

Global media watchdog names enemies of Internet

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(AP) -- The Arab Spring is changing the face of Internet freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders, which released its latest "Enemies of the Internet" list Monday.

The annual report classifies as "enemies" countries that severely curtail freedom of expression on and access to the Web. It also draws up a list of states "under surveillance."

The group added Bahrain to its enemies list, citing a news blackout and harassment of bloggers in an attempt to quell a yearlong Shiite-led rebellion against the Sunni monarchy.

The country had previously been under surveillance.

"Bahrain offers a perfect example of successful crackdowns, with an information blackout achieved through an impressive arsenal of repressive measures: exclusion of the foreign media, harassment of human rights defenders, arrests of bloggers and netizens (one of whom died behind bars), prosecutions and defamation campaigns against free expression activists, disruption of communications," the Paris-based group's report said.

But the Arab Spring - the name given to a cascade of revolts across the Arab world - has also led to the opening up of some regimes.

Libya, where the repressive rule of Moammar Gadhafi was thrown off in

a violent revolt, was removed from the list of countries under surveillance.

"In Libya, many challenges remain but the overthrow of the Gadhafi regime has ended an era of censorship," the report said.

The group said that the Arab Spring had also highlighted the importance of the Internet - and therefore the importance of protecting access to and expression on it.

"The Internet and social networks have been conclusively established as tools for protest, campaigning and circulating information, and as vehicles for freedom," the group said. "More than ever before, online freedom of expression is now a major foreign and domestic policy issue."

The enemies list contains countries that are well known for blocking [Internet content](#), like China, Myanmar and [North Korea](#).

But the list of those under surveillance contains some surprises like Australia and France.

[Reporters Without Borders](#) criticized Australia for persuading Internet service providers to create a national content-filtering system, which blocks access to child pornography sites and others deemed inappropriate. The group is concerned that the government is still also pursuing a system of mandatory content-filtering whose criteria are "very broad."

France landed on the surveillance list last year for a series of criminal indictments of journalists for stories they wrote. It remains on the list this year because of a law that could punish people who repeatedly illegally download content by cutting off their Internet access.

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