

1. Title:

Regional Session: Promoting Freedom of Expression and Media Development in Arab States

2. Date and Time:

Tuesday, 26 February from 9:30 to 11:00

3. Venue:

Conference Room IV

4. Concise session description and agenda (modality, target audience and expected outcomes):

The session aims to bring a regional perspective to the WSIS strategy analysis on **Action Line C9: Media** to understand new opportunities and challenges that have emerged in transitional Arab states and share good practice/lessons learned on promoting freedom of expression and media development at the regional and national levels. Drawing lessons from the recent dynamics related to media proliferation and new media's powerful impact on social and political transformation in Arab States, this panel will focus on assessing the changing media landscape, the opportunities and challenges for reforming media and legal frameworks, and the transformation of media institutions in the new media environment.

In light of the new constitutions in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, and the flourishing of new media outlets and citizen journalism projects in transitional countries, the panel will review the process of reforming the media landscape that is underway. Stalled legal reforms, issues around domestic and global blasphemy laws, and the ongoing challenges of professionalism in the field underscore the challenge of reforming this sector. The lack of political commitment to bring about meaningful reform and particularly to nurture the development of independent media has emerged as a particular challenge. This panel will provide an assessment of these challenges in transitional countries as well as those where political reform efforts have been more limited.

At the same time, the panel will also assess several other developments. New outlets are flourishing across the region and new institutional configurations can be seen with the incorporation of citizen-generated content. Pan-Arab satellite stations continue to play an important role in some national public spheres and put pressure on the national media to remain

competitive. State media institutions continue to employ thousands of people in some cases, and thus present institutional and economic barriers to reform. The panel will discuss how personalization of media is impacting reform efforts and the challenges and opportunities the wider trends present for promoting freedom of expression in the Arab region.

Other issues to be discussed include the challenge of meeting the needs of media literacy when more people than ever have access to multiple sources and platforms of communication. Further, whereas social media journalism played a constructive and emancipatory role in helping to bring about the Arab Spring and enabling collaboration and creative resistance, there are indications that the community is fragmenting and no longer unified behind a common set of objectives. There are indications that social media is becoming divisive yet Arab media outlets are increasingly incorporating citizen-generated content and social media into the news cycle.

Key Questions:

- How have media institutions transformed since the Arab Spring? What is the balance of power now between established media institutions, including satellite TV, and new startups?
- What is happening in the state-owned media in terms of its level of independence from the state?
- Are independent, private and citizen media initiatives competitive? What specific challenges do they face? Do they provide greater pluralism to society at large?
- How important are regional media institutions like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, and what impact do they have on national media?
- Whereas social media journalism played a constructive and emancipatory role in laying the groundwork for the Arab Spring, to what extent is this still the case, and what are the implications for the mainstream and mass media?
- How should and can media development programs remain agile enough to adapt to the changing information environment and the shifting role of professional journalist and social media producers?

- What impact have recent political developments (new or draft constitutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen; war in Syria; limited reforms in Jordan, Morocco) had on media institutions and independence?
- What factors impact on political will to reform media legislation and regulation? How does this vary by country?
- What is happening to the verifiability of information in this new media ecosystem and what does this mean for efforts to build democratic accountability and pluralism?

Expected Outcomes:

- Stock taken of developments in the region's media landscape and their implications for the promotion of freedom of expression and the role of free, independent and pluralistic journalism.
- Understanding of main challenges facing media development efforts in the region over the short-to-mid-term, as well as where there may be untapped opportunities
- Better understanding of priorities for freedom of expression and media development organizations.

Possible recommendations include: the need for holistic and updated information in a fast-changing context; the importance of media reform in a window of opportunity; sharing best-practices.

5. Names of the organizer(s) of the workshop and their affiliation to various stakeholder groups (government, the private sector, civil society and intergovernmental organization):

Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development, [Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO](#), Intergovernmental Organization

6. Names and affiliations of the panelists and the remote moderator:

Ms Courtney Radsch, Senior Project Officer, Section for Freedom of Expression, [Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO](#), Intergovernmental Organization (Chair)



Panelists (10 minutes each)

Ms Rasha Abdulla, Associate Professor and Chair, [Journalism and Mass Communication, American University of Cairo](#), Civil Society, Egypt

Ms Abeer Al-Najjar, Assistant Professor, [Department of Mass Communication, American University of Sharjah](#), Civil Society, United Arab Emirates

Ms Shabina Khatri, Founder and Editor, [Doha News](#), Private Sector, Qatar

Mr Jan Keulen, [Doha Centre for Media Freedom](#), Civil Society, Qatar

Ms Biljana Tatomir, [International Media Support](#), Civil Society, Denmark

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Mr Hisham Al-Miraat, Advocacy Director, [Global Voices](#), Civil Society, Morocco (Remote Moderator)

7. Contact person:

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Organization: UNESCO

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