

Jordan blocks 254 news websites

July 2 2013



Two Jordanian university students surf the web at an internet cafe in Irbid, on January 23, 2001. The Jordanian government has blocked 254 unlicensed news websites, 16 of them in the previous two days, using powers under a 2012 law criticised as a threat to freedom of expression.

The Jordanian government said on Tuesday that it had blocked 254 unlicensed news websites, 16 of them in the previous two days, using powers under a 2012 law criticised as a threat to freedom of expression.

Fayez Shawabkeh, head of the Press and Publication Department said:

"16 [local news](#) websites were blocked in the past two days after carefully examining their situation.

"This brings the total number of sites the PPD blocked recently to 254, while 111 sites have obtained licences."

On June 3, authorities said they would block nearly 300 out of 400 local news websites "for failing to obtain the necessary licensing," under last year's controversial legislation.

The law gave the government powers to regulate "electronic publications," requiring them to register with the PPD and obtain a licence.

It stipulates that the chief editors of news websites must be members of the Jordan Press Association, giving the government the right to censor content and hold journalists liable for comments posted on webpages.

The PPD has insisted "the decision does not seek to restrict freedoms," and that "the objective is to organise the work of these websites."

"I call on all local news websites to correct their status in line with the law. Operating outside the law, which we will continue to apply, will not be in their interest," Shawabkeh warned.

Journalists accuse the government of seeking to control who can publish news.

One of the sites blocked in the past two days is 7iber, Arabic for "ink".

Its editor, Lina Ejeilat, told AFP 7iber was an [interactive website](#) that published reports and features from contributors, and said it should not be covered by the legislation.

"We are a blog and definitely not a news website," she said.

Shawabkeh disagreed, saying that "7iber is registered at the trade and industry ministry as a news website and posts news and political analyses about Jordan, which means that the [law](#) applies to it".

The PPD's decision drew renewed criticism of Jordan from international human rights watchdogs, as well as from [journalists](#), activists and the main opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, who saw it as an attempt to impose censorship.

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