



The Beacon for Freedom of Expression Conference 2004

The 'Beacon for Freedom of Expression' Conference

Issue 1/2004

15 April 2004

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► 2004 Beacon for Freedom of Expression Conference

The Beacon for Freedom of Expression Project, and the conferences stemming from it in 2003 and 2004 are part of the general expression of the needs of the world to raise awareness about these issues and summon people to work at changes needed in their countries and in their institutions and organizations.

- The 2004 Conference (18 to 20 September 2004) will address the following topics:
 - Focus on Africa: Tradition and Individual Freedom
 - Circumventing Free Speech-New Forms of Censorship
 - The Media and Freedom of Expression: Prometheus Embedded
 - Hearing the Younger Generation
 - Freedom of Expression – Future Challenges
- Workshop: Libraries and Freedom of Expression
- Workshop: Freedom of expression and copyright in a global perspective: Focus Middle East
- Workshop: New Project – “Censorship in Arab Countries: Past and Present”

For further information visit the event website at: www.bibalex.org/beaconforfreedom

Register to attend:

Travel and accommodations information: alyaa.ali@bibalex.org

Conference information: Laila.Dowidar@bibalex.org; hanan.abdelrazek@bibalex.org



▶ **News for Thought**

▶ **Reform In The Arab World Requires That True Intellectuals Speak Out**

By Daoud Kuttab, Al-Hayat 2004/04/11

Reform is not a new issue in the Arab world. It has been the demand of Arab democrats and human rights activists for years. Most of those fighters for democracy have been muzzled, detained, tortured, or have disappeared or been killed by Arab dictators and even leaders who are believed to be moderate in the eyes of the western world. Visit any major European capital today and you will find a crowd of Arab thinkers, intellectuals, journalists, human rights activists, and scientists who have chosen exile rather than continuing to live under the tyranny of their regimes. Many independent Arab media outlets have thrived in capitals like Paris and London, and many regional Arab NGOs make their official bases outside the region.

Satellite TV and the Internet have been a godsend to many of those opposing authoritarian regimes. The independent TV station Al-Jazeera made many of these activists known in the Arab world through programs like the Al-Itijah Al-Muakes (Opposite Direction) and Aktar men rai (More Than One Opinion), and others. The Internet has also provided a censorship-free, difficult to trace, and inexpensive means of mobilizing and raising awareness.

With such a strong Arab democratic movement, an objective observer would expect a strong embrace from Arab intellectuals and human rights activists to the recent calls by the United States government to place serious pressure on Arab regimes to reform their governments. But an eerie silence has fallen on political opponents, both inside the Arab world and in exile. In fact, an unusually overwhelming comprehensive attack has been expressed against the new U.S. reform plan. These attacks, which have appeared in the opinion pages of major Arab newspapers and in satellite talk shows, have focused almost exclusively on three areas. The attacks have questioned the credibility of Washington and expressed major misgivings in the real goals of the U.S. government in general, and the Bush administration in particular. Critics have also attacked the Americans for their high-handed attempts, without consulting with Arab governments or independents, before offering their formula for saving the Arab world from itself. Finally, almost all attacks have called on the U.S. to help solve the Palestinian problem, instead of shifting attention to the issue of the need for reform.

There is a lot of truth in the above mentioned criticism. The U.S., EU, and any other party interested in reform in the Arab world must take a serious and close look at the issues raised in reaction to the U.S. plan. It seems that this has happened already; the U.S. Secretary of State has been quoted as saying that the U.S. is not trying to impose its plan, and it is clear that a wave of consultation is taking place directly and indirectly with the Arab world.

But while the criticism is correct at face value, I have two problems with it. Many of those expressing it, and most of the media that has carried these opinions, have their own credibility problem vis-à-vis democracy and human rights. When the Saddam Hussein regime fell, documents were revealed of an extensive network of payments to leading Arab journalists, commentators, and intellectuals. The independence of the media in the Arab world leaves a lot



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to be desired. I believe that many of the articles expressed in these papers represent many of the authoritarian regimes themselves. I am not saying that these articles were commissioned or paid for by the regimes, but that many Arab leaders seem to be happy with them, and must have privately encouraged them. Many of these regimes would not dare publicly oppose the U.S. on any idea it presents. This is a rare case in which they can appear to be supporting freedom of expression while allowing seemingly independent intellectuals to be their proxies in opposing the U.S. calls for reform.

I also have a problem with those wanting to link reform in the Arab world with a resolution of the Palestinian problem. For far too long, Arab regimes have hijacked the Palestinian problem to divert attention away from their own incompetence and internal troubles. The Palestinian cause will gain, not suffer, from real reform in the Arab world. If such reform would actually happen, and there is a real question that it will, Arab governments will have to be much more responsive to the demands of their people. And the demands of the Arab world today are that their governments support Palestine in deeds, and not just in words. Furthermore, the Palestinian problem is not a real issue when it comes to reform in many Arab countries that are not immediately surrounding Palestine. There is no need to link reform in, say Morocco or Oman, with the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Frankly, what is bothering me with the U.S. call for reform, and the reactions to it, is the silence displayed by genuine Arab intellectuals regarding the substance of, and the need for, reform, rather than the parties behind it. It is true that in such horrible times such as the Arab nation is going through now; it may seem to some that silence is a very good remedy. But I beg to differ. Since Arab democrats have failed to reach their goals through their own efforts, it seems to me that there is no harm in supporting any idea that fits with theirs, irrespective of the messenger. If real intellectuals are not able to make this distinction, they allow hired intellectuals and disguised Arab spokespersons to do all the talking. With any disease, healing begins with the proper diagnosis. If intellectuals are unable or unwilling to properly diagnose our problem, and if they fail to speak, the problems in the Arab world will only worsen, and the desired reform will not take place, irrespective of whether it comes from within or as a result of pressure from without.

- Daoud Kuttab is an award winning Palestinian journalist. He is the director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al Quds University in Ramallah and the founder of AmmanNet.
* This article is part of a series of views on the America's "Greater Middle East" initiative for reform, published in partnership with the Common Ground News Service (CGNews) on www.english.daralhayat.com on 13-04-04.



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▶ **American Journalist Expelled From Egypt**

Abdel-Rahman Hussein Dar Al-Hayat 2004/02/18

An American reporter for the independent Egyptian weekly The Cairo Times was denied entry into Egypt when returning from the U.S. and left the next day after being detained at Cairo airport.

on www.english.daralhayat.com on 13-04-04

▶ **Censored articles from the Middle East Times,**

9-04-2004

Nothing censored this week

Here, however, are some stories which relate to **freedom of expression** but which were not actually censored.

Here is our archive of **censored stories**..

The *Middle East Times* has never been given a license to publish in Egypt and Egyptian law gives the Ministry of Information the right arbitrarily to ban any newspaper printed outside Egypt from entering the country. The censor reviews all of our issues before allowing them to be distributed. In the past, we censored ourselves, but sometimes we pushed the limits and we lost about three to four issues every year. Needless to say, this was disastrous for our sales and advertising revenue. These days we have a new system -- we submit a proof of each issue to the censor in advance. If they don't like any article, or any paragraph, or any sentence, we take it out and leave a blank space in its place. We are not allowed, however, to mention in this space, the reason why it is there.

Reasons for censorship:

We are generally not allowed to do the following things:

- Report on human rights abuses
- Criticize the president or his family
- Criticize the military
- Point out the ill-treatment of Egyptians in "friendly" Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia .
- Discuss modern, unorthodox interpretations of Islam.
- Report on discrimination against Coptic Christians.

However, the censor is very arbitrary -- sometimes these things go through, sometimes they don't.

What did they censor? See the website: <http://www.metimes.com/>

More articles will be added as they are censored.

Keep checking this page!



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Freedom of expression in Egypt:

It's definitely under threat. From bannings of books by Al-Azhar to beatings-up of journalists. From court cases against authors to assassinations of writers by militants. Draconian press legislation and plain old censorship seem mild in comparison. In this section we are gathering stories related to restrictions on freedom of expression in Egypt.

▶ Saudi Arabia seeks to expand freedom

Saturday 03 April 2004, 11:13 Makka Time, 8:13 GMT

Saudi Arabia's appointed Shura (consultative) Council is seeking to promote freedom of expression and wants newspapers to serve as a platform for debate between conservatives and liberals.

See the website: <http://www.metimes.com/>



Kingdom is trying to introduce social reforms

"The question is whether such freedom will be implemented in practice"

Abd Al-Rahman al-Inad, member of the Shura Council's cultural and media affairs committee

AFP

▶ China urged to grant Uighurs freedom

Sunday 21 December 2003, 18:50 Makka Time, 15:50 GMT

A Muslim separatist group branded as "terrorists" by China has said it was willing to disband if the communist state offered freedom of expression and internet access to Uighur Muslim minorities.

See the website: <http://www.metimes.com/>

To subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter please contact the Webmaster.



About five million of China's 35 million Muslims are Uighurs

AFP (with additions)