



## PRESS RELEASE

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### NEW LAW SIGNALS FINAL CURTAIN FOR PRESS FREEDOM IN YEMEN

**As the Yemeni government prepares to push its draft Press and Publications Law through the Shura Council, ARTICLE 19 warns that the proposal may signal the end of the government's brief experiment with press freedom and democracy.**

**Law Programme Director Toby Mendel said:** *“Until today, a tiny but vigorous free press has succeeded in clinging to the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula. The unexplained recent spate of violent attacks against independent and opposition journalists has weakened its grip. What the free press needs now is a strong statement of support from the government. Unfortunately, the draft law is just the opposite.”*

#### NOTES TO EDITORS

1. ARTICLE 19's concerns in relation to the draft press law include:

- **The large number of vague restrictions on the content of what may be published.** These restrictions will create uncertainty about which expressions are permissible and will have a chilling effect on legitimate speech.
- **The extensive use of licensing regimes.** Official permission is required for the establishment of virtually any kind of print media enterprise. The use of licensing regimes is unnecessary and can be used to prevent or close down critical publications.
- **The use of entry requirements for media workers.** Journalists, editors and others will be required to possess certain academic qualifications and to have attained a specified age. Young and underprivileged Yemenis will be unable to enter the print media sector, regardless of their actual capabilities.
- **The imposition of capitalisation requirements.** Owners of newspapers and magazines will be required to make a capital deposit before commencing with publication. This requirement will further confine ownership of publications to the richest group of Yemenis.

2. The revision process of the 1990 Law on Press and Publications was set in motion in 2004 when President Ali Abdullah Saleh called for the abolition of prison sentences for journalists. An initial draft by the Ministry of Information was heavily criticised by journalists due to the restrictions it introduced in other areas. Responsibility for the reform process was then handed to an *ad hoc* committee chaired by the Minister of Justice, which met under circumstances of great secrecy and failed to consult the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate.

**For more information and interview:**

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- ARTICLE 19's recent commentary on the draft law can be downloaded at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/draft-yemen-press-and-publications-law.pdf>