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**Contribution of Reporters Without Borders (a non-governmental organisation in special consultative status) about press freedom in JORDAN**

**Introduction: Overview of press freedom situation**

Local journalists are closely watched by the country's intelligence services and have to be members of the state-run Jordan Press Association. King Abdullah often says he favours decriminalisation of press offences, but journalists still face prison if they write things considered "harmful to the country's diplomatic relations" or to do with the king and the royal family. The limits are clear and few journalists dare to breach them, preferring self-censorship.

According to the government, the Press and Publications Department (PPD) is tasked with "taking the necessary steps" in cases of violation of the law. The Jordanian press law provides for heavy fines which can go as high as the equivalent of 30,000 euros. The criminal code lays down prison sentences in cases of "defamation," "insulting religious belief" and "promoting material stirring up sectarianism or racism".

**1. Online freedom**

The Internet is just as closely watched as the traditional media and the government extended control of news websites in September 2007 by making online publications subject to the press law. Former MP Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi was given a two-year prison sentence on 11 October 2007 for posting on his party's website news considered harmful to the government's reputation. He had criticised corruption high up in the regime and passed on details of it to the US government, a regime ally.

**2. Government steps to improve the situation**

The Jordanian authorities have not shown any will to improve the situation of press freedom in the country. Moreover, hopes raised after parliament in March 2007 cancelled a law providing for prison terms for press offences quickly faded. MPs did drop plans to crack down hard on written “insults” to religion and its leaders. The legal action begun in 2006 against a journalist who reprinted the Danish newspaper cartoons of the prophet Mohammed was abandoned. But these encouraging developments were not enough to reassure journalists ever mistrustful of the authorities, who continued to use interference and hidden pressure to control the press.

### **3. Working with non-governmental organisations (NGO)**

The Jordanian government has never replied to solicitations of Reporters Without Borders. Local NGOs face a lot of pressure and their activities have a limited impact.

### **4. Recommendations**

-Reporters Without Borders urges the Jordanian government to embark on a thorough reform of the publications law in order to decriminalize press offences and guarantee journalists greater freedom of expression.

*The data in this report has been gathered and verified by Reporters Without Borders, which has a network of correspondents in 130 countries and partner organisations in a score of countries.*

*In some countries, a journalist can be imprisoned for several years just for a word or a photo someone does not like. Reporters Without Borders, founded in 1985, works daily to support press freedom because imprisoning or killing a journalist removes a key witness and threatens the right of all of us to be kept informed of the news.*

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