29 April 2014: For immediate release

**Statement on Criminal Restrictions on Media Content in the Middle East**

The Middle East and North Africa remains one of the world’s most troubled media environments, despite some gains since 2011. Today the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), International Media Support (IMS) and Maharat Foundation are unveiling a Statement on Media Regulatory Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Criminal Restrictions on Media Content. The Statement is the product of a workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, from 24-25 April, and was adopted by experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.

The Statement highlights the major types of problems in the region in terms of criminal law restrictions on what may be published or disseminated through the media, and calls on countries to conduct comprehensive reviews of their criminal law rules affecting freedom of expression. It also provides specific recommendations on a number of thematic areas, including that laws protecting national security should be clearly defined, that imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty for defamation and that hate speech laws should only prohibit incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

“This Statement reflects a strong consensus among experts from the region regarding the main criminal law problems,” said CLD Executive Director, Toby Mendel. “It also charts a clear path forward in terms of the basic reform efforts that need to take place.”

The workshop built on an earlier workshop hosted by IMS in Casablanca in November 2013, and is one of a series that will take place across the Middle East this year.

“By facilitating dialogue on the major freedom of expression challenges, we are advancing a common regional advocacy strategy,” said Virginie Jouan, IMS Programme Manager for Tunisia and Morocco.

“The principles espoused in the Statement reflect a shared view of the major problems in our common media landscape,” said Roula Mikhael of Maharat. “We look forward to working with our colleagues from around the region to provide mutual support in solving these pressing challenges.”


*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: +1 902 992-1296
Virginie Jouan
Programme Manager, Middle East and North Africa
International Media Support (IMS)
Email: vj@i-m-s.dk
Tel: +45 8832 7000 (switchboard) | +45 5210 7807 (mobile)
http://i-m-s.dk
@forfreemedia

Roula Mikhael
Executive Director
Maharat Foundation
Email: roula.mikhael@maharatfoundation.org
Tel.: 009613612413 (mobile)
www.maharatfoundation.org