



27 August 2012: For immediate release

## **Egypt: Need for Real Reform of Defamation Laws**

On 23 August 2012, Egypt's newly elected President, Mohamed Morsi, passed his very first decree after having wrested back legislative powers from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) earlier that month. The decree cancelled the possibility of pre-trial detention for journalists charged with insulting the president, leading to the release of Islam Afifi, editor-in-chief of *Al-Dustour* newspaper. This is a positive measure, which has earned the President kudos. The laws on defamation, however, are in need of far more profound reform if they are to be brought into line with international standards. A Statement on the issue released today by the Centre for Law and Democracy describes the wider needs and offers recommendations for reform.

*"We welcome President Morsi's decree and the signal it sends that the Government of Egypt wishes to respect freedom of expression,"* said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of the Centre for Law and Democracy. *"But it remains a largely symbolic measure, unless concerted measures are taken to reform the whole area of criminal defamation law in Egypt."*

The CLD Statement makes a number of recommendations for reform, including the following:

- The criminal charges against Afifi and others charged with insulting the President should be dropped immediately.
- The whole criminal defamation regime should be repealed and replaced with appropriate civil defamation rules. The criminal rules against publishing false news should also be repealed.
- The system of pre-trial sanctions should be limited to highly exceptional cases where such measures are fully justified in all of the circumstances.
- The rules on the Journalist Syndicate, which effectively create a two-tier status among journalists, should be reviewed in consultation with stakeholders to come up with a more democratic approach.

The Statement is available at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/live/egypt-need-for-real-reform-of-defamation-laws/>.

***For further information, please contact:***

Toby Mendel  
Executive Director  
Centre for Law and Democracy  
email: [toby@law-democracy.org](mailto:toby@law-democracy.org)  
tel: +1 902 431-3688  
[www.law-democracy.org](http://www.law-democracy.org)