

July 9, 2015

Hon. Hassan Kadhém al-Rachid  
Ministry of Communications, Iraq

cc: Executive Office of Iraqi Telecommunications and Post;  
Ambassador Mohammed Alhakim,  
Permanent mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned, are members of free expression and human rights organizations based in the Middle East region and around the globe. We are writing with regards to the blocking of the internet in Iraq in June and July 2015. On or about the day of June 27, 2015 we learned that the government had ordered Internet Service Providers to shut down the use of the internet, allegedly to stop cheating on school examinations. Our sources, which track internet traffic and other relevant information, confirmed additional shutdowns of the internet on June 12, 2015 and in early July.

The UN Human Rights Council has affirmed that the rights that are enjoyed offline must also be protected on the internet. Blocking access to the internet, or applications on the internet such as social media, violates the right to freedom of expression by denying the right of persons to seek, receive, and impart information. These shutdowns frequently occur during periods of civil unrest, directly impacting the right to association. As a result, shutdowns often precede and enable egregious human rights violations because journalists and witnesses are unable to effectively report on repressive actions by state and non-state actors.

We accordingly believe the decision by the government of Iraq to shut down the internet, whether for exams or for security reasons, negatively impacts human rights in the region. This is especially true in light of the ongoing conflict with ISIS and other groups in the country, who could use internet blockages to commit human rights violations under a media blackout, or to attack citizens who cannot gather crucial information about how to protect themselves or contact emergency services.

We humbly request that the government of Iraq:

- withdraws its order to telecommunications companies to shut down the internet;
- pledge not to order further blocking or shutdowns in the future; and
- explore alternative methods of administering exams that do not impinge upon the right of all Iraqis to seek, receive, and impart information

Respectfully submitted,  
Access, Article19, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Heliopolis Institute



Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information at [peter@accessnow.org](mailto:peter@accessnow.org) (Senior Policy Counsel, Access) or [deji@accessnow.org](mailto:deji@accessnow.org) (Senior Global Advocacy Manager, Access.)