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Draft Tunisian Press Law Falls Short

One of the first priorities of the new Tunisian High Commission for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution and Democratic Transition has been to prepare a new press law to replace the repressive 1975 law that has been used for over 30 years as a mechanism of control. Unfortunately, despite its name, the draft Press Law released by the Commission late last month fails to deliver on the goals of the revolution, according to a Comment analysing its provisions, published today by CLD.

"CLD welcomes the initiative to replace the old, repressive 1975 Press Law," said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *"It is clear that an attempt has been made in the new draft to limit the extent of government control over the media. At the same time, much more needs to be done if the law is to meet the expectations of the people during this period of change, not to mention as well as international human rights guarantees."*

Some of the main problems with the draft Press Law are:

- It requires a very wide range of published products, including books, CDs and even digitally stored material, to be registered.
- It provides for harsh punishments, including termination of a media outlet, for failing to register or to provide deposit copies to the prosecutor or ministry of culture.
- Anyone who has been mentioned in a media report may claim a right of reply.
- Nearly one-half of its 69 provisions are about criminal restrictions on what may be published in the media.

CLD calls on the Tunisian authorities to respond to the demands of the people and to put in place a democratic, rights-respecting framework for the media.

The full Comment is available at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/11.04.Tunisia.Prs.pdf>. The draft Law is available at: http://www.law-democracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Tunisia.Press_Mar11.pdf.

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