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## 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."*

The Statement is available at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/live/statement-on-criminal-restrictions-on-media-content-in-the-middle-east/>.

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