

Egypt court orders ban of pornographic websites

March 29 2012, By SARAH EL DEEB , Associated Press

(AP) -- An Egyptian court has ordered the government to ban pornographic Internet websites in order to protect society and its values.

The decision and a similar initiative in parliament has fed into fears by liberal and secular Egyptians that their country is moving down the path to fundamentalist Islam, following a sweeping victory by Islamists in [parliamentary elections](#).

The ruling Wednesday came from a lower [court](#) and can be appealed. Three years ago a court made a similar ruling, but it was not enforced because at the time, officials argued filtering systems were not effective.

[Human rights activists](#) criticized the latest ruling and warned it was a violation of freedom of information in an already conservative society.

The pornographic website issue recently underlined the Islamist domination of parliament, when an ultraconservative lawmaker presented a query asking the government to [ban](#) pornographic websites because they endangered the morality of the country's youth. The lawmaker asked the government to introduce legislation banning sites that promote corruption and immorality.

Internet specialists said trying to ban pornography with a court ruling or legislation is ineffective. The use of parental controls is considered a more common way to curb access of minors to offensive content.

"It is very hard to implement and is ... a waste of resources," said lawyer Soha Abdel-Attie of the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights. She said it was not clear if the new court order builds on the previous case or was a new ban.

Others said the ban is a violation of freedom of expression and information and could be followed by other steps to censor dissidents.

Ramy Raouf, an online activist, said during the regime of deposed leader Hosni Mubarak, the government blocked websites of Islamists for brief periods during election times to curb their activities.

During the 18-day uprising that toppled Mubarak, the government blocked the Internet for several days in an attempt to disrupt communications among activists. The measure failed to curb huge street protests against the regime.

Raouf said barring information is not a practical way to tackle social problems. He said such a court order was broad, lacking specifics on how to implement the ban, how to monitor its implementation, and what sites were deemed offensive.

"Censorship presumes that citizens are dumb and lack knowledge, and that the state must carry out that role for them because it knows better," he said. "If you want to protect people from trouble, it is never through withholding information."

Last month Tunisia's highest court overturned a similar court ban on pornographic websites that attempted to restore the filtering system in place before the country's revolution against its longtime leader. The court sent the case back to a lower tribunal for review.

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