law or a state of emergency, a limited censorship on newspapers, publications, books and broadcasts in matters affecting public safety and national defense may be imposed by law,» they do not apply to the measures taken by the government to confront the Coronavirus pandemic. Using the constitutional right by issuing a law for defense according to the text

of article 124 of the constitution is different from resorting to the use of article 125 of the constitution which allows declaring a state of emergency and martial law.

This debate makes a number of law experts say that the government stopped permitting publishing newspapers based on the constitutional text which allows it to take the necessary arrangements including the right to inactivate laws. For this reason, it restricted citizen rights such as the freedom to move and quarantined people for health reasons.

The government's decision to ban printing newspapers may not agree with international standards to guarantee the freedom of expression and the media and the comments by the committee concerned with the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which affirmed the importance that measures taken should be characterized by necessity and proportionality.

In spite of this, it is not easy to calculate the proportionality in the issue of the ban on printing and circulating newspapers. Many Arab countries banned printing newspapers including the Sultanate of Oman, Morocco, Yemen, Kuwait, Tunisia, and Syria. «Ukaz Saudi newspaper stopped its paper issue temporarily. Many Algerian newspapers stopped as well. Yet through a quick monitoring of the internet, most paper newspapers printed in Europe and the United States continued to print although they were subjected to losses due to the lockdown and requested their journalists to work from home.

In this context, owners and chairmen of the boards of directors expressed, particularly during the discussions and interviews CDFJ conducted for the purpose of producing this report the size of losses incurred by the newspapers, which reached between 95% and 100% as the result of government orders to stop printing them to prevent the transmission of the Coronavirus disease.

The World Health Organization, however, said in a statement after receiving enquiries regarding the potential for someone to contract the disease through commercial goods, that «the possibility of a person contracting the disease through commercial goods is low, and the risk of contracting the virus that causes COVID-19 from a container that was transported and traveled, and was exposed to different circumstances and temperatures is also low.» This statement may lead to assuming that there is no large chance for the spread of COVID-19 through newspapers.

### 3. Flow of Information

As the Coronavirus pandemic started and the curfew was declared closing public and private institutions, movement by journalists was also constricted. With the exception of journalists who were issued permits to move, the rest were unable to do so. This also applied to closing the government including the Minister of State for Media Affairs, together with the Health Minister if the issue involves Coronavirus, and to a lesser extent the Pandemics Committee affiliated with the Health Ministry, and the Operations Director at the Pandemics Committee, Brigadier General Mazen Al-Faraya. This precluded asking any direct questions by journalists.

Most information to media outlets came from the daily press briefing at the National Center for Security and Managing Crises. They were mostly flowing in one direction from the government to the media outlets and the public.

The press briefing was not held in the presence of journalists to ask questions but was broadcast directly on local television channels (Al-Mamlaka, Jordan Television, Ro>ya, and Al-Haqiqa International) whose cameras were allowed at the Crises Center where the press briefing was held.»

Based on the above, one can say that the flow of information was centralized. Journalists were circulating documented information about directives issued to all officials including ministers not to talk to the media outlets a few days after the pandemic started resulting in contradicting information among officials.

The right to talk was mostly restricted to the ministers of state for media affairs and health. They were later joined by the Director of the Pandemics Committee, Dr. Nazir Obaidat.

This centralization and the absence of media outlets from the scene, as well as the inactivity allowed directing accusations at the government of being unfair in dealing with the media outlets, practicing favoritism and bias toward certain media outlets while ignoring and excluding media institutions, blocking them intentionally from receiving information.

Defense Order number (8) which maximized penalties on anyone accused of promoting rumors represented unprecedented pressure on media outlets, pushing them to be reluctant before publishing any information, particularly what contradicts the information from the state apparatus on the state of the pandemic and the average number of cases, for example.

Even media institutions' directors (official and public) were scared of broadcast information derived from conformed sources before receiving an affirmation or comment from government parties. This was considered as hindering their work and a restriction on the independence of their role in broadcasting information to the public.

Detaining the General Manager and owner of Ro'ya, Fares Al-Sayegh, and the News Director at the channel, Mohammad Al-Khalidi, after broadcasting a televised report that was considered an act of incitation against defense orders may have represented a direct threat against all journalists, pushing them to be more careful. It increased the level of prior self-censorship of the media content.

The Minister of State for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh, does not agree that the government policies were not fair in dealing with media institutions and does not acknowledge the centrality of the media message. He affirmed in his interview with CDFJ during a meeting that he was responding to hundreds of telephone calls from journalists and supplied journalists with information. He also participated with state ministers in tens of televised and radio meetings to answer enquiries by journalists and the public.

CDFJ believes that most comments made by participants in the discussion sessions and interviews conducted for the purpose of preparing this report on the flow of information showed that there was an infringement in the right to access information and its flow, and that restricting the right of journalists to movement and participation in the government's press briefings contributed to that. The Minister of State for Media Affairs commented on this saying: «The public prevention and safety measures prevented the presence of journalists at the press briefing.» Dana Al-Sabbagh, Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka channel, commented on this saying: «We sometimes faced a scarcity in the sources of information or even a delay in responding to our enquiries and questions, or participation with us.» The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Radio and Television Corporation, Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani, agreed with the opinions saying that the information received from the government were not very clear or convincing, nor did it reach the public smoothly. He gave an example of this in explaining and clarifying some defense orders related to business, and the reasons behind the comprehensive danger and delays in opening business sectors and the continued closures.

Media professional Fateh Mansour commented saying: «Many decisions and information provided by the government in the press briefing were void of justification.»



Hadil Ghabun, a journalist in Al-Ghad newspaper shared this opinion with him saying: «The flow of information was sporadic and did not include details.» According to human rights expert Kamal Al-Mashriqi, «the government succeeded in controlling the media by controlling the flow and provision of information. It was the only source of information and there was a scarcity of information which negatively affected the performance of media outlets.»

The director of the Criminal Justice Unit at the National Human Rights Center said that «information came from one source and the intentional absence of true information led to the spread of fake news and rumors.» The owner of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, believed that the press briefing was closed and information flowed in one direction. It would have been better had there been an interaction with the media outlets.» He considered «the government's commitment to spread information was successful but not sufficient, some information was lacking and untrue, and the documents and information we had revealed realities and truths contradicting what was being said.»

On the other hand, the News Director at Jordan Television, Anas Al-Majali, believed that «the media policies during the crisis were outstanding, and for the first time in four years, he felt the smooth work and speed in response in providing information.»

It is noteworthy that about 22% of journalists surveyed by CDFJ over the government performance with the media during the Coronavirus pandemic see that the government guaranteed the flow of credible information to a large extent whether to the public or the media. 70% saw that the government guaranteed the flow of credible information only to a limited or medium level whether to the public or the media outlets. The results of the survey showed that restricting information to limited sources

is the most important challenge that faced the surveyed journalists during their media work during the Coronavirus pandemic at 44%, followed by the inability to move at all times to follow stories and press reports at 40.8%. Next came preventing officials from making statements to media outlets at the rate of 38.9%, followed by stopping press conferences at a rate of 37.7%.

#### **4. Living and Job Security for Journalists and Losses Incurred by Media Institutions.**

In addition to the material losses incurred by media outlets due to the decision to ban printing newspapers and the receding revenues resulting from the loss of advertising, a number of journalists were subjected to random dismissal by the management of their media institutions using the excuse of losses they incurred as a result of the defense orders to confront the Coronavirus and the absence of any compensation for them from the government.

A number of journalists complained about the dismissal decisions or their receding living incomes with the excuse of confronting the Coronavirus pandemic. For example, Al-Ra>y daily newspaper management on May 18th 2020 informed the Social Security Administration which is a shareholder in the newspaper that it suspended 59 of its journalists temporarily for the months of April and May 2020. along the background of this decision, journalists in the newspaper issued a statement in which they said that «their newspaper's management divided its journalists into three categories: One that receives 100% of their salaries, a second that receives 70%, and a third that was temporarily suspended.»

On May 31st 2020, the management of Al-Ghad independent daily newspaper issued official letters to 9 of its journalists informing them that they were suspended for the month

of June. The letters said: «based on the statement by the prime minister dated May 31st 2020, and in accordance with the defense order number (6), I would like to inform you that it was decided to request you to stop working as of June 1st 2020 until June 30th 2020.»

Publishers and chairmen of the board of directors of daily print newspapers affirmed in the interviews conducted for preparing this report that the decision to ban printing newspapers to circumvent the transfer of the Coronavirus led to losses reaching 100%»

The chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Dustour daily newspaper Mohammad Dawudiyeh said that «the newspaper sustained damages after it stopped printing during the Coronavirus pandemic reaching 100%,» and that the damages sustained by the newspaper were about JD600,000.» He affirmed that the revenues of the press institutions stopped, and even our rights to government advertising amounting to JD700,000 for the three newspapers were collected later. Al-Dustour's share of them was JD80,000, and hence we find it very difficult to secure the salaries of our staff during the pandemic months.»

Dawudiyeh said that «the government stood with the daily-paid labor and this is good, but it did not stand with the newspapers.» He described the issue as unjust for the media institutions.»

For his part, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra'y newspaper, Ayman Al-Majali, demanded that the government interferes immediately to save the paper newspapers noting that «what the newspapers need is not loans that increase its debt but for the government to pay the salaries of the staff for a period of four months until it returns to normal.»

Al-Majali said: «The newspapers sustained direct damage during the Coronavirus pandemic and the government should help them and stand by them. The newspapers have always been a main channel for information in society during the pandemic.»

For his part, the Chief Editor of Al-Ghad daily newspaper, Makram Al-Tarawneh, said that «the daily newspapers» managements sent a letter to the prime minister demanding compensations for the damages sustained because of the printing ban and the accompanying halt of its revenues that reached <Zero>.»

He added: «Until this minute, the newspapers did not receive a response to their letter and the position from it is still unknown.» He explained that the print newspaper's ban from printing came in a defense order based on a recommendation from the Pandemics Committee stating the importance of banning newspapers from printing because they carry the Coronavirus.»

The publisher of Al-Ghad daily newspaper publisher, Mohammad Alayan, affirmed that «the print newspapers were the ones that sustained most damage during the Coronavirus.» He affirmed «the need to support them so they can recover.»

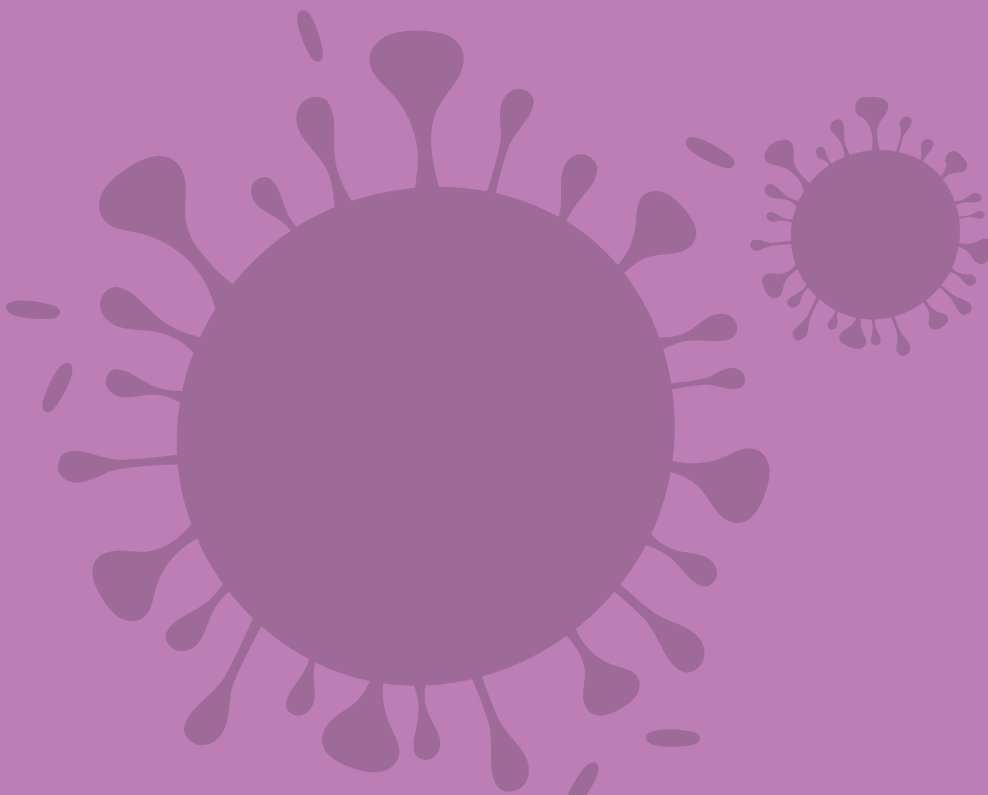
Alayan said: «The daily newspapers continued to be published without printing but also without any income as well.» He warned that 95% of their revenues stopped, with the exception of some online advertising. He noted that the size of the material damages sustained by Al-Ghad newspaper during the pandemic months reached at least JD600,000.

Similarly, the results of this report's survey on the government's performance and the challenges facing journalists during the Coronavirus pandemic showed that the media outlets are facing increasing challenges during the pandemic, and that they will likely persist after it. Most surveyed journalists (73.5%) see that the most important challenge facing them is receding financial revenues, followed by receding commercial advertising (66%), the inability to distribute printed newspapers and magazines (51.5%), followed by reducing the salaries and bonuses of journalists, and threats of dismissing journalists respectively.

# 03

## **Section Three:**

Monitoring Violations against the Freedom of the Media and Journalists





## 03

## Monitoring Violations against the Freedom of the Media and Journalists Resulting from the Government Measures to Address the Coronavirus for the Period March 17th – June 10th 2020

The CDFJ succeeded over the first five months of the current year 2020 in monitoring about 10 cases of violation against journalists and media institutions through its «Ayn Program for Monitoring and Documenting Violations against the Freedom of the media in Jordan. This report, however, addressed cases that took place since the Defense Law was announced on March 19th and until the end of May 2020, with special reference to the nature of these cases which were related to covering issues related to economic, social, cultural, and political affairs under the Coronavirus pandemic only.

workers from his country in Jordan during the curfew, in addition to assaulting the daily Al-Ghad newspaper's photographer, Mohammad Al-Maghayda, preventing him from covering the arrival of Jordanian students returning from abroad as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. There was one group case of a circular to the Health Affairs Directorate and hospital directors preventing them from giving statements to media outlets except with the approval of the Health Ministry.

Number of Violations	Number of Journalists Subjected to Violations	Number of Cases		
		Individual Cases	Group Cases	Total
17	4	3	1	4

No.	Type of Violation	Recurrence
1	Restriction of Freedom	4
2	Security Investigation	2
3	Unjust Trial	2
4	Random Detention	2
5	Deprivation of Residency	1
6	Random Arrest	1
7	Prevention from Coverage	1
8	Harassment	1
9	Physical Assault	1
10	Infliction of Injury	1
11	Prevention from Publishing and Distribution	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>

Violations that the «Ayn team believed took place in monitored cases were «deprivation of freedom» (4 times), and the repetition of security investigation, unfair trial, and random detention (twice each). One case of violation each was for prevention from coverage, harassment, physical assault, inflicting injury, and prevention from publishing and distribution.

The Ayn team believed that all the monitored 17 violations touched on five of the basic rights according to the International Human Rights Law, foremost of which was violating the right to freedom and personal safety through deprivation of freedom, and random detention and arrest which were repeated seven times, representing 46.7% of the total number of violations, followed by violation against the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the media in the second place which were repeated five times through security investigation, prevention from coverage, harassment, and prevention from publishing

In this context, the «Ayn Program documented 4 cases that indicated, according to monitors in the program, 17 violations to which 4 journalists and journalists were subjected. Three of these cases were individual, namely, detaining Ro»ya channel Manager, Fares Al-Sayegh, and its News Director, Mohammad Al-Khalidi, and arresting the Bengali television reporter Kabir Hussein Salem, known as Salim «Ukash, for a report he wrote about the

and distribution, representing 20% of the total number of monitored violations.

The Ayn team believed that violating rights in the judiciary through unjust trials, in addition to violating the right to personal security and subjection to torture or other forms of harsh, inhumane, or humiliating punishment through physical assault and inflicting injury came third. In the fourth and last place was violating the right to residency to which the Bengali Television reporter was subjected for reporting on the state of Bengali workers residing in Jordan during the curfew.

It is noteworthy that the results of the opinion survey conducted by the CDFJ for preparing this report showed that 25.8% of the journalists surveyed were subjected to violations during the Coronavirus pandemic. Withholding information came at the top of the violations list at 37.3%, followed by prevention from movement and work during the curfew at 35.3%. Journalists mentioned a number of violations they believed they were subjected to. These can be summarized as random detention and arrest, random dismissal and termination, threats of inflicting harm, harassment, preventing printing newspapers, refusal to license, prior censorship, blocking a website, blocking information, prevention from coverage, verbal assault, harassment, confiscating work tools and equipment, damage to assets, prevention from radio or television broadcast, deprivation of a fair trial, prevention from publishing, harsh and humiliating treatment, confiscating official documents, prevention from media work, security investigation, inflicting injury, and prevention from movement and work during curfew.

### Violated Human Rights

Following is a brief presentation of the violations monitored noting that the Ayn team is continuing the process of documentation and ensuring the integrity of the evidence

available regarding these cases, as follows:

Rank	Violated Right	Recurrence	%
1	Right to freedom and personal security	7	46.7%
2	Right to freedom of opinion, expression, and the media	5	20%
3	Right to judiciary issues	2	13.3%
4	Right to personal freedom and not being subjected to torture or other forms of harsh, inhumane, or humiliating treatment or punishment	2	13.3%
5	Right to residency, movement, and travel	1	6.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 1. Detention of the Manager of Ro'ya channel and its News Director, Mohammad Al-Khalidi

On April 9th 2020, the Public Prosecution at the State Security Court issued an order to detain the owner of Ro'ya television channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, and its News Director, and Program Presenter journalist, Mohammad Al-Khalidi, for a period of 14 days. The public prosecution started to interrogate them along the background of broadcasting a media content which was also posted on social media. They were charged with exposing the security of Jordanians to danger in contravention of articles (2, 3, and 4) of the Anti-Terrorism Law, as well as violating Defense Orders regarding broadcasting reports that incite violating the curfew.

The channel had broadcast a televised report which included interviews with Jordanians complaining of the deterioration of their economic situation as a result of the curfew. One of the interviewed in the televised report included a comment in which a citizen expressed the possibility that the economic situation would lead people to burglarize and trade in drugs if the curfew was not released.

This caused an outcry on social media and public opinion, which was considered by the security systems as «abusive to the Jordanian state»s efforts in confronting the ramifications of the Coronavirus crisis in Jordan.»

On April 12th 2020, the State Security Court agreed to release Al-Sayegh and Al-Khalidi on bail. The case is still with the Public Prosecutor at the State Security Court at the time this report was released.

## 2. Arrest of the Bengali Television Reporter Kabir Hussein Salem, known as Salim Ukash, for a report on the living conditions of Bengali workers in Jordan during the curfew

On April 14th 2020, the security forces detained Kabir Hussein Salim, reporter of the official Bengali television, for filing a press report during which he touched on the living problems from which Bengali workers in Jordan suffer as a result of the curfew imposed in Defense Order number (2).

According to the information that the «Ayn team managed to monitor and document, security elements in civilian clothes detained Salim in front of his house a few days after the report was broadcast on the official Bengali television. He was referred to the Amman public prosecutor who ordered his detention for 14 days and charging him with violating the Communications Law. His detention came along the background of charges based on a complaint against him by the Bengali Embassy in Amman because he criticized his country»s government and its embassy in Amman for neglecting thousands of workers from Bangladesh who were suffering from the lockdown in Jordan.

Salim was released and returned to the administrative ruler who ordered his deportation. He was kept under administrative detention pending the implementation of the deportation order. He could not, meanwhile,

resort to the judiciary to cancel the deportation because the courts were not operating in order to prevent the spread of the virus. He was also not granted the right to have a lawyer with him during the interrogation. He was still in detention at the time of writing this report. The official Bengali television had broadcast on April 4th 2020 a report by its press reporter residing in Amman Hussein Salim entitled: «About 30,000 Bengali Expatriates Suffering from a Sharp Food Crisis in Jordan.»<sup>1</sup> The «Ayn team also acquired an official document sealed with the official seal of the Bangladesh embassy in Jordan proving that he works for the Bangla TV Limited.

The CDFJ launched a communications campaign with the government, particularly the Minister of State for Media Affairs to ensure his release. This did take place, but he was again detained based on deportation orders against him for violating the residency law. The CDFJ demanded that the government gives him a grace period to rectify his position to protect him and his family and stop the deportation decision.

## 3. Assault against Al-Ghad daily newspaper»s photographer, Mohammad Al-Maghaydah, and preventing him from covering the arrival of Jordanian students from abroad as a result of the Coronavirus

Photojournalist Mohammad Al-Maghaydah from Al-Ghad daily newspaper claimed in a complaint he submitted to the CDFJ that he was harassed and prevented from coverage, and was physically assaulted and deprived of freedom for covering the arrival of Jordanian students who had been stranded outside Jordan due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

In further details, Al-Maghaydah stated that on May 5th 2020 and through coordination with journalists and the Armed Forces» Moral Guidance Department, journalists were covering the welcoming of Jordanian students

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2UNWsEI>

who had been stranded abroad as a result of the Coronavirus crisis inside the Queen Alia International Airport. When the journalists arrived, there was a change in plan by the Moral Guidance and all media personnel were diverted to an area about 10 kilometers from the airport, namely, the Airfreight Terminal. He added: «After the first airplane landed, we waited for hours but the buses did not come out from the airfreight terminal. The second airplane then landed and one and a half hours of waiting later no bus came out. As a result, some of the media colleagues from different outlets withdrew from the coverage while others decided to stay.»

Al-Maghayda went on: «After that, an internal security member told us that the evacuation and departure of students will be done on the runway. This had not been agreed on in the coordination with the Director of Moral Guidance but we did not object at all.»

He went on: «When I started the coverage for Al-Ghad took a number of photos and then started to broadcast «live» to the newspaper's Facebook page, being vigilant and following safety precautions. A sharp argument took place between me and an officer who objected to the live broadcast although a number of colleagues were doing the same. After that I was prevented from coverage by the airport security personnel upon the direct order of the officer, saying that direct broadcast is not permitted.»

Al-Maghayda said that «the security forces expelled me from the airport by force and I was beaten, which caused arm and shoulder cuts and bruises.»

#### 4. Circular to the health affairs directorates and hospital directors Banning making statements to media outlets except with the approval of the Health Ministry

On May 13th 2020, the Health Ministry issued a circular directed to the health affairs and hospital directors preventing them from giving statements to any media outlet except after the approval of the ministry.

Health Minister Saad Jaber said in press statements to the media along the background of this statement that «the decision is aimed at preventing falling into conflicts of information to circumvent the creation of a state of confusion in news related to the developments of the Coronavirus in Jordan.»

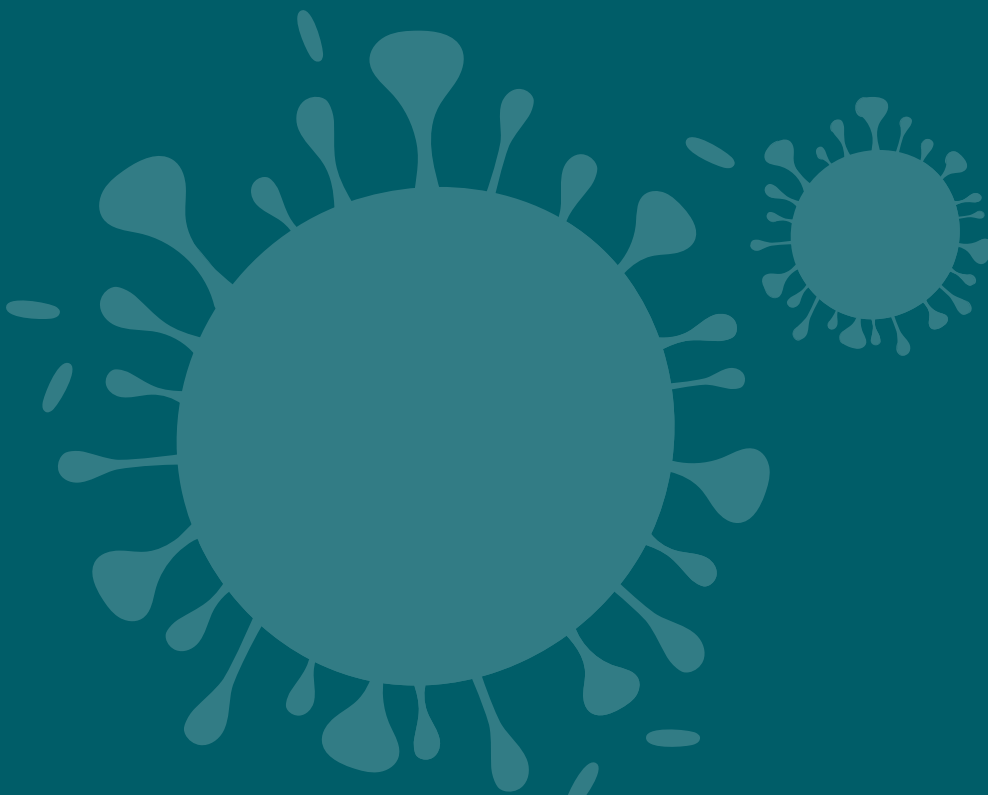
The Ayn team believes that decisions prohibiting publication on areas that concern public opinion represent a violation of the freedom of opinion, expression, and the media, and are in contradiction of article (15-1) of the Jordanian constitution, in addition to article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights to which Jordan is party. They stipulate «freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.»



# 04

## Section Four:

Journalists Survey: Challenges that Faced Media Professionals  
Journalists in Jordan during the Coronavirus Pandemic





## 04

## Journalists Survey: The Challenges that Faced Media Professionals Journalists in Jordan during the Coronavirus Pandemic

For the purposes of preparing this report, the CDFJ conducted a survey of a random sample of journalists working in various local media institutions. The survey covered print, electronic, visual and audio media from government, public and independent sectors. The survey focused on the challenges they faced in media work as well as the problems and violations they were exposed to. It also covered the extent of the government's commitment to dealing with the media with impartiality, credibility and transparency during the Coronavirus pandemic, in addition to evaluating the mechanisms of information flow.

The survey was conducted between May 24th and June 1st, 2020, with the participation of 159 journalists. It was conducted by sending electronic forms through Google Forms to be filled out by the participating journalists in order to abide by standards of public safety and health.

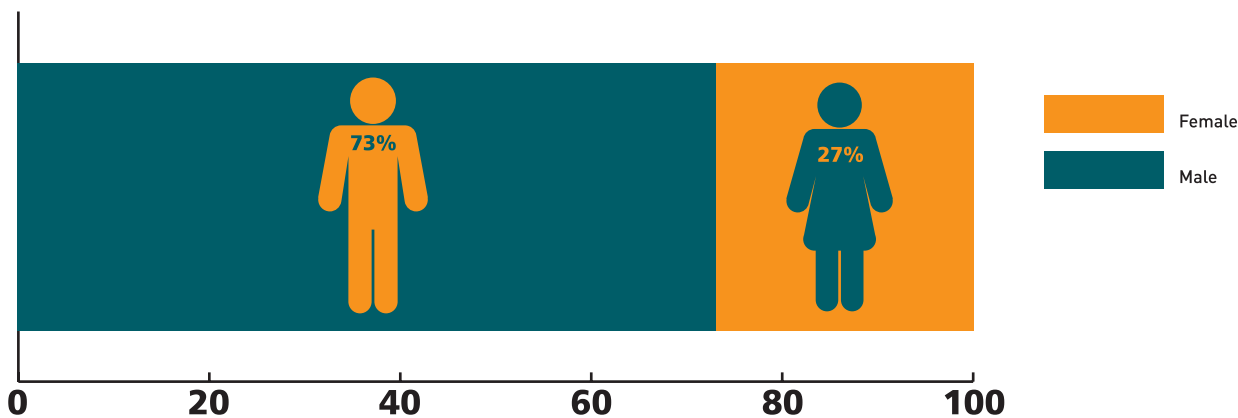
The survey questions focused on six themes that included 17 direct questions, as follows:

1. The government's dealing with the media
2. Ensuring information flow
3. Movement permits
4. The challenges and problems that face media workers during the Coronavirus pandemic
5. Violations and abuses
6. Media support trends after the Coronavirus pandemic

The participants in the sample were distributed as follows:

Government Media				Public Media				Private Media				Total
18				16				125				159
11.3%				10.1%				78.6%				100%
Print	Audio	Visual	Electronic	Print	Audio	Visual	Electronic	Print	Audio	Visual	Electronic	Total
0	4	9	5	0	5	11	0	45	10	23	47	159
0%	22.2%	50%	27.8%	0%	31.25%	68.75%	0%	36%	8%	18.4%	37.6%	
Percentage of the total sample				Percentage of the total sample				Percentage of the total sample				Total
0%	2.5%	5.7%	3.1%	0%	3.1%	6.9%	0%	28.3%	6.3%	14.5%	29.6%	100%

The ages of the participants in the surveyed sample ranged from 25 to 70 years, with 73% males and 27% female respondents.



Following is a reading and an analysis of the results of the survey, divided into six themes as follows:

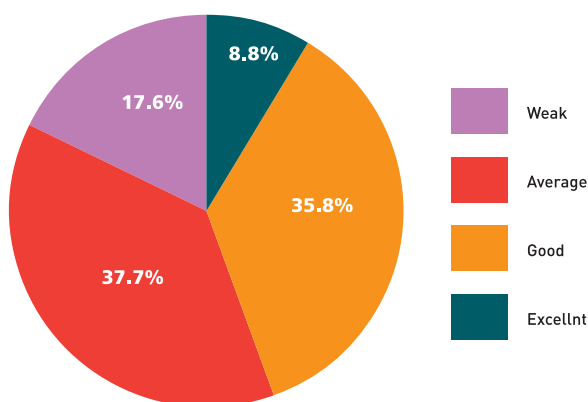
### 1. The government's dealing with the media

The results of the survey showed that 8.8% of the surveyed media professionalsjournalists found that the government's performance in dealing with the media during the Coronavirus pandemic was excellent while 17.6% of them thought that it was weak. Most media professionalsjournalists expressed their satisfaction: 35.8% of them described the government's performance as good, and 37.7% described it as medium.

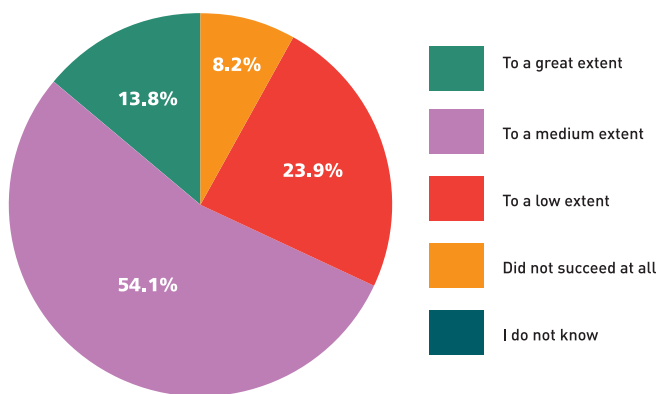
Examining the numbers reveals that those who deemed the performance excellent and good constitute 44.6%.

When media professionalsjournalists were asked about their evaluation of the government's success in dealing with the media during the Coronavirus pandemic, 13.8% considered it successful to a great extent. On the other hand, 8.2% thought that it had failed and that it did not succeed at all. The remaining answers vary: The highest evaluation of the success was given a medium score by 54.1%, and those who gave it a low score formed 23.9%.

Question 1: How do you evaluate the performance of the government in dealing with the media during the Coronavirus pandemic?



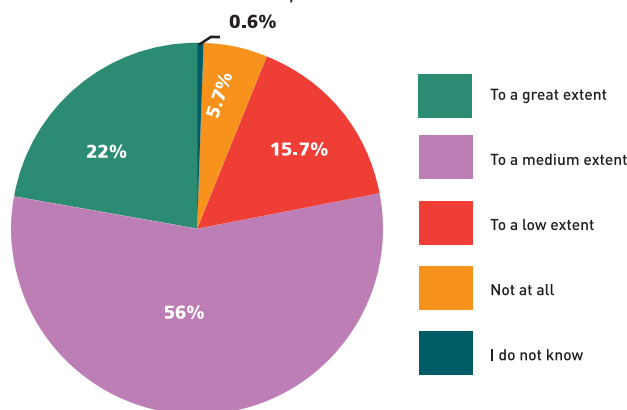
Question 2: To what extent do you believe the government succeeded in dealing with the media during the Coronavirus pandemic?



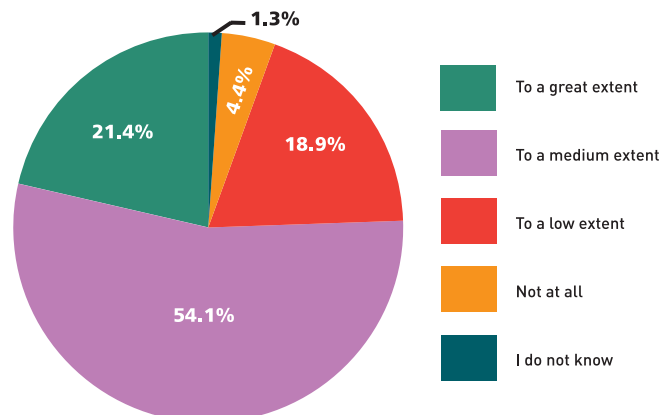
## 2. Ensuring information flow

The results of the survey showed that only 22% of the surveyed journalists find that the government ensured the flow of credible information to a great extent both to the public and to the media. Most of the answers with a percentage of 70% show that the government ensured the flow of credible information to low and medium extents, whether to the public or to media outlets. 25.8% of journalists believe that the government's commitment to presenting a daily press

Question 3: To what extent do you believe the government ensured the flow of credible information to the public?



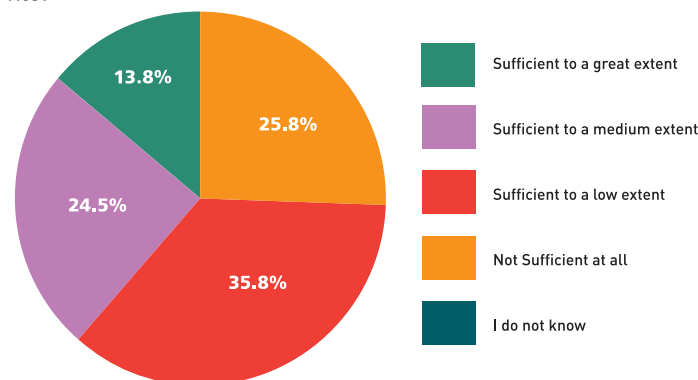
Question 4: To what extent do you believe that the government ensured the flow of credible information to media outlets?



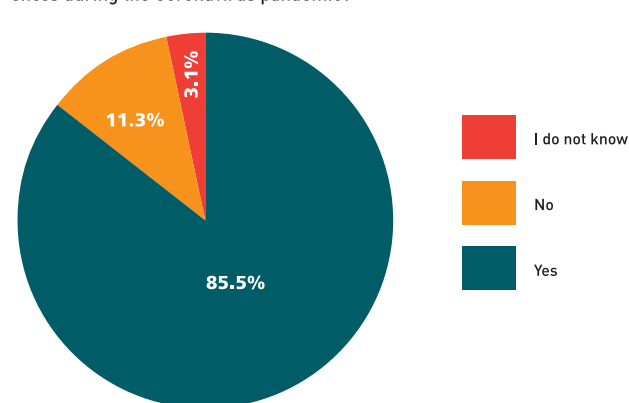
briefing is not sufficient at all to answer their questions and inquiries while only 13.8% found it to be sufficient to a great extent.

This was evident when they were asked whether the government should continue holding press conferences during the pandemic: 85.5% of them said yes, and only 11.3% of them answered with «no.»

Question 5: To what extent were the government's daily press briefings sufficient to answer media professionals' questions and queries?



Question 6: Should the government have continued holding press conferences during the Coronavirus pandemic?



### 3. Movement permits

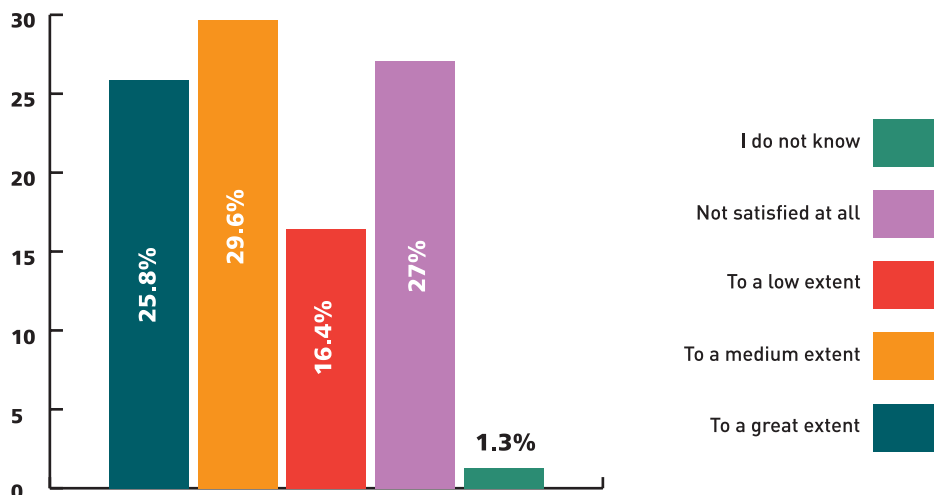
27% of the surveyed journalists expressed their complete dissatisfaction with the system of permits granted to journalists by the Media Commission. On the other hand, 25.8% of them replied that they were satisfied with this system to a great extent. The majority of 46% said that they were satisfied to a low and medium extent.

At the same time, the majority of surveyed journalists emphasized that the permits constituted a restriction on the freedom of performance of journalists and media outlets. 45.9 % of them said that it constituted a restriction to a great extent while 39% of them said it formed a restriction to low and medium extents. Only 13.8% said it did not constitute a restriction at all.

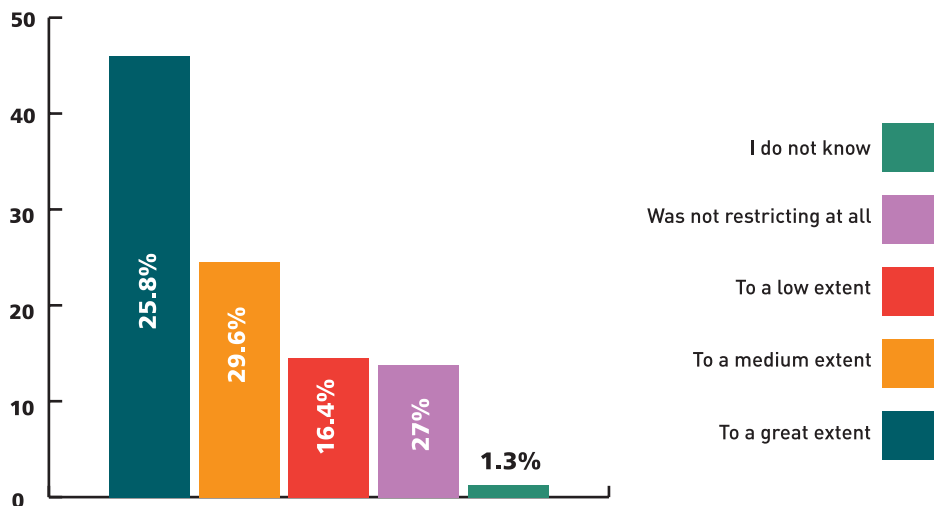
76.1% of the surveyed journalists answered that they had applied for a permit. The results showed that 72.4% of those who applied for permits received it while 27.6% of them did not. When asked if they knew the reasons they were not granted a permit, their answers varied. The most important of these are:

- The limited number of permits allowed for each media institution and the inability of media organizations to request permits for all their employees
- The failure to complete the procedures for working licenses of some institutions in Jordan.
- The whimsical nature of the person granting permits, in addition to the whimsical nature of some institutions in dealing with their journalists.
- An agency that is not registered with the Media Commission
- Because some public institutions had not joined the Social Security Corporation
- Working independently and not being enrolled in the social security program
- Weakness of the Jordan Press Association
- Not being affiliated with the Jordan Press Association
- The lack of a mechanism to communicate with the Media Commission, the difficulty of communicating with it, and the dependence on traditional methods of dealing with media outlets. This is in addition to the unavailability of electronic communication
- The site for the permits was down
- Unknown reasons

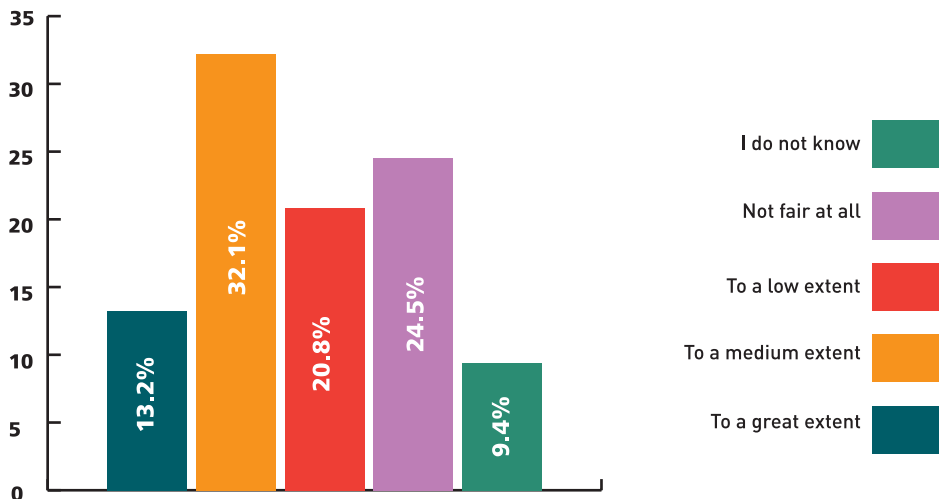
Question 7: To what extent are you satisfied with the system of granting permits to journalists by the Media Commission?



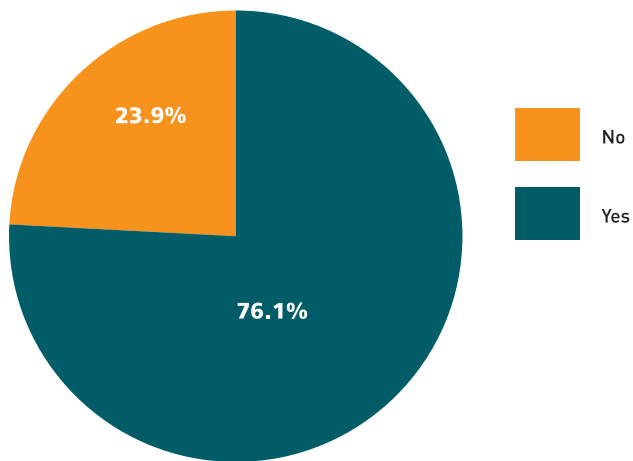
Question 8: To what extent do you believe the system of granting permits constituted a restriction on the freedom of journalists and media outlets in performing their jobs?



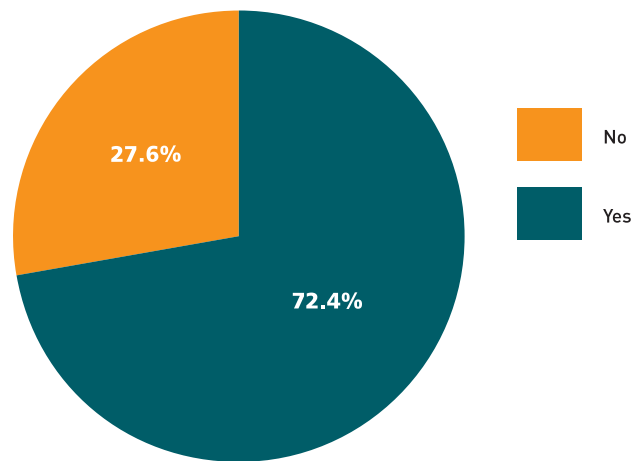
Question 9: To what extent do you believe that the permits granted to journalists and media outlets were given fairly?



Question 10: Did you apply for a permit?

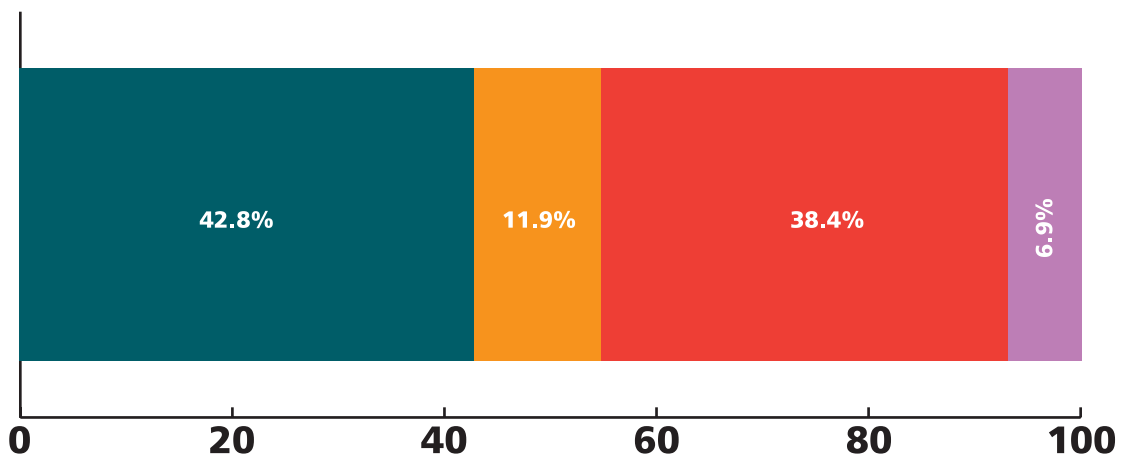


Question 11: Did you receive a permit?



The results of the survey showed that 42.8% of the media professionals/journalists believe that the ideal way for the government to ensure the continuity of media work and the mobility of journalists is to grant all journalists permits based on a list with their names from their media organizations. 38.4% of them consider the ideal way would have been to recognize the media outlet's identification card while only 11.9% of them think that approving the Jordan Press Association card only is the best way for that.

Question 12: What would have been the optimal method for the government to follow in order to ensure that media outlets continued working and to ensure the mobility and transportation of journalists?



- Other options
- Recognition of the media outlet's identification card
- Recognition only of the Jordan Press Association identification card
- Granting all media professionals/journalists work permits based on a list from their media organizations



## 4. The challenges and problems that face media workers during the Coronavirus pandemic

The results of the survey shown in the table below reveal that limiting the information to specific sources is the most significant challenge that faced the surveyed media professionals/journalists during their journalistic work under the conditions of the Coronavirus pandemic: This formed (44%) with (70) responses. It was followed by the inability to always move to follow up on stories and reports with (65) answers, or a percentage of 40.8%. This was followed by the refusal of officials to grant permits to media outlets with (62) responses, forming 38.9%. Next came stopping press conferences with (60) answers, forming 37.7%.

It can be noted that the lack of information needed by media professionals/journalists to do their journalistic work was among the last of the challenges and problems that were mentioned as the most significant with only (43) responses, that is, (27%). The second most important challenge scored (36) responses with a percentage of 22.6%.

Challenge/Problem	Did not answer	By Importance, where 1 is most important and 7 is least important							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Fear of contracting the virus during work	#	10	54	20	22	19	5	8	21
	%	6.3%	34%	12.6%	13.8%	11.9%	3.2%	5%	13.2%
Lack of information you need for media work	#	8	43	36	29	10	15	7	11
	%	5%	27%	22.6%	18.2%	6.3%	9.4%	4.4%	6.9%
Limiting the information to certain sources	#	6	70	36	21	7	9	4	6
	%	3.8%	44%	22.6%	13.2%	4.4%	5.7%	2.5%	3.8%
Press conferences stopped	#	9	60	27	19	17	8	8	11
	%	5.7%	37.7%	16.9%	11.9%	10.7%	5%	5%	6.9%
Preventing officials from making announcements to media outlets	#	9	62	36	18	16	6	4	8
	%	5.7%	38.9%	22.6%	11.3%	10%	3.8%	2.5%	5%
Not being able to always move to follow stories and do press reports	#	5	65	32	13	13	8	7	16
	%	3.2%	40.8%	20.1%	8.2%	8.2%	5%	4.4%	10.8%
Difficulty of hosting figures to talk with the media due to curfews	#	11	53	31	22	20	10	1	11
	%	6.9%	33.3%	19.5%	13.8%	12.5%	6.2%	0.6%	6.9%

It is worth noting here that the journalists in the surveyed sample added many problems and challenges that face them while working during the Coronavirus pandemic. The most important of the challenges mentioned are:

1. The Jordan Press Association and the Media Commission did not support electronic websites or media professionals/journalists.
2. The government's interference in directing public opinion and adopting policies that promote the government's performance.
3. The impact of Defense Law No. (8) on the freedom of journalistic work and the fear of imprisoning media professionals/journalists.
4. Limiting press releases to some channels and withholding them from others.

5. Favoritism shown by officials and security entities towards some media outlets.
6. Lack of work tools required for flexible work, which gave us a great difficulty in performing work and in communicating with the specialized authorities.
7. Officials were selective in dealing with media institutions and journalists.
8. Frequent stopping by the police and the gendarmerie.
9. Not approving permits during the general lockdown.
10. The application of the Cybercrime Law to media outlets and professionals and considering information that does not come from specific government sources rumors and intimidation of citizens.
11. Arrests and lawsuits in the State Security Court and suspending cooperation with some media institutions by the official authorities.
12. The mindset of martial law and discriminating among institutions.
13. Not allowing media professionals journalists to interview infected people while adhering to health procedures. Additionally, there was no way to verify the information broadcast and published by the government because it was limited to the single source of the daily press conference.
14. The absence of accurate information about the virus, which created confusion.

### 5. Violations and abuses:

The results of the survey showed that 25.8% of the surveyed journalists were subjected to abuses and violations in their journalistic work during the Coronavirus pandemic, and 5.7% said that they may have been subjected to violations, but they did not confirm this. 68.6% confirmed that they were not exposed to any violations or abuses.

At the top of the list of violations journalists were exposed to was withholding information by 37.3%, followed by the preventing movement and work during the curfew by

35.3%. Journalists reported many violations they believe they were subjected to as follows and listed by the frequency of occurrence:

The Violation/ Abuse	Frequency	Rate %
Arrest	1	2%
Detention	2	3.9%
Arbitrary separation	1	2%
Threat	4	7.8%
Harassment	7	13.7%
Banning newspapers from being printed	12	23.5%
Restriction of Freedom	6	11.8%
Refusing to grant permits	4	7.8%
Preemptive censorship	4	7.8%
Blocking an electronic website	1	2%
Blocking information	19	37.3%
Preventing coverage	9	17.6%
Defamation and slander	3	5.9%
Incitement	1	2%
Confiscating or seizing work tools	2	3.9%
Financial damages	1	2%
Banning broadcasts	4	7.8%
Refusal to grant a fair trial	1	2%
Preventing publication	5	9.8%
Cruel and degrading treatment	1	2%
Seizing official documents	1	2%
Banning media work	10	19.6%
Security investigation	3	5.9%
Sustaining wounds	1	2%
Banning movement and work during the curfew	18	35.3%
Banning photography by the security authorities	1	2%
Not receiving salaries for three months	1	2%
Withholding permits and preventing access to information	1	2%
Threatening with arrests and not answering the phone	1	2%
Receiving only the salary for March	1	2%
Not receiving salaries for April and May	1	2%
Adhering to the official narrative	1	2%

Among those who indicated that they were subjected to violations, 17 journalists mentioned the specific dates of the violations they experienced.

## 6. Problems and challenges facing media outlets during the Coronavirus pandemic:

The surveyed journalists confirmed that media outlets are facing increasing challenges during the Coronavirus pandemic and that these would probably persist afterwards. Most of them (73.5%) believe that the most prominent challenge is the decreased financial revenue with (117) responses. This is followed by a decline in advertisements with (105) responses, forming (66%). Next comes the inability to distribute printed newspapers and magazines with (82) responses, that is (51.5%). After that comes the reduction in the salaries and bonuses of media professionals/journalists and the threats to fire them, respectively.

Journalists did not attach much importance to defense laws, especially No. (8) as an element that limits their freedom: It was the last of the challenges mentioned on the list. Only (42.7%) or (62) responses considered these orders a major challenge that limits the work of journalists and media outlets.

This contradicts with the answers cited by journalists when they were asked directly whether they thought that Defense Law No. (8) constitutes a restriction on the freedom of expression and the media. 86.2% of surveyed journalists believe that the Defense Law was restricting to varying degrees of great, medium, and low extents. Only 12.6% believe that it is not a constraint in any way.

Challenge/Problem		By Importance, where 1 is most important and 7 is least important						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Decline in financial revenues	#	117	15	8	8	4	2	5
	%	73.5%	9.4%	5%	5%	2.5%	1.2%	3.1%
Suspending the of distribution of printed newspapers and magazines	#	82	24	13	16	2	5	17
	%	51.5%	15.1%	8.1%	10%	1.2%	3.1%	10.7%
Decline in advertisements	#	105	19	7	15	3	3	7
	%	66%	11.9%	4.4%	9.4%	1.8%	1.8%	4.4%
Defense laws, especially No. (8), constituted restrictions on the freedom of expression and on media outlets	#	68	34	21	16	5	6	9
	%	42.7%	21.4%	13.2%	10%	3.1%	3.7%	5.6%
Threatening to fire media professionals journalists	#	71	24	19	16	9	2	18
	%	44.6%	15.1%	11.9%	10%	5.6%	1.2%	11.3%
Reducing the salaries and bonuses of media professionals journalists	#	77	25	22	12	4	3	16
	%	48.4%	15.7%	13.8%	7.5%	2.5%	1.8%	10%
Defense laws gave media owners the opportunity to reduce salaries or lay off their media workers	#	75	22	21	13	6	6	16
	%	47.1%	13.8%	13.2%	8.1%	3.7%	3.7%	10%

Other problems mentioned by media professionals/journalists who participated in the survey include:

1. Closing down media organizations
2. The nature of information flow and its restriction to specific entities and from specific sources
3. Excessive permit fees and unfair conditions for news websites
3. Prior censorship on press content by editorial departments
4. Excluding the media sector from support funds, relying on the members of the Jordan Press Association and marginalizing journalists who are not members of JPA
5. An increase in the number of social media sites and their superiority; therefore, most media outlets lost their supervisory and professional role
6. Decline in professionalism in dealing with issues regarding such circumstances, in addition to forcing the official narrative and self-censorship on the media, especially those that depend on government support
7. Lack of job stability
8. The prolonged delay in salaries

## **7. Trends to support media outlets after the Coronavirus pandemic:**

Journalists participating in the survey highlighted a group of trends to support media outlets after the Coronavirus pandemic. This should ensure the continuation of their work efficiently in such a way that would ensure their diversity, pluralism, freedom and independence. They believe that the best approach would be to review legislation to rid them of the restrictions on the freedom of journalists and media outlets. This would also align with international standards of the freedom of the press as (114) or (71.7%) of the responses showed. This is followed by the development of a law on the right to obtain information to ensure that media professionals/journalists have an easy access to information and facts with (113) and (71%) of the responses. These are followed by the development of government policies that support independent media outlets, forming (108) or (67.9%) of the responses. Next comes the prosecution of those who committed violations against media professionals/journalists and outlets to prevent their escape from punishment with (106) responses, that is (66.6%). This is followed by the establishment of an independent fund to support media outlets and to set fair and transparent criteria to manage these with (94) or (59.1%) of the responses.

Structuring media outlets and firing inefficient media professionals/journalists came as the least important item among the surveyed journalists with only (43) responses, that is (27%).

Challenge/Problem	By importance, where 1 is most important and 11 is least important											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Structuring media outlets and dismissing inefficient media professionals journalists	#	43	23	20	20	9	3	2	2	9	8	20
	%	27%	14.4%	12.5%	12.5%	5.6%	1.8%	1.2%	1.2%	5.6%	5%	12.5%
Saving expenditures by merging media owned by the government and those whose resources are from the general budget or those in which the Social Security Corporation has a stake	#	71	19	16	17	8	1	3	6	5	3	10
	%	44.6%	11.9%	10%	10.7%	5%	0.6%	1.8%	3.7%	3.1%	1.8%	6.2%
Establishing an independent fund to support media outlets and developing fair and transparent standards for their management	#	94	20	17	16	4	1	1	4	5	2	5
	%	59.1%	12.5%	10.7%	10%	2.5%	0.6%	0.6%	2.5%	3.1%	1.2%	3.1%
Imposing taxes on advertisements on social media platforms with certain percentages directed towards supporting media institutions	#	53	21	19	21	4	3	3	4	7	10	14
	%	33.3%	13.2%	11.9%	13.2%	2.5%	1.8%	1.8%	2.5%	4.4%	6.2%	8.8%
Reaching a financial agreement with search engines such as Google for free use of media content and setting up a mechanism for media outlets to benefit from this agreement and its financial returns.	#	60	34	21	15	4	3	1	4	9	4	4
	%	37.7%	21.3%	13.2%	9.4%	2.5%	1.8%	0.6%	2.5%	5.6%	2.5%	2.5%
Developing legislation to allow the enhancement of public media and establishing independent mechanisms for their expenses	#	71	30	22	11	7	4	1	4	6	1	2
	%	44.6%	18.8%	13.8%	6.9%	4.4%	2.5%	0.6%	2.5%	3.7%	0.6%	1.2%
Criminalizing the interference of the government or any affiliated party with media work	#	91	20	20	11	2	2	2	2	4	1	4
	%	57.2%	12.5%	12.5%	6.9%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	2.5%	0.6%	2.5%
Prosecuting violators against media professionalsjournalists and outlets and preventing their escape from punishment	#	106	23	10	5	2	4	0	2	3	1	3
	%	66.6%	14.4%	6.2%	3.1%	1.2%	2.5%	0%	1.2%	1.8%	0.6%	1.8%
Developing the law on the right to access information to ensure the easy access of media professionalsjournalists and outlets to information and facts	#	113	18	8	6	2	2	2	3	2	0	3
	%	71%	11.3%	5%	3.7%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.8%	1.2%	0%	1.8%
Developing government policies that support independent media outlets	#	108	20	11	9	1	0	3	3	1	0	3
	%	67.9%	12.5%	6.9%	5.6%	0.6%	0%	1.8%	1.8%	0.6%	0%	1.8%
Revising legislation to rid them of restrictions on the freedom of the work of journalists and media outlets and aligning them with international standards for the freedom of the press	#	114	15	14	4	0	0	2	3	3	1	3
	%	71.7%	9.4%	8.8%	2.5%	0%	0%	1.2%	1.8%	1.8%	0.6%	1.8%

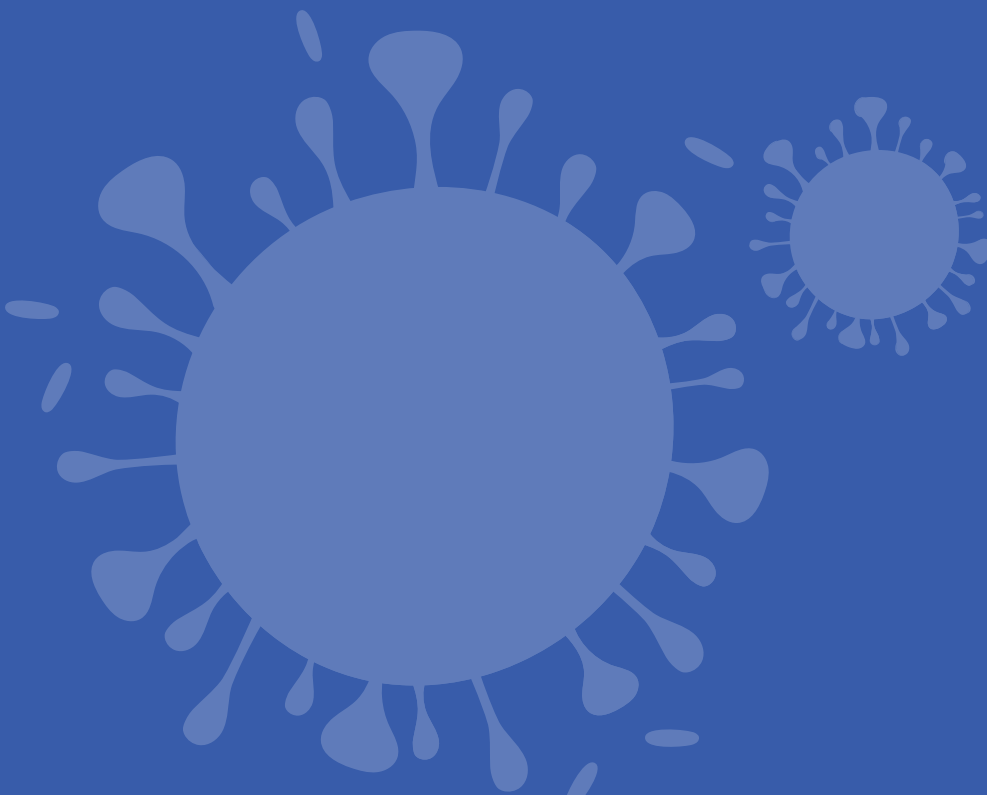
It is worth noting that journalists added another set of trends, as follows:

1. Opening the door to membership in the Jordan Press Association for holders of university degrees in the field of media and those who work in foreign institutions
2. Establishing a law that maintains the place and respect of the journalistic body and not to interfere in its work
3. Implementing the professional code of conduct on the ground, instead of keeping it theoretical.
4. Repealing the Electronic Cyber Crimes Law or not applying it to press and media institutions or to journalists and professional working in it
5. Supporting media outlets financially and not to discriminate among them, whether in terms of information or announcements
6. Adopting the principle of electing the chief editors
7. Compensating media outlets for the financial losses they endured
8. Establishing an association or a union for publishers of electronic websites to ensure the organization of media work in Jordan

# 05

## **Section Five:**

In-depth Discussions and Interviews Regarding  
the State/Status of Media Freedoms in Jordan in  
view of the Coronavirus Pandemic







## 05

## In-depth Discussions and Interviews Regarding the State Status of Media Freedoms in Jordan in view of the Coronavirus Pandemic

In order to enrich this report with information and to explore what happened recently in media affairs and freedoms in Jordan, the CDFJ organized two in-depth discussion sessions over Zoom. The first one was a discussion of «Media Policies in Jordan during the Coronavirus pandemic» held on May 16th 2020. Participants included the Minister of State for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh along with a group of media professionalsjournalists. The second was devoted to discussing «Challenges to and Violations of Freedom of Expression Facing the Media during the Coronavirus Pandemic» on 22/5/ 2020. Participants included media professionalsjournalists, lawyers and activists

in the area of freedom of expression.

In addition to the two discussion sessions, the CDFJ conducted interviews with nine editors-in-chief, publishers, and heads of boards of directors of seven widespread media institutions in Jordan, including government, public, and independent institutions. The interviews focused on the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and on the livelihood of journalists. It also focused on the losses sustained by media institutions as well as the policies adopted by the government in dealing with media outlets.

Following is a review of what was discussed in the two sessions. This is followed by the full text of the interviews, as follows:

### The first discussion session: «Media Policies in Jordan during the Coronavirus Pandemic»

On 16/5/2020 May 16th 2020, the CDFJ organized a discussion session on «Media Policies in Jordan during the Coronavirus Pandemic» over Zoom.

The CDFJ invited the Minister of State for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh, to present the government's viewpoint and vision and to start a discussion with a group of media professionalsjournalists.

The session highlighted a number of questions and inquiries, the most prominent of which are:

- Did the government succeed media-wise during the Coronavirus pandemic?
- What challenges did the government face in managing the media file during this crisis?
- Did the government guarantee that information is provided to the media?
- Were the government's policies in dealing with the various media outlets fair?

In the discussion, the Minister of State for Media Affairs, Amjad Al-Adayleh, stressed that «during the Coronavirus pandemic, the government sensed the weakness of the capacities of public institutions and especially the vital ones in dealing with the media.» He said that «the weakness and absence of

self-organized media in Jordan increases the challenges in managing communication with media platforms.» He added, «Print journalism is facing structural challenges, and solutions must be found to facilitate their financial sustainability.»

Minister Al-Adayleh emphasized that «during the pandemic, the Jordanian state devoted efforts to reach citizens through briefings, which I considered an important tool in ensuring the flow of information.» He noted that «preventive and public safety measures prevented the presence of journalists at the press briefing.»

During the discussion, the journalists explained that Defense Order No. (8) enhanced self-censorship and stressed that the arrest of the owner and director of Roya TV was a blunt message to media outlets.

Some journalists accused the government of favoritism in its media policies and considered these to be in the interest of a particular media outlet. They indicated that much of the information provided by the government in the press briefings was devoid of clarifications, explanations and causality.

The Director of the Media Commission, Theeb Al-Qaraleh, noted that «279 Jordanian, Arab and international media institutions were granted permits: 900 permits were granted to media professionalsjournalists in the first hours of the lockdown.»

Following is the text of the dialogue on the government's public policies during the Coronavirus pandemic:

### **Nidal Mansour<sup>1</sup>:**

I am pleased to welcome the Minister of State for Media Affairs Mr. Amjad Al-Adayleh to the media forum. I should not forget to thank my colleagues and media professionalsjournalists in the various media institutions for their participation in this important and necessary dialogue.

My question to the Minister is: Do you think that the government succeeded media-wise during the Coronavirus crisis? What were the main challenges you faced in managing

<sup>1</sup> Executive President, Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists

the media file? Did the government provide sufficient information to media outlets? Were the government's dealings with the various media outlets fair and impartial?

### **Amjad Al-Adayleh<sup>2</sup>:**

First of all, I would like to thank Nidal Mansour and the CDFJ for this initiative and for hosting me. I also thank all the colleagues who are participating in this meeting today from afar, although we are always close to the media and we wish we could communicate directly. Dealing with the crisis in all sectors includes aspects of success and other aspects in which there were defects or failures here and there. It is important that we all have a sense of responsibility, flexibility and speed in rectifying any mistake, and to be open to any feedback. Indeed, our approach and work in the media were built on certain bases.

As you know the logistical challenges and constraints imposed on physical presence and working from home were not limited to the media. We have to remember that despite our interest in the media sector because it is our professional field, it still was not and is not the only sector that is facing challenges.

The Coronavirus crisis and its consequences highlighted the weaknesses and challenges inherent in the media scene. These include, of course, the structural challenges that print media face in terms of financial sustainability. There is also the large number of online news websites that are not organized by an umbrella body, even if a self-organized one, to help in the process of managing the communication process with these platforms.

On the government level, we have sensed a weakness in the capabilities of some vital ministries with regard to media and communication. For example, the Ministry of Health was not prepared for this scene, due to the lack of a capable media unit to communicate and deal with media outlets. The only person who was able to do that was the minister himself. This crisis presented an opportunity

<sup>2</sup> Minister of State for Media Affairs

to accelerate the building of the necessary media capabilities for these ministries. We had put in place a plan to develop media units specific to all ministries; however, only 30% of these have been implemented.

We can take advantage of the gaps exposed by the Coronavirus crisis to increase opportunities for challenges, form partnerships and cooperate with the media sector to address them.

As for the question on whether the government succeeded in managing the Coronavirus crisis in terms of the media, it is difficult to judge whether it was a success or a failure now. Judgements of success can be left to observers and fair-minded people who evaluate media performance during this crisis. We have feedback that confirms that the performance of the media was positive and organized. We leave judgements of success or failure to observers.

It is also difficult to judge the performance of the media in isolation from the general performance in dealing with the crisis. There is no doubt that the success in the measures to confront the epidemic and the attendant media work are hard to separate and distinguish. Procedural success in dealing with the crisis is a fundamental condition to the success of the media. As the King recently expressed, there is no country that got a full mark in dealing with Coronavirus because of its difficult nature and because it is unprecedented.

Jordan is on the verge of celebrating its centennial establishment: I believe this country had never before encountered a pandemic of such magnitude. We must realize that the current logic of the state in dealing with this epidemic is to mitigate the damage as much as possible and to mobilize fast recovery procedures.

In order to judge the success of the media, it is necessary to take into account several criteria, including information flow. During this crisis, we devoted our efforts to reach citizens through daily briefings and through television and press interviews. Honestly, the daily

briefing was a crucial tool to ensure the flow of information. The proof to that is the fact that people and media professionals/journalists would wait for it and depend on it.

The public opinion's contentment with these procedures and the confidence in them came because of brevity and because it acted as a link between the government and citizens. Many impartial reports and studies confirm the satisfaction of the public that is the recipient of this information.

In addition to that, there was continuous communication with media outlets to answer their inquiries. We receive tens or even hundreds of calls every day.

There are also limitations imposed by the precautionary measures due to closures and curfews as well as restrictions on field and office work. These, of course, also led to logistical challenges and imposed on us a continuous administrative burden in trying to obtain exceptions and facilitations for a sector we deem vital, especially during general lockdown. Journalist colleagues asked for permits for the whole sector, but there was an opinion that the general lockdown covered everyone except medical personnel and some sectors that are needed for the continuation of life. Despite that, we granted permits to audio and visual media. We also provided some media professional colleagues at Jordan Television with accommodation to enable them to perform their duties to the fullest extent.

There are also limitations imposed by the preventive and general safety measures that excluded the presence of media professionals/journalists at the press briefing, but we compensated for that by increasing the number of interviews with various Arabic and national media outlets. We strived to answer their inquiries over the phone or through other technological means.

After the briefing, and even while we were at home, we would receive calls from news websites, newspapers or radio stations. Additionally, interviews on radio stations

would start in the morning: I give three or four interviews with Jordanian, local and Arabic television stations every day. We did not stop answering any inquiries or questions from all media outlets.

In all fairness, we were dealing with all media outlets in complete neutrality. There was a problem between Ro>ya channel and the Minister of Health. I hope that we could reach a settlement on this issue since the minister filed a lawsuit against the channel, and he would not cooperate with this channel.

### Ayman Al-Majali<sup>3</sup>:

I think that the performance of the official and/or private media was good despite the lack of full information. They were able to achieve the goal, and there was harmony among them.

The implication, however, is that there is confusion in the statements related to economic matters.

As for the printed newspapers, we must change the content and work on increasing the analysis to focus on internal affairs; otherwise, these newspapers will not succeed.

### Amjad Al-Adayleh:

The Coronavirus pandemic revealed the crisis of printed newspapers to a large extent, which had started before the Coronavirus. We discussed solutions for this crisis in more than one encounter. These solutions come from the newspapers themselves and from the government. We are looking for sustainable solutions for the crisis of printed newspapers, especially that they are a cornerstone of the media scene. They are also the most important source of generating media figures, talents and media leaders, so solutions are needed, and they must persist. More attention must be paid to developing their capabilities and to developing their websites to be more competitive.

<sup>3</sup> Former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra>y Daily Newspaper

### Dawud Kuttab<sup>4</sup>:

It was important to have interaction during the press briefings through the presence of media professionals/journalists or even through sending questions during the briefings.

The structure and ownership of the media has to be reexamined, and there should be a fund to support good quality media products.

### Sa>d Hattar<sup>5</sup>:

The pandemic situation constituted a rare opportunity to rebuild trust between the government and citizens, but this is not enough. The arrest of the Ro>ya Channel owner and news director was a huge problem: They were only conveying the voice of the people regardless of its content. What happened with them was a strong and blunt message that shook the media scene. After our battle with the Coronavirus ends, we need to open up all the sources and information about [or to] the sectors.

### Suheir Jaradat<sup>6</sup>:

Among the positive aspects of the Coronavirus for the government is that the media stopped criticizing it and adopted the method of overlooking mistakes in government performance. Now that the citizens are bored, and the pandemic has taken its economic toll on them, conspiracy theories surfaced, and the time of reckoning has come.

If I may, I want to hold the government accountable now over three mistakes: **First:** How did you accept to show Jordanian women as women in love after you changed the ministerial platform into a Don Juan-like setting?

**Second:** The government used double standards, which I consider a fatal mistake: It threatened Petra>s delegate who gave the wrong number of infections, and you saw how people were terrified. At the same time, the

<sup>4</sup> Vice President of the International Press Institute and General Director of Community Media Network

<sup>5</sup> Media advisor, Network of Arab Researchers for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)

<sup>6</sup> Director of Jadal Media Training Center

government did not dare to hold the writer of an even more terrifying article accountable.

**Third:** Among the policies that the government has implemented is a policy of favoritism in the interest of Al-Mamlaka channel at the expense of Jordan TV and the official news agency, Petra.

### **Abdel-Wahab Zugheilat<sup>7</sup>:**

The issue of print journalism is on the agenda in the whole world, not only in Jordan; it is a major problem that our fellow journalists suffer from. I was surprised that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra'y newspaper asked the Minister for Media Affairs/ Minister of Information to intervene to improve the content of print journalism.

This pandemic changed many concepts regarding the issue of press freedoms in the world and even international standards for press freedom; Jordan is not alone in battling these issues.

I follow-up on what is happening globally and in the Arab world: The comparison with the Jordanian case reveals that there is a great similarity in the press briefings. I think the focus of what some colleagues and His Excellency the Minister have highlighted are some side issues that are easy to control. The most important issue on the table is that of print journalism. The number of fellow journalists who work in print journalism is large and parallel to the number of JPA affiliates, for example, which is estimated at 1,300. Based on that, I ask the Minister to direct immediate financial support to the journalists as was done with per diem workers and the impacted groups, especially that the Social Security Corporation owns Al-Ra'y and Al-Dustour newspapers.

### **Jamil Al-Nimri<sup>8</sup>:**

The truth is that the government's performance was good and sufficient. It was professional

<sup>7</sup> Former chief editor of Al-Ra'y newspaper, former President of the Jordan Press Association, and Head of the Freedoms Committee in the Federation of Arab Journalists.

<sup>8</sup> Writer, political activist and former deputy

work with a suitable and balanced message, and I feel completely satisfied with this performance. However, there are mistakes, the worst of which is what happened with Ro'ya Channel.

In terms of media coverage, it would have been better if press conferences were held by taking safety procedures into account or through the Internet. However, this was compensated for by informational interviews, and the national media played a great role. Print media institutions must be preserved, due to the citizen's need for a reliable source of news in light of the chaos caused by the huge number of electronic websites and means of communication.

The number of employees in print journalism institutions must be reduced.

### **Amjad Al-Adayleh:**

According to the King's directives, the government has made sure that the application of the Defense Law is strictly limited and should not affect liberties or property. There could be some observations about Defense Law No. (8), but the primary idea is to deal with the damage and the confusion caused by intimidation, rumors and fake news.

Certainly, we do not think that the press briefings are sufficient. We tried to compensate for that with interviews, but this does not prevent the curiosity of all fellow journalist colleagues. Now, in preparing a guide for the return to work in government departments, we hastened to arrange procedures for organizing press conferences at the Prime Ministry. Tomorrow we will issue and publish the details of these procedures, and they will accommodate all types of media outlets.

Before the Coronavirus pandemic, there was a preparation of a law related to the support of media content and media education, but due to the preoccupation of the government and the parties concerned with the Coronavirus crisis, work on it stopped. The law will be postponed until the lower House of Representatives reconvenes to be submitted to it.

What happened with Ro>ya channel was painful, but the channel published a report urging people to violate the curfew, and this is a very serious matter. In the report, citizens were calling to trade in drugs, to assaults and to thefts. This is unacceptable, and no one in the Jordanian society would accept that a Jordanian channel should broadcast such content that threatens the safety of society. The matter is being examined by the judiciary system. I hurt for any journalist who is subjected to a negative situation or is referred to the judiciary system, but freedom must be yoked with responsibility.

The government is ready and willing to cooperate in any investigation about the disease and its side effects on the infected, and we are open to that.

We were not biased to a specific media outlet, and a distinction must be made between the types of media. Al-Mamlaka channel is a dedicated news channel, and it broadcasts any news immediately. As for Jordan Television, it has specific and limited news bulletins.

We are in constant contact with the Social Security Corporation and its officials to find solutions for print journalism institutions. These institutions themselves must offer solutions and build and develop their own technical and electronic capabilities, so that they can remain present, competitive, and powerful.

### Yusor Hassan<sup>9</sup>:

Regarding the lack of institutional expertise and capacities, after the end of this pandemic, will we witness the preparation of a scientific paper that identifies the areas of weakness and their solutions, and come up with recommendations to be implemented on the ground to address these gaps in case a similar crisis happens in the future?

### Theeb Al-Qaraleh<sup>10</sup>:

In dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic,

<sup>9</sup> Media professional and a member of the Radio and Television Board of Directors

<sup>10</sup> Director of the Media Commission

the government has succeeded through three axes:

**First:** Providing information through the daily briefing session or through the continuous daily activity of His Excellency the Minister for Media Affairs/ Minister of Information.

**Second:** The government succeeded in assisting with the transport of media professionals journalists by granting them comprehensive permits, as it granted these to 279 Jordanian, Arab and foreign media institutions. In the first six hours of the lockdown, 900 permits were granted to journalists and media professionals journalists. According to a study done by the Commission, the percentage of satisfaction over granting permits is 95%. Even the remaining 5% did not object to the permit system: Rather, they wished they could obtain more of them.

**Third:** Represented through the Media Commission, the government followed up on the feedback and communicated with most journalists and media professionals journalists to have their evaluation and hear their advice and observations. In the end, the government has succeeded in terms of media coverage by all measures despite some misfortunes and missteps, but it is a successful experience that can provide a good structure.

### Mohammad Irsan<sup>11</sup>:

I have a recommendation for the government, that is to activate the «Ask the Government» platform. It was well activated before the Coronavirus crisis, but now it does not fulfill its role, especially since we resort to it in the absence of press conferences.

After Defense Law No. (8), we as journalists became obsessed and developed a large degree of self-censorship before publishing any topic.

My question to the Minister is: Has the Coronavirus news coverage management overtaken the media's interest in covering the issue of annexing the lands of the Jordan Valley by the occupation?

<sup>11</sup> Media professional, Radio Al-Balad

### Rana Al-Husseini<sup>12</sup>:

I did not get a permit, even though the chief editor of the organization I work for had applied for it. The language of the government in the press briefing does not take gender into account; it is always masculine. This is in addition to the absence of female ministers from press briefings.

### Fateh Mansour<sup>13</sup>:

Many of the decisions and information presented by the government in the press briefing are devoid of explanations, clarifications, or causality. This led to a state of controversy and confusion, and in most cases justifications come late.

### Husam Gharaibeh<sup>14</sup>:

Was the government's distinguished performance in terms of media coverage a response to a health emergency, or did it establish a new phase for the media, based on transparency?

### Hadeel Ghboun<sup>15</sup>:

The government's media performance has fluctuated with ups and downs since the beginning of the crisis, and there were sometimes inconsistencies in the statements. The flow of information was inconsistent and did not cover details.

What are the directions of the government in terms restructuring media institutions?

### Amjad Al-Adayleh

The government has not issued any authorization to re-own the official media outlets back to the government and cover them under its authority. What is proposed is a structure for official media institutions to merge them under the umbrella of a single board of

directors while preserving their independence and professionalism. This requires a law and will be postponed until Parliament convenes. I can say that the performance of the government and official bodies in the Coronavirus pandemic was distinguished and everyone can testify to that.

The NCSCM had prepared various studies on dealing with any potential crisis. I looked at a study that was prepared in 2017 on how to deal with the spread of an epidemic in Jordan.

It can be said that the state has not witnessed harmony in its work as much as it did during the pandemic, whether in the government, the security services, or the armed forces. There was coordination, support and close follow-up by the King. Although this pandemic struck us, government bureaucracy performed wonderfully.

To be clear, the Ministry of Health and some other ministries were not prepared to deal with this crisis in terms of media. We will present a document and recommendations for improving this in the future and after the end of the crisis. We will have press conferences and allow the attendance of journalists, activate the «Ask the Government» platform, and we will receive and answer questions by e-mail.

As for the issue of annexing the Jordan Valley, we have heard the King's declarations. These are very clear and have an impact not only in Jordan. It cannot be said that Jordan forgot the Palestinian cause in the midst of this pandemic. As for the gender discourse, the remarks are correct, and we will work to address them. However, female ministers did appear in media outlets and press briefings.

Jordan will be better and stronger after this crisis, especially with regards to coordination, institutionalism and harmony between institutions. The structure of the security services may have previously achieved positive results in terms of coordination and institutionalization. This harmony is not an act of panic, but, rather, it will be a permanent approach.

<sup>12</sup> Journalist, Jordan Times

<sup>13</sup> Media expert

<sup>14</sup> Media professional, director of Radio Husna FM

<sup>15</sup> Journalist, Al-Ghad Daily newspaper and CNN Arabic correspondent

**Bayan Al-Tal<sup>16</sup>:**

I believe the state's media policy during the crisis was characterized by clarity, calmness and modesty, which we were not used to. Openness and providing information were good but deficient.

This pandemic highlighted the importance of the national media and the need to pay attention to it. It is important for the government to take bold decisions to support and advance the media. I should note the importance of having newspapers catch up with digital media.

**Ramzi Khoury<sup>17</sup>:**

I hope that the state will preserve the trust that has been established with citizens during this pandemic by making the way for the media outlets to do their work freely and to convey the voice of citizens.

**Sabri Irbeihat<sup>18</sup>:**

At this moment when a citizen feels fear and anxiety about the future, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive and gradual media discourse that transcends the crisis and directs it towards discussing the issues around the crisis and beyond.

**Amjad Tadros<sup>19</sup>:**

What happened with the Ro>ya channel may adversely affect its media work and may cause fear among workers in it.

It is vital to redefine the profession of the journalist and media professional to include a larger segment of workers in this sector and not to limit the definition to a member of the Jordan Press Association.

**Basil Al-Ukour<sup>20</sup>:**

The problem that we face at work is related to the economic aspect. The government was not able to answer the questions and concerns related to the economy, and it must work on the economic side now.

<sup>16</sup> Jordan Media Institute

<sup>17</sup> News Director, Ro>ya Channel

<sup>18</sup> Former minister and writer

<sup>19</sup> Media professional and director of the CBS Office in Jordan

<sup>20</sup> Publisher, JO24 News Website

We believe that merging official media outlets is a necessity. Supporting printed newspapers should be linked to a plan and a program so that they do not face crises again.

**Haydar Al-Abdali<sup>21</sup>:**

We demand the activation of the role of media spokespersons in the ministries to access information more broadly and faster.

**Ibrahim Braizat<sup>22</sup>:**

What is required and what is the mechanism for merging media institutions?

**Mohammad Qutaishat<sup>23</sup>:**

Official media would not be strong without the support of the private media. It has stood by the state and raised the ceiling of public freedoms.

**Amjad Al-Adayleh:**

We will discuss topics other than the Coronavirus in the upcoming briefings and conferences.

We will also work to boost the trust between society and the state, and we will work on a gradual discourse to deal with the post-Coronavirus issues, especially the economic situation.

We deal with media professionals/journalists regardless of their affiliation to JPA and regardless of their institutions, and we must cooperate to redefine what «journalist» and «media professional» mean.

As for the case of our colleague Nidal Fara>neh, it is a case that has nothing to do with media freedoms, and despite that I have tried to intervene repeatedly. I promise you that I will ask questions about this issue again and will make every possible effort.

<sup>21</sup> Media professional, Al-Hurra TV

<sup>22</sup> Media professional, Hayat FM

<sup>23</sup> Lawyer and former director of the Media Commission



## The second discussion session: «Challenges to and Violations of Freedom of Expression Facing the Media during the Coronavirus Pandemic»

On 22/5/2020, the CDFJ organized a discussion session on «Challenges to and Violations of Freedom of Expression Facing the Media during the Coronavirus pandemic» over Zoom. The session highlighted the following questions and themes:

- What are the most important challenges and problems that media professionals/journalists faced during their work under the Coronavirus pandemic circumstances?
- What violations were media professionals/journalists subjected to during their journalistic work under the Coronavirus pandemic circumstances?
- What are the challenges that media institutions faced during the Coronavirus pandemic?
- What are the challenges in the way of freedom of expression during the pandemic, due to the defense law and orders?
- What are the most prominent violations of freedom of expression or against social media users?

The CDFJ invited a group of media professionals/journalists, lawyers and activists in the area of freedom of expression.

The participants confirmed that the government had succeeded in controlling media outlets during the Coronavirus pandemic. They confirmed that defense orders contributed to an increase in fears and self-censorship among journalists.

They warned that the government and the media violated the privacy of Coronavirus patients during the pandemic, and that government officials were the first to commit this flaw.

They criticized the absence of media outlets and saw that the government presented a one-sided narration of events.

Lawyer Omar Al-Atout said that the government had a wrong understanding of the defense law, and that is why some ministers came out in uniform at the beginning of the crisis.

Ahmad Awad indicated that the human rights system is fragile and became worse with government procedures during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Fateh Mansour emphasized that media institutions do not have strategies or plans to deal with crises, including ensuring the safety of journalists.

Following is the text of the dialogue session on the state Status of media freedoms and violations during the Coronavirus pandemic. The session was moderated by the CEO Executive President of the CDFJ, my colleague Nidal Mansour.

### **Kamal Al-Mashreqi<sup>24</sup>:**

The government succeeded in controlling the media through its control over providing information: It was the only source of information. Information was scant, which negatively affected the performance of media outlets.

There are modest initiatives that aim to analyze the practices of the government in dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic. There was no analysis of the impact of the defense law and its orders on rights and freedoms. Many violations were recorded, such as the arrest of the publisher and director of the news of Roya channel and former MP Salim Al-Batayneh. Control was practiced over all media outlets and even on social media, which gave the impression that the security grip was in force in order to limit the freedom of opinion and expression.

Fear of defense laws still controls media

<sup>24</sup> Lawyer and president of Change Academy for Democratic Studies and Development

professionalsjournalists, especially Defense Law No. (8) and not only of the Electronic Cyber Crimes LawLaw.

The government must review the defense orders and work on issuing new orders that allow the circle of freedoms to be expanded in accordance with international standards and treaties ratified by Jordan.

### **Zeina Al-Maani<sup>25</sup>:**

Originally, we had concerns about the Cybercrime Law and hate speech, and we do not know when a cybercrime occurs. The Defense Law and its orders made us more cautious in writing and publishing.

It is important to address the right to obtain information, as it is closely related to the freedom of expression, especially under the Coronavirus pandemic circumstances.

The press briefings do not allow for any interaction, and what is presented briefly is static information and only in one direction.

### **Fateh Mansour<sup>26</sup>:**

Actual violations are taking place on the ground, including arrests and restrictions on the freedom of social media activists. Limiting the freedom of movement cannot be ignored, as this greatly impacted the work of journalists.

Concerning the right to obtain information, there is one story, and it is incomplete and ambiguous. There is professional weakness in the realm of media work, which was extended to the media during the Coronavirus pandemic. We should also not forget that the media violated the right to privacy, and stereotypes helped the government to violate their rights.

### **Marwan Salem<sup>27</sup>:**

Main Challenges:

- Restricting the freedom of the media through preventing movement and coverage and not letting journalists participate in the briefings

<sup>25</sup> Activist on social media sites

<sup>26</sup> Media expert

<sup>27</sup> A lawyer specialized in media issues

- There is a problem in granting permits, and there was no equality in giving them
- The weak point in the media was the violation of privacy
- The media is a victim and has no role in the Coronavirus crisis, as it was not on the scene, and was not allowed to be present even in the briefings
- Media professionalsJournalists were subjected to violations. The biggest evidence to that is the arrest of the owner and director of Ro>ya news channel because of a report in which citizens expressed their views. The government arrested them as a form of threat and intimidation for journalists.
- Defense Law No. (8) is contrary to the Constitution because the powers granted to the Prime Minister in Article (4) of the Defense Law do not allow him to impose new penalties, which appears to be the case in the text of Item 2 (b) of Defense Law No. (8).
- The government is the reason behind the violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets in the following cases: The inability to cover and pay salaries as a result of the crisis that enveloped the media; stopping the process of printing newspapers; and the dismissal of employees who work in these institutions.

### **Omar Al-Atout<sup>28</sup>:**

There is a lack of understanding of the defense law by the government. Based on Article (124) of the Constitution, this law is operated to handle an epidemic, and any emergency circumstances. It is completely different from the state of emergency stipulated in Article (125), and it is not related to the idea of martial law. It appears that some ministers cannot distinguish these, and the biggest evidence to that is that some ministers went out in military uniform at the beginning of the crisis.

The legitimate fear of citizens was taken advantage of by the government to control the

<sup>28</sup> Lawyer and political activist

media scene completely. The most important result of this were the conferences in which journalists did not participate. The statements of the Minister of Information after the incident of the infection of the driver Al-Khanasri are an example of that.

From the first day, neutrality was not present in government interactions with media outlets. The arrest of the owner and director of a news channel is a threatening message to the remaining media outlets.

The government itself was the first to violate the defense law regarding the right to privacy. The Minister of Health came out with a patient in a video, and he was the first to mention the names of infected people as was the case of «Sobhi,» for example.

Due to its inability to manage the crisis, the government resorted to absencing the media and even its partners, such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry and trade unions. It monopolized the scene.

### **Manal Kasht<sup>29</sup>:**

Journalists were content to report the news as it is, and there was not any kind of analysis. Even after journalists were allowed to participate in the press briefings, their questions were undaring and traditional. It is noticeable that the media marginalized the role of women and did not pay any attention to them as they did with officials.

As activists on social media sites, we felt even more tied up in publishing and expressing our opinions after the defense laws.

### **Mohammad Maghaydah<sup>30</sup>:**

I was beaten when covering the return of students from Turkey and Egypt, and it was because of filming live. The airport security forces prevented me from entry, despite my adherence to all professional standards. The Defense Law was applied against me as a result of an error that occurred with the serial number that is given to journalists

<sup>29</sup> Director of Shabbat Center for the Political Empowerment of Women and activist on social media

<sup>30</sup> Photojournalist for Al-Ghad Daily Newspaper

during the general lockdown. We also faced a permanent problem when presenting the permit. My question is on car permits or work tool permits.

### **Ahmad Awad<sup>31</sup>:**

Despite its already fragile state in Jordan, the overall human rights system became more fragile with government procedures under the Coronavirus pandemic situation.

I agree with my colleagues that there is selectivity in the way the official state institutions deal with the various media outlets. I arrived at this conclusion as an observer of what is happening. Civil rights were not the only elements that were subjected to a violation or restriction; a significant part of the defense law impacted overall economic and social rights. To a large extent, if we take Defense Laws No. (6) and (9), we note that these greatly affected the lives of people and specifically led to the suffering of workers in the private sector.

There are journalists who have played an important role in monitoring the performance of the government, but to a limited extent. There are many websites that raised the ceiling on freedoms in the media: They published reports issued by civil society organizations that criticize and evaluate the defense law on their main pages.

### **Nisreen Zureikat<sup>32</sup>:**

There was a problem with the freedom of opinion and expression and the legislation regulating this right. The Coronavirus pandemic revealed the fragility in the legislation regulating many rights and freedoms.

With regard to the freedom of opinion and expression as a member of the public, we sensed that information was blocked; information was lacking and came from one source. The absence of accurate information led to the spread of fake news and rumors.

<sup>31</sup> Director of the Phoenix Center for Economic Studies and Informatics

<sup>32</sup> Head of the Criminal Justice Unit, National Center for Human Rights

We witnessed violations of people's right to privacy. We must assess the phase and most importantly, we should involve different groups, especially civil society organizations.

**Nidal Mansour:**

We sent the government a message at the beginning of the crisis and organized a meeting with it over Zoom. In it we demanded that civil society be involved in the crisis and that it be given a role in raising awareness and prevention. The government's response, however, was limited and delayed.

**Dawoud Kuttab<sup>33</sup>:**

We have to look at the right to expression as an integrated system not just for media professionals, journalists or owners or as a crisis that proved the absence of media institutions. For example, the Jordan Press Association did not have a role at all. Even we as media professionals, journalists and institutions are falling short in our duty towards ourselves. There are two types of media: those supported by the government and then businessmen who are influencers. There is the third group of media institutions that suffers from a lack of support and employees. Therefore, their impact is less significant. We must work on establishing a fund to support the media product.

**Riad Riyad Suboh<sup>34</sup>:**

I think the situation is different now than it was before Coronavirus in two ways: Social media platforms had a good margin of freedom of expression despite the fear and reservations of some people due to the defense law. As for the media, the government tried to provide information transparently, but it had to be more seamless. Officials named the infected people and did not respect their privacy. According to international standards, some freedoms may be restricted, but the burden of applying the requirement of proportionality and necessity rests on the government and

not on the people. Therefore, the fact that the government conveyed the information and automatically disclosed it was a necessity and did not have any negative effects.

**Mohammad Shamma<sup>35</sup>:**

Journalists face a problem, and independent journalists face a greater problem in obtaining permits because they are not covered by an institution. They also suffer from the problem of obtaining the information they need.

Journalists avoided talking about many topics as a result of the self-censorship they imposed on themselves for fear of accountability and legal prosecution.

The Bangladeshi journalist, Kabir Hussain, who was preparing a report on the suffering of Bangladeshi workers in Jordan was arrested and then bailed out. However, the governor of Amman arrested him again administratively, and this is a big problem and a clear violation of the freedom of the media.

**Omar Al-Abdallat<sup>36</sup>:**

Cartoonists are suffering: There is no institution that supports them or their talents, and there are no platforms where they can publish their work.

Recently, a red line was drawn at the criticism of some independent institutions and bodies, and everyone who criticizes them is prosecuted. This is a clear violation of the Constitution.

**Fateh Mansour:**

Media institutions do not have any strategies or plans to deal with crises or to even cover safety means for journalists.

There is confusion among journalists between their professional work and expressing themselves on social media platforms. This conflation creates more problems in promoting the concept of information flow.

<sup>33</sup> Director of the Community Media Network

<sup>34</sup> Human rights expert

<sup>35</sup> Journalist specialized in human rights issues and office manager of the Canadian organization, Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) in Jordan

<sup>36</sup> cartoonist

## Interviews

The CDFJ focuses on enhancing information, verifying assumptions and readings of this report. Therefore, it conducted interviews with nine editors-in-chief, publishers, and heads of boards of directors of seven widespread media institutions in Jordan, including government, public, and independent institutions. It focused on the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the livelihood of journalists, the losses sustained by media institutions as well as the policies adopted by the government in dealing with media outlets.

The interviews, presented here in alphabetical order, with each of the following: Former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra

newspaper, Ayman Al-Majali; Former News Director at the Jordan Television, Anas Al-Majali; Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka, Dana Al-Sabbagh; Director General of the Jordan News Agency (PETRA), Fayeq Hijazeen; Owner and Manager of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh; Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Dustour daily newspaper, Mohammad Dawudiyeh; Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani; and Chief Editor of Al-Ghad daily newspaper, Mohammad <Alayan.

Following are the interviews:

### Ayman al-Majali: Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Ra>y Daily Newspaper

Ayman Al-Majali, former chairman of the daily Al-Ra>y newspaper, called on the government to immediately intervene to save printed newspapers. He highlighted that «what newspapers need is not loans that increase their debt but that the government pay the employees for four months until life goes back to normal.»

Al-Majali said, «Newspapers have been directly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, and the government must support them, as these have remained a major channel of information for society during the crisis.»

Al-Majali noted that «interest in printed newspapers is still common in the world. The New York Times, for example, has increased its sales. What is important is to develop the content of the newspapers as an essential step.»

Al-Majali acknowledged that «the first problem facing newspapers now is the availability and securing of salaries.»

Al-Majali realizes that the printed newspaper crisis existed before the Coronavirus era.

This is why he is working with the Board of Directors to develop the content for the newspaper. Newspapers are not competing over the news that happened anymore but rather in providing what is behind the news by focusing on internal issues with investigations and reports of professional quality to restore the reader>s confidence. This is in addition to developing the website.

Al-Majali discussed the idea of establishing a radio station for Al-Ra>y and restoring the distribution of the paper directly to improve revenues to better reach the public.

Al-Majali presented his perceptions for a solution to the newspaper>s problem, the most important of which is restructuring, solving the debt problem, and increasing revenues. He says, «We must take restructuring measures and reduce salary expenditures.»

Al-Majali stressed his support for the establishment of an independent fund to support media institutions. He wondered, «Why are printed newspapers not supported by the Hemmet Watan Fund?»

He described the government's management of the media file during the Coronavirus pandemic as good and noted that «the government's discourse has gained credibility.»

Al-Majali added, «The press briefings were sufficient for the public. Perhaps there was a need for dialogue with media professionalsjournalists to highlight some of the vague points.»

### **Anas Al-Majali: Former News Director at Jordan Television**

The former news director at Jordan Television, Anas Al-Majali, confirmed that «media policies during the crisis were distinct.» He pointed out how «he felt that work went smoothly and that the response in providing information was fast for the first time in four years.»

«The response by the government and the crisis team during the pandemic was better than the situation before the crisis,» he said. He pointed out that «the daily press briefing that was presented was necessary for media outlets and society. There could be other journalistic requirements, and they could have followed up on these to fulfill them.»

He explained, «Jordan Television played a leading role during this crisis. It ensured that all television networks are provided with

Al-Majali did not see that there were violations that occurred on media outlets during the pandemic. He explained that the media sector was realistic and cooperative with the government. He wished that the government had adopted the press cards for media institutions instead of resorting to permits.

the electronic link that broadcasts the press conferences taking place at the NCSCM.» He added, «We were the ones giving the signal.» Al-Majali did not agree with the accusation of the government of favoritism in dealing with media outlets. However, he said, «Perhaps a minister should examine this media platform. It happens, and it is possible.»

He noted that the representatives and correspondents of news at the Television station obtained 140 permits at the beginning of the crisis. Later, these reached 180 permits dedicated to the news section. This does not include the permits obtained by TV representatives in the governorates directly from the governors, whether in the isolated areas or during the general lockdown.

### **Dana Al-Sabbagh: Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka Channel**

The Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mamlaka channel, Dana Al-Sabbagh, denied that the government and state agencies practiced favoritism towards Al-Mamlaka Channel. During an interview with her for the purposes of preparing this report, she said, «It must be noted that interest in news has increased during the Coronavirus pandemic, and Al-Mamlaka is the only news channel in Jordan. Therefore, it is natural for it to have become the main platform of delivering the state's messages to people. There is no favoritism or bias in dealing with us. Sometimes we encountered a scarce information sources

or even a delay in having our questions and inquiries answered or in engaging with us.» «During the crisis, we were chasing the government to follow up on our work. We followed it up with questions in every place to inform the people of the developments,» she added.

«Al-Mamlaka Channel has reporters everywhere in the field, and this is why I see that the media was helping the government in tracking down infection cases. Often, we found it difficult to find a quick source to confirm the discovery of a new case.»

Al-Sabbagh did not object to the centrality of

media work or to the limited sources during the pandemic. She pointed out that the Minister of State for Media Affairs Amjad Al-Adayleh and the Minister of Health Sa'ed Jaber were the primary dependable sources. After a while, hospital directors in governorates stopped talking about the crisis.

Al-Sabbagh noted, «Al-Mamlaka has multiple news programs, such as Sabah Al-Mamlaka.» The appearance of officials in a continuous and varied manner to answer the issues we are raising is necessary, and I had to rely on information from reliable sources which were confirmed by the reporters of Al-Mamlaka in the field.»

She also said, «Al-Mamlaka maintained its independence during the Coronavirus pandemic. No one interfered in our media policies, but we knew about the centrality of administration, and we were keen on filtering voices because everyone has an interest in

double-checking the information.»

She confirmed, «Al-Mamlaka prioritizes public interest; during the crisis, we were not looking for flaws or small missteps.»

Al-Sabbagh explained that «Al-Mamlaka Channel obtained 199 permanent permits for media professionals/journalists who work for it, including reporters. Later, these became 205 permits.» She pointed out that «during the general lockdown, there were 140 permits for two days, that is 70 daily permits for Thursday and Friday.»

Al-Sabbagh does not reject the idea of establishing a media network, that is, the existence of a unified board of directors for the Radio and Television Corporation, the Jordanian News Agency- Petra, and Al-Mamlaka channel, provided that the independence of work of these institutions is preserved and their roles are defined clearly.

### Fayeq Hijazeen: Director General of the Jordan News Agency - Petra

Fayeq Hijazeen, General Director of the Jordan News Agency- Petra, said, «The circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic imposed a new way for dealing with the media. Hence the solution of the press briefing instead of the direct meetings and press conferences.»

In an interview with him for the purpose of preparing this report, Hijazeen added, «Nothing prevents us from receiving the questions of journalists during the crisis or from directly interacting with them or answering them.»

He described the flow of information from the government and its entities during the pandemic as «positive» and confirmed that «all observations that we passed on to the government or to the NCSCM were addressed directly.»

He continued, «Our responsibility as media is to transfer information, and their responsibility is to find solutions.»

He described the role of the media as a «community protector.» He noted that

«we would communicate problems to the government with the intention of reaching solutions.»

He asserted, «The government does not restrict the freedom of journalists» and said, «At Petra, they gave us what we want in terms of permits. On the first day of the lockdown, they gave us 100 permits. After that, all the staff obtained permits. Even during the general lockdown, we had 30-40 people who had the serial number that allows them mobility.»

He highlighted that «the Jordan News Agency worked with the smallest staff possible during the pandemic and the remote work system was adopted.»

It is noteworthy that the staff at the news agency is made up of 262 people, and 179 of them are journalists.

## Fares Al-Sayegh: Owner and Manager of Ro>ya Channel

The Manager and owner of Ro>ya channel, Fares Al-Sayegh, assured that «the government succeeded in terms of media during the Coronavirus pandemic and operated in a much better way than other crises it had gone through.»

Al-Sayegh said, «Perhaps the prolonged crisis was a reason for this success, as it adapted and addressed some mistakes that it committed.»

He added, «There is no doubt that the press briefing was closed, and the information went in one direction. It would have been better if there was interaction with the media.»

He sees that «the government's commitment to publishing information was successful,» following that up with «it was not sufficient.»

Additionally, «some information was incomplete and untrue.» He said, «The documents and facts we had showed the reality and truth to be different than what is said.»

He noted, «During the pandemic, the media overlooked the inaccuracy and unreliability of some information and began to accept the policy of the situation as it is along with media secrecy.»

He pointed out that «the government's general media policies were centralized, and many ministers and officials were not allowed to make statements, and the government presented a single discourse.»

He explained, «At the beginning of the crisis, there was a multiplicity of sources, references and even directives. After that, only a single channel of information was left.»

Al-Sayegh declared that he was not opposed to the government taking sides with its own official institutions or to use the crisis to help these in succeeding. However, he demands that this discriminatory treatment does not happen at the expense of other media institutions.

He said, «The permit system for media outlets was unfair to Ro>ya; we only received 40 permits for all programs and news coverages. Then, we were given between 10-15 permits every two weeks until the end of Ramadan. We only had 50% of permits for those working at the station, which forced us to cancel some programs.»

## Mohammad Dawudiyeh: Chairman of the Board of Directors of Al-Dustour Daily Newspaper

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the daily Al-Dustour newspaper, Mohammed Dawudiyeh, described the government's media performance as «professional and excellent.» He stressed that «the Minister of State for Media Affairs was transparent and answered all questions that were directed to him.»

Dawudiyeh considers that «the government worked to provide information to the public on a regular basis during the pandemic.»

He confirmed that printed newspapers, including Al-Dustour, incurred 100% losses after they stopped printing during the Coronavirus crisis.» He explained that «the

newspapers adhered to the defense order that demanded that they cease printing for fear of carrying infection, due to the closure of all institutions and due to the ban on movement.»

Dawudiyeh estimated the damages incurred by the Al-Dustour newspaper at 600,000 dinars, indicating «monthly salaries amount to 12,000 dinars.»

He said, «Based on the directives of the Central Bank, we applied for a loan to deal with the crisis to support the blundering sectors, but they did not endorse it.»

Dawudiyeh asserted that «the revenues of journalistic institutions stopped. Our rights from government advertisements since before



the pandemic had amounted to 700,000 dinars for the three newspapers. We were only paid these later, and Al-Dustour's share in this was 80,000 dinars. Therefore, we are finding it extremely hard to secure employees' salaries during the months of the pandemic.»

Dawudiyeh said, «The government stood with the per diem workers, and this is a good thing, but it did not stand with the newspapers,» and he described the matter as «unfair to media outlets.»

### **Dr. Mohammad al-Momani: Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation**

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Radio and Television Corporation, Dr. Mohammad al-Momani explained, «The theme of the government's general policy during the pandemic was openness and accuracy in communicating information on a regular basis.»

He added, «This policy created a positive atmosphere between the media and official institutions.»

Al-Momani agreed with the opinions stating that the information received from the government was not sufficiently clarified. They were not convincing and did not reach people smoothly. He gave examples such as the explanation and clarification of some of the orders of the defense: These concern work, the reasons for the general lockdown, the delay in opening business sectors and the continuation of the closure.

Al-Momani said, «There was imprecision in taking some decisions» and stressed that «the information that was provided was

He added, «The King championed printed newspapers in his last meeting with journalists and assured them that he would discuss the matter with the government. He called for a fund to support journalism and the media through relieving newspapers of their debts within two years.» Dawudiyeh pointed out that «one of the proposed solutions is to raise the price of government advertisements from 55 piasters per word to 85.»

not enough.» He clarified that «there were questions in people's minds, but these were unanswered.»

He would have preferred that media institution cards could have been approved to grant permits to journalists during the pandemic so that their work would not be subject to restrictions. He pointed out that what he understood from the government statements was that permits were for everyone without exceptions, noting that «the Radio and Television Corporation may have obtained approximately 600 permits.»

Al-Momani added, «The press briefing presented by the government was good, but it would have been better if there had been some kind of interaction with the media. Nothing could have stopped online conferences to answer the questions raised by journalists. There are many sides to every story, and there are many sides to every decision, which may not be clear.»

## Makram Al-Tarawneh: Chief Editor of the daily Al-Ghad Newspaper

Makram Al-Tarawneh, Chief Editor of the daily Al-Ghad newspaper, said: «The management departments of the daily newspapers sent a letter to the Prime Ministry demanding compensation for the damages they suffered as a result of stopping the printing process and the resulting stoppage of revenues, which amounted to zero.»

He added, «Until this moment, the newspapers have not received a response to their letter and do not know the position on it.» He explained that the suspension of printed newspapers came as a result of the defense order based on the epidemiological recommendation of stopping printing newspapers due to the possibility of transmitting the Coronavirus infection.

Al-Tarawneh confirmed that «permits constituted an obstacle to the movement of all journalists during the pandemic.» He pointed out that «Al-Ghad newspaper obtained 20 permits at the beginning of the crisis. Then, it had 50 and ended up with 75 permits, covering media professionalsjournalists,

administrators and technicians.»

He emphasized that «the government's media policies during the pandemic were not fair,» and he said, «We were chasing after the news, and it was presented to others on a golden platter.»

He declared that «access to information was not easy; rather it was arduous. Worse still, some ministers did not cooperate with us and would not answer our questions, but we would read, see, and hear the responses to our questions on other media institutions.» He noted that some ministers would avoid answering questions, arguing that they could not comment without going back to the Minister of State for Media Affairs and the Minister of Health.

Regarding the implications of the defense law and its orders on the freedom of journalistic work, he replied, «We did not feel fear of publishing, even if we became more careful, self-censored, and scrutinizing of the content. We do not we want a fight during the enforcement of the defense law.»

## Mohammad Alayan: Publisher of the daily Al-Ghad Newspaper

The publisher of the daily Al-Ghad newspaper, Mohammad Alayan, confirmed that «print journalism was one of the most affected during the Coronavirus pandemic» and stressed «the importance of supporting it, so it recovers.»

Alayan said, «The daily newspapers continued to be issued without getting printed, and almost without any revenues.» He noted that with the exception of some online advertisements on their site, 95% of their revenues stopped.

Alayan indicated that the magnitude of the material damages incurred by Al-Ghad newspaper during the months of the pandemic amount to more than 600 thousand dinars. He pointed out that «the period in which the newspaper was stopped was an important experience for developing and presenting

new ideas.» He highlighted that that «the newspaper became more professional electronically, with more focus dedicated to videos and investigations. Readership of our site and platforms was high and interesting. The experience of electronically distributing a PDF version was inspiring and distinct.»

He affirmed that the continuity and sustainability of newspapers is contingent upon the introduction of a new, creative and clear business model. He stressed the «necessity of focusing on efficiency and productivity at work and the adoption of effective evaluation mechanisms for work and achievement.»

The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists [CDFJ] was established in 1998



as a civil society organization working to defend media freedom in Jordan. CDFJ was established after a series of major setbacks to press freedom on a local level, starting with the issuing of the temporary press and publications law of 1997, which increased restrictions on the media and caused many newspapers to shut down.

CDFJ works to protect freedom and democracy in Jordan and the Arab world, while promoting respect for human rights, justice, equality, development, non-violence and open dialogue.

CDFJ always maintains its independence and does not take sides in the political process. However, when it comes to defending the freedom of journalists and the media, CDFJ stands against all policies and legislations that may impose restrictions on a free and thriving press.

CDFJ is active on a regional level in developing media freedom and strengthening the skills and professionalism of journalists in all Arab countries through customized programs and activities. Additionally, CDFJ works with media and civil society organizations to protect democracy and promote respect for human rights principles.

**CDFJ's Vision:** Developing and strengthening democracy and the reform process in the Arab World in a manner that supports freedom of expression and the media and that ensures commitment to international standards in press freedom.

**CDFJ's Mission:** The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists is a non-governmental and non-profit organization. CDFJ defends media freedom and provides protection to Arab journalists by addressing violations to their rights, providing professional development and ensuring free access to information. Finally, CDFJ advocates for reform of legislation that restricts press freedom and works to foster a political, social and cultural environment that supports a free and independent media.

**CDFJ's Primary Goals:**

- Supporting free and independent media and journalists
- Providing protection and security to journalists and addressing violations to their rights
- Strengthening the professionalism of the media and promoting the role of the media in defending democracy, liberty and reform.
- Developing a legislative, political, social and cultural environment supportive of the media.

