

Who Pays the Price? Advertisements in the Egyptian Press Beautifying the Image of the Tunisian Dictatorship

Preface

"We are asking journalists not to eat our flesh." This appeal came from the Tunisian journalist and celebrated activist Naziha Rejiba (Um Ziad) in her speech delivered at the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate (EJS) on May 3rd, 2006 during the celebration of World Press Freedom Day.

As a journalist herself, Um Ziad knows the importance of the news for journalists and press organizations, yet the concept of news doesn't mean that media outlets publish materials to embellish the image of the Tunisian dictatorship and ignore the daily disasters caused by this regime.

Publishing news advertisements biased to one point of view transforms such a newspaper that is in effect "eating the flesh" of the Tunisian citizen and his or her right to an independent impartial media.

But many newspapers and journalists didn't answer Um Ziad's call and didn't care about it and this goes for Egyptian and Arab newspapers and journalists alike.

These paid advertisements have kept on appearing in newspapers carrying fantastic headlines about the heaven of democracy in

Tunisia using well-chosen mostly color photos of President Ben Ali, applauding the achievements he has made in all fields.

But none of these advertisements have been labelled as an advertisement. Most of these advertisements were published in Arab affair pages and some of them were even published on the front page. Some newspapers published these ads as "special reports" or "documentary reports" but none of these newspapers pointed out clearly that these were paid advertisements.

"Human rights has great significance in Ben Ali's thought." This is an example of a news story published in the Egyptian Al-Gomhoria among other subjects on the Arab affair page in mid-April 2007. When the regular person reads this story (advertisement) he or she will not stop for long to think about it but he or she will deal with it instead as a regular story like other stories, analysis, reports or news. And this is exactly the intention behind designing these advertisements to look like other stories. But the truth is that they are not real news stories, they are advertisements published differently and in an intentional way to mislead, and this is where the deception lies.

Um Ziad's outcry at the EJS alerted us to the fact that it is a practice and a continuing widespread violation. We didn't expect it to be of such a scale, we didn't expect that some journalists call for freedom of press in their own countries while they embellish the image of another which kills freedom of the press in another country. These advertisements/reports jeopardize all the concepts of independent media. These advertisements jeopardize the

citizen's right to knowledge based on the distinction between advertisement and media.

The false news has given a chance to those who violate freedom of expression in Tunisia to escape punishment or even reproach. These newspapers jeopardize the articles of the journalistic code of ethics. These advertisements are funded from the flesh of the Tunisian citizen.

Background on Tunisia

November 7, 1987, dawn:

"It's all set according to the deal and congratulations Mr. President" were the words of Alhabib Ammar to the Tunisian Minister of Interior at the time Zin Abidine Ben Ali, after Ammar has seized control of the Carthage Palace - and this was also the first phone call to declare Ben Ali the President of Tunisia.

November 7, 1987, morning:

During the early hours of the morning of that day in 1987, the head of the Tunisian Radio Broadcast, Mr. Abdelmalak Alarief, put on a recording of a voice message for Ben Ali in which he declares himself President and promises the people democracy and that he will respect the law and abolish lifetime presidency.(1)

November 7, 2007:

The democracy Ben Ali promised was achieved through:

- * Hundreds of Tunisian journalists and activists are sent into voluntary exile
- * Hundreds of journalists and activists are prohibited from writing or taking up any activities in Tunisia
- * Hundreds of Tunisian activists are kept behind bars in Tunisia
- * Millions of Tunisians are at the mercy of law enforcement officials instead of the law
- * Millions of Arabs are deceived by paid advertisements talking about "green Tunisia, the oasis of democracy and women's gains, the secular role model, etc "

The other Tunisia... after 20 years:

The Tunisian constitution, since its promulgation on June 1959, has undergone about 14 amendments - eight of them were after the coup led by Ben Ali in 1987. Those amendments took place in: 1988, 1993, 1998, 1997, 1995, 1999, 2002 and 2003.

The most detrimental amendments took place in 1993, 2002 and 2003 as they gave Ben Ali a lifetime judicial immunity in addition to giving him the right to run for president an indefinite number of times.

Tunisian democracy and the enshrinement of the 99 % majority in elections:

Many believe mistakenly that the notorious 99% majority in voting during elections is an Egyptian product, yet history in that regard must pay the Tunisian authorities their dues. When Sadaam Hussein once acknowledged proudly his victory in a presidential election by 100 % (2), that was a cheap copy of the real expertise of Ben Ali.

Tunisia saw during Ben Ali's regime four elections, all of which came up with results totally in keeping with his version of democracy which he promised the Tunisian people during the morning of November 7.

The results were as follows:

In 1989, Ben Ali scored 99.20 % of votes

In 1994, he won 99.91% of votes

In 1999 he won 94.4% of votes But in 2004 he saw a big setback

as he couldn't win more than 94.48% of votes, which might call for new amendments in the coming days

Press freedom and public freedom in Tunisia

Sean O Siochru from Communication Rights in the Information Society admitted that the status of human rights in Tunisia is not the worst in the whole world but he said that as long as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was being held there in November 2005 it was expected that the authorities would exhaust every effort to guarantee freedom of expression.

Instead, "the responsibility of assaulting local human rights activists was taken upon by members of the plainclothes police, and these assaults led the organizers of the Citizen's Summit on the Information Society to go on protest on Tuesday instead of looking for a place to host their summit." (3)

Civil society in Tunisia

Between 1992 and 1993, more than 1400 members of the Constitutional Democratic Rally, the ruling party in Tunisia, joined the Tunisian League for Human Rights, raising questions about the sudden resurrection and the sudden embracement of human rights values and concepts.

The reader will find the answer in the following part.

"The Tunisian League for Human Rights was denied the right to hold its sixth annual conference and was denied access to its main building in Tunisia; only the executive members of the association are allowed to enter the offices. The association branches were closed to the public and the elected members of the association. The legal case filed against the executive body of the association

was adjourned for the second time to January 2007. The authorities made contacts with embassies of a number of countries in Tunisia and threatened to sever diplomatic relations with these countries if its representatives continued to meet Tunisian human rights activists, the authorities stressed specifically about any meetings with members of the Tunisian League for Human Rights based on legal suits filed against it and instead of these threats a number of workers in different embassies visited the League's headquarters to express their support."(4)

Yet this is relatively new information and God only knows what was happening during the nineties.

Naguib Hosny, one of the most public figures in Tunisia, was deprived from his right to practice his profession as a lawyer. He was also prohibited from traveling and his passport was confiscated after he discussed the human rights situations in Tunisia with the media in 1998.

Mohammed Mowada was questioned after his return from Europe and meeting with European human rights activists and members of parliament in 1998. He was also accused of practicing subversive activities, and he was under arbitrary custody.

The vice-president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights Khamis Kosila was sentenced to two years in prison for issuing a statement in which he criticized the government's policies on human rights. His son was prohibited from traveling to Cairo to receive a human rights award from an Egyptian human rights organization.

Radia Nasrawy, a lawyer specializing in human rights issues, who defends political prisoners and victims of the state's oppression, is also a founding member of the Association Against Torture in Tunisia. Nasrawy was the first lawyer to have membership in the Law Council and membership in the International Organization Against Torture. She also assumed a number of monitoring tasks with Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the European Missions. For more than 25 years Nasrawy was a target for police harassment, threats and raids at her workplace. She also received an order restricting her movement, and her family members and her lawyers suffered from harassment too. The police broke into her office on three separate incidents and she also suffered from physical assaults in a number of occasions. Her e-mail messages were intercepted, her phones were wiretapped, an intermittent security presence was stationed in front of her house and in 2002 her husband, Hamma Alhomamy, the political activist was detained and was suspended for three years for his political opinions.(5)

Doctor Moncef Marzouki, the former vice-president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights was fired and prevented from teaching medicine in the city of Sousa. He founded, with a number of human rights activists, the National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia in 1999. He was detained several times, including one time when he was detained in 1994 but released after a personal request from Nelson Mandela.

All in all, Tunisia breaks the record in the number of organizations denied the right to work in Tunisia. There are seven significant organizations, including the National Council for Freedoms in

Tunisia, the International Association for Political Prisoners, the Tunisian Association Against Torture and the Observatory for Press Freedoms, Publishing and Creation in Tunisia.

Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press:

On April 3rd, 2000, Tunisian Journalist Tawfik Ben Brik launched a hunger strike in protest against the closure of the Sabar publishing house and the confiscation of his passport. In the spring of 1999, Ben Brik was subject to broken arm at the hands of non-uniformed police officers. Due to the international support Ben Brik received, the Tunisian president said that he also wanted to go on a hunger strike because he was "sad to know people of this kind exist in Tunisia" and he gave his orders to return Ben Brik's phone service.

Ben Ali made a comment about the Tunisian government saying, "Why don't the Tunisian newspapers cover Ben Brik's hunger strike - at least with four lines so people won't look for the news outside?" He also said that he was reading the Tunisian newspapers and found them "repetitious in terms of news, photography and editorials."(6)

Certainly the Tunisian president wasn't serious, although what he said was true but it wasn't for actual usage, since any Tunisian newspaper's attempts to break away from the authorities' grip will face a similar fate as other newspapers like Al-Mokaf, Al-Akhbar, Al-Gomhoriya, Al-Fajr, and Al-Maghrib magazine. All these newspapers faced prohibition, confiscation and harassment, which was intended to hide the truth from the Tunisian citizens. Foreign

newspapers didn't receive better treatment from the censor like Le Monde and the U.A.E.-based Woman Today.

Censorship went further to even harass government newspapers such as the monthly cultural paper Al-hyat published by the Tunisian Ministry of Culture. It wasn't unusual then that the International Federation of Journalists decided in 2004 to suspend the membership of the Tunisian Journalists' Syndicate, which is the Tunisian government controlled union, for rewarding the President with its press freedom award for his role in that field at a time when the Tunisian press lacked all concepts of independence and impartiality. World press freedom organizations strongly criticized the Tunisian press.

The government's grip kept on tightening on the press, leading to an unusual situation never before seen in many Arab countries. This situation became a hallmark of the Tunisian press as mentioned in the report of the October 18th movement,(7) which noted that Tunisian newspapers used or were "coerced to use" a blacklist including many leaders of political parties and civil society. Names on this list are shunned by the press, they can't express their opinions or have their photos published. The surprising thing is that the list gets bigger and bigger every day. The list includes many names of journalists and human rights activists, such as:

- * Ahmed Naguib Alshaby, the secretary general of the Democratic Progressive Party
- * Hama Alhomamy, the official spokesperson of the Tunisian Workers Communist party
- * Rashid AlGhanoshy, the head of Al-Nahda movement

- * Mostafa Ben Gafar, the secretary general of the Democratic block for labor and freedoms
- * Mokhtar Trifi, the head of the Tunisian League for Human Rights
- * Mohammed Alnoury, the head of the International Association for Political Prisoners
- * Radia Nasrawy, the head of the Tunisian Association Against Torture
- * Sihem Bensedrine, the official spokesperson of the National Council for Freedoms
- * Ali Ben Salim, the head of the Veteran resistance members society
- * Galool Azouna, the head of the Free Writers Society
- * Mohammed Talby a thinker and the head of the observatory of freedom of creation and publishing
- * Mohammed Al-Sharafy, the former Minister of Education
- * Moncef Marzouki, the head of the Conference for the Republic party
- * Albasheer Alseed, the former head of the lawyers syndicate
- * Abdelraziq Alhomamy the head of the Democratic National Labour party
- * Mohammed Alkeelany, of the Democratic communists
- * Abdelqader Alzitony, the head of the Green Tunisia party
- * Kamel Jendoubi, the Committee for cherishing freedoms and human rights in Tunisia
- * Khamees Alshamary, the former vice-president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights
- * Abdelrazek Alkeelany, Member in the National Council for Lawyers.(8)

That was an idea about the conditions of the press in Tunisia.
What about the journalists' conditions?

Tunisia may be the only country in the whole world that every time you make a search on one of its well-known journalists on any famous and non-famous search engines you will be surprised that there are only two things in common: either this journalist is jailed or beaten or that he or she is writing from his or her arbitrary exile out of Tunisia. In other words, the independent journalist or an outspoken figure is victimized by a repressive regime, or, this journalist has left Tunisia to another place where expressing your opinion is not equivalent to prison and harassment.

The October 18th movement mentioned in its report a list of names of the journalists deprived from writing in Tunisia. Those writers' work can be found only through electronic journalism means. The list includes:

Abdellatif Alforaty

Salah Aldin Algorshy

Kamel Labidi

Lotfy Hajji

Omar Sahabo

Mohamed Fourati

Slim Boukdhir

Abdelwahab Alhany

Altahir Alobidy

Noor Aldin Aloydy

Alhady Yahmad

Shahrizad Okasha

Abdellah Alzowary
Hindda Alarfawy
Taoufik Bin Brik
Sihem Bensedrine
Naziha Rejiba (Um Ziad)
Lotfi Hidouri
Sami Nasr
Souhair Belhassen
Kamal Aldeif
Ali Borawy
Ahmad Alkadidy(9)

An independent Tunisian journalists' syndicate is under siege

On May 2004, a number of Tunisian journalists established an independent syndicate for journalists in Tunisia in order to save the Tunisian press from this plummeting condition. The establishing body was headed by the Tunisian journalist Lotfi Hajji and many organizations concerned with freedom of press and civil society organizations declared their support to this new body. Yet the severe repressive measure the government took never stopped, starting from preventing the group from holding its founding conference and physical assault launched against many of the new syndicate's members. These measures led many Tunisian journalists abroad to issue a declaration of support for the right to have an independent union for Tunisian journalists, and this declaration was signed by many Tunisian journalists including:

1. Mohamed Krishan/Qatar
2. Amal Wannas Alzein/Qatar

3. Galol Bin Hamida/France
4. Nabeel Alrihany/ Qatar
5. Altayib Ma'aly/Canada
6. Alhady Yahmad/ France
7. Mohamed Borika/Canada
8. Abdelatif Bin Salim/France
9. Khalid Showkat/ the Netherlands
10. Bassam Boniny/ France
11. Altahir Alobidy/ France
12. Safwa Essa/ Switzerland
13. Ali Borawy/ France
14. Samy Bin Gharbiya/ the Netherlands
15. Gamal Alhany/ France
16. Shihab Bel Reesh/ Switzerland
17. Galal Alwarghy/ Britain
18. AbdelWahab Alhany/ France(10)

The independence of the Tunisian judiciary is now something from the past

Early on July 2001, Judge Almokhtar Al'iyhyawi sent a letter to the Tunisian President Zine Alabedeen Ben Ali, asking him to respect the article in the constitution which provides respect for the judiciary and its independence. A few days later the letter came back unopened to Judge Al'iyhyaway, despite the fact he didn't write his address on the letter. The judge published that letter on a number of websites, which led to his receiving an official letter from the Tunisian Ministry of Justice suspending him without pay.

Almokhtar Al'yihyawawi went back to work on August of the same year, yet the Tunisian Ministry of Justice insisted on showing its real face by firing the judge on December 2001. He hasn't had his job back since then.

Almokhtar Al'yihyawawi suffered a severe beating a month after he was fired, yet the wall of silence hiding the truth behind the reality of the independence of the judiciary in Tunisia was broken. It was revealed that it is in the hands of the authorities, receiving its orders only.

The following incident proves clearly how the Tunisian government, represented by the Ministry of Interior, despises and ridicules the Tunisian judiciary: on February 2nd, 2002 after the leftist opposition figure Hamma Alhomamy and a number of his comrades submitted themselves to the Tunisian judiciary asking for a fair trial after escaping for a long time after an unjust trial held in absentia. Another trial was held and during this trial, members of the police stormed into the court and started beating Alhomamy and a number of his comrades severely without respecting the sanctity of the courtroom. Hamma Alhomamy and his comrades didn't receive the justice they were seeking and they were sentenced again to prison for a number of years. Alhomamy was freed after a huge international and Arab campaign. The Tunisian government in order to save face they made his release based on "medical grounds.

Egyptian Newspapers: Media or Propaganda?

An example of news "propaganda"

1-"Human rights occupies a maximum priority in Ben Ali's thought"
(Al-Jomhoriya, April 13th 2007, page 11 pan-Arab affairs)

This is a news report, or this is what the reader might understand, run by the daily state-run Al-Jomhoria on its pan-Arab affairs pages.

The report was published without any indications as to whether it is an advertisement or an editorial, something which makes Egyptian readers or readers in general feel jealous and angry when they see this "piece of propaganda" on the Internet. Their countries don't enjoy, according to that report, the minimum of these magnificent rights the pro-government and widely spread newspaper talked about as it is one of the three mouthpieces of the Egyptian government, described as "national newspapers."

When reading this report (propaganda) in full we figured out that the headline is the weakest link and totally untrue about the situation in Tunisia, which is portrayed in the report as a heaven of democracy and openness, which makes the people of the world wish to immigrate to Tunisia or at least to have the right to residency.

"Those who would contemplate in the path of deepening the freedoms and democracies in Tunisia would find out that path was moving up with every initiative leading to another achievement, this

was in correspondence with the political and societal development the Tunisian society saw."

This word-for-word excerpt from the report reveals the conditions the Tunisian people are living within, according to the report, and this is the idea behind publishing this advertisement in that manner so that the reader won't have an idea that this is a paid advertisement, probably written in the Tunisian embassy in Cairo and published on the pan-Arab page without any indication that this report expresses the writer's point of view and his idea about promoting the advertised product i.e." Ben Ali's thought!! "

2- "Kuwaitis pout against Parliament"

This sentence was mentioned in a news story in the national state-run Al-Ahram on Sunday June 3, 2007. "I am sure that colleague Saraya Pasha didn't receive a pay-off from some Kuwaiti perpetrators who seek to spread this image about our democracy on an Arab and international level," said Mohammed Alwasheehy from the Kuwaiti Alrai Alam in a response to what was mentioned in the Egyptian Al-ahram. "What was mentioned in the newspaper was a paid advertisement, it was agreed upon and paid for from Kuwait straight to Egypt and didn't pass on Alahram's office in Kuwait," said Mohammed Yousry Mowafy, head of Alahram's office in Kuwait, in response to what was mentioned in the "Amal" column of Mohammed Alwasheehy under the title "Tamam ya Ahram".(11)

It may have passed lightly.

Certainly Kuwaiti journalists have the right to be enraged after reading this news story on Alahram's pages and they have the right to hit back. We have mentioned a very small part of that report. It was obvious that instead of Mohammed Alwasheehy's harsh article, Alahram's Kuwait's office director wouldn't have explained that it was a paid advertisement.

This incident raises many questions:

1. Would the Kuwaiti activists and journalists become enraged if Alahram indicated clearly that that report which provoked this stand-off is a paid advertisement?
2. Is it always necessary to stir up a problem about a paid advertisement posed as editorial material or a news story, to make the newspaper confess that what it ran as a news story was in fact "a paid advertisement"?
3. What would the Tunisian activist or journalist do if he couldn't find a newspaper or an independent magazine to run his comment on news story published in an Egyptian newspaper while neither him nor anybody else knew that it was "a paid advertisement"?
4. Is this news story which caused this standoff between Kuwaiti journalists and Alahram the only news story or advertisement? Is there an intentional professional error or it is a constant method practiced not only by Alahram but in many Egyptian and Arab newspapers?
5. "Citizenship is the ground of the Democratic project in Tunisia" - the daily Alahrar, the mouthpiece of Alahrar party, ran that headline on April 17, 2006, on page 6, Arab affairs. This news story (advertisement) mentioned without any indication, as it is the case "with slight changes" in other newspapers on different dates.

This made us search behind the reasons that led to the publication of this number of advertisements in these newspapers: Alahram, Alaraby, Aljomhorya, Alahrar, Alosbou, as part of an advertising campaign posed intentionally to look like news stories.

Last March, on Tunisian Independence Day, also saw the same methodical campaign, we are wondering right now if the new campaign which ran over a whole week starting from the 10th of April to the 17th of April is a cover for a certain incident?

Was this campaign a cover for a certain incident? HRInfo was following the Tunisian press and the Tunisian media for any exceptional incident that took place that week, and we didn't find an incident worth covering.

Yet we have found a number of incidents that drew our attention. We have mentioned some of these incidents:

"Political prisoners face life-threatening situations"

The National Council of Freedoms in Tunisia issued on April 6, 2007, a statement about a number of prisoners who face torture and others who went on hunger strike in many Tunisian prisons. Those prisoners included Ali Ramzy Baltaiby, Waleed Aloyonee, Gaith Mekky and others.(12)

"Assaults on Tunisian activists, lawyer Tarik Obaidy face threats on his life"

This statement was issued on April 7, 2007 by the National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia about the detention of lawyer Tarik Obaidy and threatening him with a weapon in addition to assaulting the

head of the independent press syndicate Lotfi Hajji. He was also prevented from entering the Progressive Democratic party's premises in Aryana to attend an inauguration party, and finally the destruction of the car of a leading figure Fathy Algarby (13) of the conference for the Republic party.

An invitation to journalists to attend a press conference in Cairo about the violations of the freedom of the press and expression in Tunisia

This may be the strongest reason, a press conference to announce the results of the fact-finding mission made by a number of international human rights organizations who are also members of the Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) and of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX). The invitation for the press conference was announced on April 7, 2007 and the report was set to be presented to the public on April 11.

The Tunisian government doesn't take into consideration local Tunisian organizations but pays generously its money and attention to conceal and bar the international reports and statements about the violations that took place in Tunisia, especially regarding the freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom of the press - and to reach this goal it resorts to propaganda concealed under the robes of editorial material.

Does it seem logical for one of the five newspapers which joined in the campaign to run any news about this report in the same time or on the same page which hosted the very same advertisement that talks about Tunisia as the oasis of democracy?

Which is more profitable, to publish a news story or part of a report talking about the violations of freedom of expression and the freedom of press in Tunisia or an advertisement which will bring a lot of money?

We shall leave the answer of these questions to be inferred from these headlines published in the five newspapers:

"The Tunisian woman engaged in political decision making" a total contribution in enriching the societal project and enriching the multi democratic path.

(Rosa Alyosef, a weekly state-run magazine, April 12, 2007)

"Human rights occupy a maximum priority in Ben Ali's thought"

(The daily Aljomhoria, April 13, 2007)

"Tunisia takes the first place in technology usage"

(The daily Alahrar, April 13, 2007)

"United Nations applauds the Tunisian reforms"

Rosa Alyosef, the weekly state-run magazine, April 14, 2007.

"9000 societies in Tunisia contributes to development and enriching the multi-party path"

(The weekly Nasserist Alaraby, April 15, 2007.)

"In its 50th anniversary of independence and the establishment of the personal affairs' magazine, the Tunisian woman pronounces pride of independence's profits and the achievements of reforms"

(The daily Alahram, April 15,2007)

"The Tunisian economy gave dimensions to the goals of national development and confronts effectively the challenges of globalization"

(The daily Alahrar, April 15, 2007)

"The youth... the cornerstone of the independence fortress in Tunisia"

(The daily Alahrar, April 16, 2007.)

"The foreign investments, a channel of chances for development in Tunisia"

(The daily Aljomhoria, April 16, 2007)

"After it became an effective part and an essential drive-force, the Tunisian president gives the media sector its due consideration to push for the democratic and multi-party path"

(The independent weekly Al-Osbou, April 16, 2007)

"Citizenship is the ground for the democratic project"

(The daily Alahrar, 17 April, 2007)

The press conference was held on April 11, 2007 and the report was issued and circulated but not one of these newspapers or magazines referred to the report.

Do we have the right to force them to publish that report? We have no right to do so, the editors in every newspaper or magazine are to decide which material they want to run, and they are to decide the editorial policy of the newspaper or the magazine.

Those magazines and newspapers chose the path which complies with their perspective, talking about the youth, women, civil

society, economy and the democratic project in Tunisia from the perspective of the Tunisian government or as it is seen by the Tunisian advertiser Osama Romdhani who is deeply entrenched in the foreign communications agency in Tunisia.

The Arab governments intensified a famous rule: "every government has the right to do what it wants with its people" - the newspapers and magazines adhered to that rule and applied it. The Tunisian government is more aware of its people than 16 international and Arab human rights organizations who were members of the Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) at the time and who issued that report.

Is it acceptable to ask those newspapers and magazines not to believe the Tunisian government when it "makes advertisements" about Tunisia, the oasis of democracy, in addition to the fact that the financial gain for publishing these advertisements is very attractive?

If we permit the same latitude to this famous rule or logic, shall we accuse the Egyptian, Syrian or Saudi government of not telling the truth when they make advertisements about the oasis of democracy in their countries? The governments, those newspapers and the advertisements those governments published disguised as "news stories" were telling the truth? While the civil society organizations were dishonest in accusing those governments and adhering to the rights of the people of those countries?

"There must be a clear and total distinction between editorials and advertisements"

We didn't make this headline up, it is a part of article 31 of law 96/1996 which regulates the profession of journalism in Egypt. It's a clear cut text and it cannot be annulled unless by a new law or the constitutional court, but this text is ineffective not due to a new text or by the constitutional court but due to a de facto practice made up by a number of newspapers.

Q: Does custom or tradition abolish a legal text in any country in the whole world?

A: No.

Q: What is the case in Egypt?

A: On hiatus.

Q: What is that custom or tradition that made a legal text ineffective to publish under such pervasive headlines as "Tunisa exclusive" or "Tunisia-exclusive Ahram" or "exclusive report" or "Tunisia exclusive news" or nothing is mentioned at all?

A: Karim Yehya said, (14) "The ad has to be distinctively separated from the editorial by a zigzag or a distinctive frame to make it look different than the editorial in the rest of the page if the nature of the published material in the same page is related there must be a clear distinction and there must be an indication that this material is an ad."

Among 25 ads the Egyptian newspaper and magazines published, the Arabic Network recorded, only some of them totally broke the

rules: Ahram, Ahrar and Jomhoria; some applied the logic of "the customs supersedes the law"; some hold the stick from the middle by placing a zigzag only, like Ahram and Akhbar, or using a simple frame, like Ahram Araby and Ahaly; or placing the phrase "exclusive Tunisia" or "Tunisia exclusive" like Rosa Alyosef, Akhbar, Ahram, Ahaly; or using the headline "exclusive reports" on top of the page without referring to the report itself" as the weekly Al-Osbou does.

Some would say that a number of them adhered to those rules and standards, yet we say that an ad is an ad and the reader's right to be aware that it is an ad. The incident of Alahram and the Kuwaiti ad is a good example as the Kuwaiti journalist Mohammed Alwasheehy commented on the ad because he thought it was an essay.(15)

It is quite obvious that the journalist has more experience than the regular reader yet when a journalist is deceived by this kind of ad it's very possible that the regular reader won't pay attention to this kind of ad published in the same way to look like a report or a news story.

Badr Ben Saoud says, "If you read a news story or a report in a newspaper talking about matters unworthy of publishing, rest assured that these materials are paid for by an advertiser."(16)

Anna Forecelle, the executive editor of the Australian Courier newspaper, wrote (in 1996), "Making the ad look like a news story eliminates the line between impartial news and ads."(17)

In addition to those ads, some newspapers and magazines didn't indicate that they are ads when it was clearly posed in a perverse manner using words that precedes the ads like "Tunisia exclusive" or "exclusive reports" or the zigzagged line is definitely a deception.

*Tunisia exclusive:

Most of the newspapers mentioned participated in that deception by using this phrase "Tunisia exclusive". Akhbar, Ahram, Ahaly and Rosa Alyosef were asked whether the phrase "Tunisia exclusive" placed on top of these ads is enough to make it clear that it is an ad?

Khalid Sergany says, "No, because these ads will give the assumption that they are edited by the newspaper's correspondent in those countries and using the phrase Tunisia exclusive will give it the credibility by looking more like an editorial not an ad. " (18)

*Special reports:

This is the title of a page the independent Al-Osbou published in which it repeatedly promoted Tunisia as an oasis of democracy with the Tunisian president's photo in the middle without an indication that this subject is an ad edited by Osama Romdhani, the managing director of the Tunisian foreign communication agency or edited by the Tunisian embassy in Cairo.

* The zigzagged frame:

A frame that surrounds the ad with Ben Ali's photo in the middle and nothing else that was published in Ahram Akhbar many times but inside the Arab-affairs page when the reader reads that news

story (ad) next to news about Algeria, Palestine or Syria he or she won't notice that most of the time that this news story is different than the other news stories in a significant way.

* Frame:

When we read any page we will notice many news stories surrounded by this frame so when these papers published these Tunisian ads they didn't do anything to warn the readers that what they are reading is an ad, how could the readers think that this ad is different while they read in the same page other news stories that were also surrounded by a frame too? What would the reader understand from Ben Ali's statement about putting an end to the deterioration of the conditions in Iraq and the settlement of the Lebanon's conflict inside a frame and in the same page there was a news story about the biggest military preparation in the history of Israel. (19)

Glenn Cameron and his colleagues wrote (in 1996), "Ads are a group of paid commercial messages that promotes products, people or organizations and is compatible with editorials in visual and textual structure and content."(20)

An unanswered call.... Prevarication must desist

The Arabic Network documented 25 advertisements published over eight newspapers and magazines, including state-run and national, a number of parties' newspapers and independent newspapers. These advertisements took place between 2006 and 2007 in:

1. State-run and national newspapers and magazines: Alahram, Akhbar, Aljomhoria, Rosa Alyosef
2. Independent newspaper Al-Osbou
3. Partisan newspapers Alahrar, Alaraby, Alahaly

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information had sent since March 21st 2007, official letters to the editors-in-chief of five newspapers and magazines: Alahram, Alakhbar, Rosa Alyosef, Alosbou, Alaraby, urging them to explain the nature of the materials published on Tunisia in their newspapers or magazines. The Arabic Network also offered to provide them with files and issues about the reality of human rights in Tunisia and urge them to give a space in their newspapers for Tunisian activists and journalists to express their opinions on a larger Egyptian, Arab and international public scale so they can provide a real picture about the deterioration of human rights at the hands of the Tunisian government.

None of these newspapers gave attention to HRInfo's requests. All these news papers and magazines continued such a practice i.e. publishing advertisements disguised as news stories and editorials.

1. State-run national newspapers and magazines: Alahram, Alakhbar, Aljomhoria, Rosa Alyosef

A grave error - some newspapers may extenuate their way out by relating a number of justifications, used to reduce the seriousness "not to deny" the error e.g. the ignorance of the reality of the situation in Tunisia or a tattered financial situation or assuming that using the phrase "Tunisia exclusive" or using a zigzagged frame, placing the phrase "special report" on top of the page - all these are assumed to be enough of indications. Some newspapers claim that the report is the work of a journalist and the editor wasn't fully aware of the report's credibility and the reasons behind it.

These might be justifications used by some to bail themselves out. Yet in the case of national magazines and newspapers, it isn't enough at all. These newspapers and magazines are not suffering from any lack of advertising money as they dominate the majority of the advertising market in Egypt and have more than they need. They also are kept in good financial shape thanks to the incessant support of the government. The lack of information also cannot be used as a justification as HRInfo offered to provide those newspapers with editorial material in addition to those materials. Were those materials produced by a certain journalist and the editor forgot to refer to its advertising nature? This is a grave repetitiously-adhered to mistake

This is an indication of the ineffectiveness of those newspapers and magazines and this necessitates their replacement.

Are there any other justifications? We don't think so. So it is a mistake and a prevarication.

2. Independent newspaper: Al-Osbou

Al-Osbou: an established old newspapers with a lot of advertisements, keeps repeating slogans about the freedom and independence of the press. It has its own loyal readers so there are questions about those ads. Is it okay to talk about the freedom of the press in Egypt while it promotes a government that represses journalists? Do you keep good relations with Tunisian journalists as you do with the Tunisian government? Are you ignorant of the deteriorating conditions of human rights in Tunisia? Are your readers aware that the "exclusive reports" placed on top of Tunisia's and Ben Ali's news page are advertisements? We don't think so; the mistake is intentional and is improper.

3. Partisan newspapers: Alahrar, Alaraby, Alahaly

1. Alahrar: a daily issued by the Egyptian Ahrar party, which is one of the oldest parties in Egypt, was supposed to adhere to the values of the free and fair press, Alahrar made all the mistakes and didn't even pay attention to the customs that halt the law either by using the zigzag, the frames or placing the phrase "exclusive report or exclusive Tunisia" in a clear position.

2. Alaraby: the mouthpiece of the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party, it made a smaller mistake but it happened. The paper suffers from financial problems and published less material and referred equivocally to these reports as ads especially by using the frame technique. Yet the credibility of the newspaper has to be

preserved - the reader who supported Alaraby, when it defended the independence of the judiciary and press freedom, and also stood up against corruption and torture in Egypt, expects Alaraby won't give up this historical struggle and give a government that eradicated all these principles the chance of credibility and deceive the reader.

3. Alahaly: the mouthpiece of the Democratic Progressive Unionist party, a weekly issued every Wednesday, suffered from confiscation and prosecution many times as a punishment for its bold reactions. Alahaly made the same mistake, a huge colored advertisement in its last page in November 2002, surrounded by a frame and inside the frame "Tunisia exclusive Alahaly"

Alahaly in that case had to mention that was an ad especially when the headline is a value the newspaper is calling for. The headline was "Multiparty is Tunisia's choice for a successful take-off". A newspaper like Alahaly, whose editor knows more than anyone else the reality of the situation in Tunisia, should have indicated that it was an advertisement.

Appendices

Appendix 1

A list of advertisements published in 2006-2007

notes	date	The advertisement	The newspaper
The Network sent a letter on March 27-2006	26-3-2006	The 50 th anniversary of Tunisia's independence: a significant development in civil and political freedoms.	<i>Alaraby</i>
	15-4-2007	9000 societies in Tunisia participate in development and support the multi-partisan path	<i>Alaraby</i>
	20-4-2006	Improving the living standard of the Tunisian citizen US\$5000 GNI per Capita in 2009	<i>Alahram</i>
	19-11-2006	"Tunisian diplomacy gains more grounds	<i>Alahram</i>

		inside and outside" after it proved its success amid international transitions	
A letter was sent from the Network	21-3- 2007	President Ben Ali in Tunisia 's independence day: the independence is meaningless if the country is not in charge of its decision and there has to be a settlement for the problems in Iraq , Lebanon and Palestine	<i>Alahram</i>
	10-4- 2007	Dafus forum: Tunisia is better than western countries in competitive ability and Tunisia is the best both in Africa and in the Arab world	<i>Alahram</i>
	15-4- 2007	"The Tunisian woman confirms its pride in the	<i>Alahram</i>

		independence and the achievements of transitions" during the festivals of the 50 th anniversary and the establishment of the personal affairs magazine	
	28-3-2006	Moderation and initiatives creation, analysts: successes on the international front is an extension to the success inside under the leadership of Ben Ali	<i>Alakhbar</i>
A letter was sent from the Network	21-3-2007	President Ben Ali in Tunisia 's independence day: the independence is meaningless if the country is not in charge of its decision and there has to be a settlement for the problems in Iraq , Lebanon and Palestine	<i>.Alakhbar</i>

	13-4-2007	Human rights occupy a priority in Ben Ali's thought	<i>Aljomhoria</i>
	16-4-2007	Foreign investments are a main asset in development in Tunisia	<i>Aljomhoria</i>
	31-3-2007	51 years of political reforms in Tunisia the transition philosophy supported democracy and protected Independence .	<i>Alahrar</i>
	13-4-2007	Tunisia is the first in Technology usage	<i>Alahrar</i>
	15-4-2007	Tunisia the green one creates modernism since independence "the youth is the main cornerstone in the independence fortress"	<i>Alahrar</i>
	16-4-	Despite hard	<i>Alahrar</i>

	2007	universal conditions: Tunisian economy reaches for the national development goals and stands up effectively against the globalization challenges	
	17-4-2007	Citizenship is the main ground of the Tunisian democratic project	<i>Alahrar</i>
A letter was sent from the Network	3-4-2006	In compliance with its foreign policy and establishing a system upon justice Tunisia calls for putting new foundations of reforms in the UN and to support partnership and international cooperation	<i>Alosbou</i>
	10-4-2006	After it admitted that the right to labor is	<i>Alosbou</i>

		<p>part of the individual's integrity, Tunisia makes its bid on youth in creating the independent national choices</p>	
	10-4-2006	<p>After the success of the developmental experience in Tunisia " political and social stability is firmly established during the independence years"</p>	<i>Alosbou</i>
	16-4-2007	<p>After it became an effective part and an essential player, the Tunisian president gives the media sector its due position in supporting the democratic path and multi-partisan system</p>	<i>Alosbou</i>
	22-11-2006	<p>Multi-partisan is Tunisia 's choice for achieving a strong</p>	<i>Alahaly</i>

		start	
A letter was sent from the Network	31-3-2006	"Social cooperation" is the human dimension for Tunisian development!	<i>Rosa Alyousef(magazine)</i>
	14-4-2006	An international certificate as a proof of the unprecedented achievement, the UN applauds the Tunisian transition!	<i>Rosa Alyousef(magazine)</i>
	30-3-2007	Thanks to the structural and flexible reforms, the Tunisian economy proves a higher competitiveness and a higher performance	<i>Rosa Alyousef</i>
	12-4-2007	The Tunisian woman in charge of political positions, a complete participation in creating the societal project and intensifying the	<i>Rosa Alyousef</i>

		multitude democratic system.	
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2007	2006	Number of times published	The newspaper
3	2	5	<i>Alahram</i>
1	3	4	<i>Alosbou</i>
5	-	5	<i>Alahrar</i>
1	1	2	<i>Alaraby</i>
-	2	2	<i>Rosa Alyousef (magazine)</i>
2	-	2	<i>Rosa Alyousef newspaper</i>
2	-	2	<i>Aljomhoria</i>
1	1	2	<i>Alakhbar</i>
-	1	1	<i>Alahaly</i>
15	10	25	Total

Appendix 2

A copy of the letter sent by HRInfo to the concerned newspapers regarding the advertisements

Alahram, Alakhbar, Alaraby, Rosa Alyousef, Alosbou

Dear sir/*****

The Editor in Chief of *****

Greetings,

We have read in your newspaper ***** issued yesterday a documentary report on page ***** titled "*****".

As we in the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information know, and we have a lot of documents on our website which were issued by civil society organizations in Tunisia, and also materials issued by international and Arab organizations which contain a different point of view to that of the Tunisian's government which paid for that ad in your newspaper.

As the freedom of press and expression which we all call for means, as part of its value, offering different points of views about the same issues, this gives the civil society in Tunisia and those who are concerned about issues of the freedom of opinion, expression, civil rights and other political freedoms, the right to make it clear to the international, Arab and Egyptian public, how human rights deteriorated and suffered from violations at the hands of the Tunisian government.

As this is the case we are asking you to give the chance and space in your newspaper ***** to publish a number of issues and concerns of our colleagues from Tunisia who are working in civil society organizations and concerned about the freedom of speech and expression.

And certainly we will be glad to provide you with a number of those publications which carry different points of views than those of the Tunisian government and you can have more information by visiting our website: <http://www.hrinfo.net/tunisia>

We do thank you for your cooperation and we hope for more for the sake of freedom of opinion and expression.

Please do accept our respect and gratitude,

Gamal Eid

The Executive Director

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

Appendix 3

An example of Alahram's advertisement



Appendix 4

An example of Alakhbar's advertisement

تكريس الاستقرار السياسي والاجتماعي في تونس خلال سنوات الاستقلال



زوح الشحرون

تونس هي من بين دول العالم التي شهدت تحولات عميقة في مسارها السياسي والاجتماعي خلال سنوات الاستقلال. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات. فمنذ عام 1956، عندما أعلنت تونس استقلالها، شهدت البلاد نهضة اقتصادية واجتماعية واسعة النطاق. وقد تم إنشاء مؤسسات ديمقراطية حديثة، وتم تعزيز سيادة القانون. كما شهدت تونس نهضة ثقافية وعلمية مهمة، مما ساهم في تكوين جيل مثقف واع. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات. فمنذ عام 1956، عندما أعلنت تونس استقلالها، شهدت البلاد نهضة اقتصادية واجتماعية واسعة النطاق. وقد تم إنشاء مؤسسات ديمقراطية حديثة، وتم تعزيز سيادة القانون. كما شهدت تونس نهضة ثقافية وعلمية مهمة، مما ساهم في تكوين جيل مثقف واع. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات.

تونس هي من بين دول العالم التي شهدت تحولات عميقة في مسارها السياسي والاجتماعي خلال سنوات الاستقلال. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات. فمنذ عام 1956، عندما أعلنت تونس استقلالها، شهدت البلاد نهضة اقتصادية واجتماعية واسعة النطاق. وقد تم إنشاء مؤسسات ديمقراطية حديثة، وتم تعزيز سيادة القانون. كما شهدت تونس نهضة ثقافية وعلمية مهمة، مما ساهم في تكوين جيل مثقف واع. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات. فمنذ عام 1956، عندما أعلنت تونس استقلالها، شهدت البلاد نهضة اقتصادية واجتماعية واسعة النطاق. وقد تم إنشاء مؤسسات ديمقراطية حديثة، وتم تعزيز سيادة القانون. كما شهدت تونس نهضة ثقافية وعلمية مهمة، مما ساهم في تكوين جيل مثقف واع. وقد لعبت التجربة التتيموية دوراً محورياً في تحقيق هذه التغيرات.

Appendix 6

An example of Alahrar's advertisement

Footnotes

(1) Morasil Alkaseeby- the Asr magazine on March 4, 2006, January 17 visit, 2007.

<http://www.alasr.ws/index.cfm?method=home.con&contentID=7528>

(2) Sadaam Hussein won 99.9% in a 1995 referendum and 100% in a 2002 referendum

(3) "The civil society sheds light on Tunisia's record on human rights" Stefania Milan, the World Summit on the Information Society website, November 18, 2005.

<http://www.ipsterraviva.net/tv/tunis/viewstoryarabic.asp?idnews=23>
The visit of May 14, 2007.

(4) Human Rights Watch's report for 2007.

(5) Front Line organization

<http://info.frontlinedefenders.org/arabic/award/3696>

(6) Islamonline website on May 7, 2000

<http://www.islamonline.net/iol-arabic/dowalia/alhadath2000-may-7/alhadat...>

(7) The October 18th movement was formed after a number of political parties and national organizations in Tunisia went on a hunger strike under the slogan "Famine is better than submission" on that same day. The body then became a national democratic and peaceful movement known as 18 October which is calling for: freedom of association for all, freedom of expression for all, the

release of hundreds to political prisoners left for a decade and a half inside the Tunisian prisons. The Tunisian people answered the movement call and did not stay behind not even in one district, Tunisia was late to form a supporting committee to this movement and many European, Western and Arab organization supported these demands. Since that date the supporting body in Germany was formed to stand by the hunger strikers and that media page on the Internet was open to help in exposing the amount of suffering the Tunisian people bears.

(8) October 18th movement's report on freedom of expression in Tunisia

<http://www.aktion18oktober.com/arabic/index.php>

(9) October 18th movement's report on freedom of expression. Same source

(10) A copy of the letter of support the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information and published on the Network's website.

<http://www.hrinfo.net/tunisia/makal/2005/pr0907.shtml> "

(11) The Al-rai Am newspaper on 4, 5 June 2007.

<http://www.alraialaam.com/04-06-2007/ie5/articles.htm#7>

<http://www.alraialaam.com/05-06-2007/ie5/articles.htm#top>

(12) The National Council for Freedoms' statement on April 6, 2007. also it is published on the council's section on the Arabic Network's website

(13) The National Council for Freedoms on April 7, published on the Council's section on the Arab Network

(14) A journalist in the daily Ahram and a union activist has many significant essays about the press

(15) The incident mentioned in index 10

(16) Bard bin Saood, a journalist in Okaz newspaper, part of his essay published on April 2, 2007 in Okaz

<http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20070402/Con20070402100034.htm>

(17) The same source

(18) A meeting with Khalid Alsergany, a writer Al-Ahram and the managing editor of the independent Al-Dostour, who also edits a weekly page in Al-Dostour about the conditions of journalism and journals in Egypt.

(19) The state run Al-akhbar on March 21, 2007, page nine, the same page that publishes Arab and international news.

(20) Bard bin Saood