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Morocco: *al-Jazeera* forced to shutdown Maghrebi news program from Rabat

ARTICLE 19 expresses concern over the decision by the Moroccan authorities to stop the broadcasting of a daily news programme from the Rabat office of al-Jazeera.

Al-Jazeera's Rabat bureau received a fax on May 6 from the National Agency for Telecom Regulation (ANRT) saying it would no longer be able to broadcast the Maghreb programme for "technical and legal problems."

"The decision by the Moroccan authorities comes as further indication of the continuous trend in the region to target Satellite TV, the only avenue for free expression in much of the Arab World", said Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

Al-Jazeera started broadcasting the daily news program on the Maghreb region from its Rabat office in November 2006. Although the TV-station has been unable to obtain a permanent permission, it has so far worked under provisional permits. The current permit is valid until 13 of June. The programme has frequently covered stories on Morocco, including the country's parliamentary elections last September and the issue of Western Sahara.

The decision comes after Ministers of Information of the Arab League States, with the exception of Qatar and Lebanon, adopted in February 2008 the 'Principles for Organizing Satellite TV in the Arab World' Charter. ARTICLE 19 has condemned the Charter which constitutes a major set back to freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the Arab World. Shortly after the Charter was adopted Egypt stopped the transmissions of *Al-Baraka*, *Al-zawara* and *Al-hewar* stations, in line with their statement of support for the Charter.

ARTICLE 19 urges the Moroccan government to reconsider its decision to stop the al-Jazeera programme and to allow it to broadcast from Rabat. Once again, ARTICLE 19 strongly condemns the Arabic Charter on Satellite for contradicting Article 32 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights that guarantees the right to information and freedom of expression.

ARTICLE 19 would also like to remind Morocco of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to human rights and freedom of expression in particular.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name

from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.