Steps on the road .... Mutual Support Between the Internet and Human Rights

Prologue

The importance of Internet is constantly increasing as a means of acquiring information and knowledge un most societies, yet its importance increase significantly in societies where free expression and exchange of information is under restriction, just as it is the case in the Arab world.

In spite of the limited participation, quantitatively, of the Arabic sites on the web, yet, some of these websites are becoming increasingly important because of the fastness of publishing news through the Internet, as well as providing comprehensive analysis and different viewpoints on the issues the Arab Internet users are interested in. Moreover, These websites allowed common users to participate through forums and comments on all kinds of public causes and issues.

Take Al-Jazeera, Islam online or Elaph websites and other news websites as a clear example, such websites are more readable today than many newspapers and more influencial sometimes than several radio & TV stations.

However the main question pertaining to Human Rights is always about where do the concepts of Human Rights stand in the midst of revolution of information? Can the Internet help promote human rights concepts and support human rights causes? How can we make better use of Internet pertaining to Human Rights.

Over a period of 14 months, HRInfo, worked on the issue of "Internet and Human Rights" and part of this work on the relation between Internet & Human Rights, HRInfo prepared a comprehensive study on the form and content of topics addressed by major Arabic websites regarding the issues of Human Rights, as well as the great potentials that the Internet can provide for human rights organizations & activists.

Also, in our endeavor to strengthen the mutual support between Internet and human rights, HRInfo held several training courses and workshops targeting activists and volunteers for capacity building and skill development regarding using Internet for advocacy as well as training tem on the basic concepts of Human Rights.

In February 2008, HRInfo held a workshop entitled "Internet and Human Rights – Mechanisms for Mutual Support". The workshop was held in Cairo and attended by a number of influential human rights activists, bloggers and electronic media professionals. In this book we provide a comprehensive report on the discussions and activities of this workshop. The workshop meetings and discussions not only wondered about the possibility of mutual support and cooperation between Internet activists, e-media professionals on one side along with Human Rights activists on the other side, yet the workshop and discussions went further to provide recommendations and suggestions to implement and develop the mechanisms for such a mutual support.

This book included the main topics of discussions over the 2 days workshop, as well as (in Arabic only), some of the study papers provided by several participants on the different aspects of the issue. Publishing this book, we hope it would be a helpful guide that provides practical steps on the road toward implementing the mutual support between Internet and Human Rights.

Gamal Eid
Executive Director of
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

Steps on the Road Mutual Support Between the Internet and Human Rights

Over a couple of days of discussions and exchanging viewpoints about probable cooperation between human rights activists, bloggers, journalists and media professionals, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information held a workshop titled "Internet & Human Rights – Mechanisms of Mutual Support" where participants from 12 Arab countries contributed, representing "Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, UAE, Jordan, Oman, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya and Bahrain".

The workshop was held within the frame of a project performed by the Arabic Network tilted "Internet & Human Rights". Participants paid attention in the first day to many experiences of various Egyptian and Arab bloggers in regards to raising the ceiling of freedom of expression in the Arab world, besides highlighting causes of the Arab citizens' interest such as torture, freedom of religion and defending prisoners of conscious, in addition to extending use of free software among youth and activists, as well as discussing the issue of relation between traditional press and electronic media.

Participants in the second day listened to the experiences of activists from the Gulf countries explain the internet role in disclosing a number of widespread violations in the Gulf region, and also illustrating their success in birthing a human rights movement despite of the oppression attempts to eradicate human rights culture over there.

Human rights activists also discussed obstacles preventing them of expanding their use of internet in spite of the great abilities available compared to traditional means which are controlled by Arab governments. Also, the participants discussed the issue of the use of internet by human rights & freedom of expression defenders enabling them to gain supporters and convey their massages and causes to a larger audience.

During a session regarding legal protection regarding crimes of publication, participants discussed a number of cases and punishments directed to those in charge of electronic publishing and vague articles in the law that they are usually accused by such as "fault, insult, disrupting tranquility, libel & defamation, lies and fake news, instigation…etc" & all these charges used against governments critics, journalists or activists.

Here is a list of participants in the workshop (in alphabetical order):

- Abdou Abdul-Aziz: Researcher in the Arabic Network, Egypt.
- Abdullah Al-Reyami: Writer and Internet activist, Oman.
- Abdul-moneim Mahmoud: "Ana Ikhwan" blog and a journalist, Egypt.
- Ahmed Al-Omran: Saudi Jeans blog, Saudi Arabia

- Ahmed Gharbia: Technology and information expert, Egypt
- Ahmed Mansour: Human rights activist, UAE
- Ahmed Nagy: "Set your Imagination free" or (Was'aa Khayalak) blog and a journalist, Egypt.
- Alaa Abdul-Fattah: Manal & Alaa blog, Egypt.
- Amale Khyr-Allah: journalist, Lebanon.
- Amera abdul-Fattah: Coordinator of Regional Programs in Frederich Nauman's Institution.
- Amr Magdy: Tarqaet Keyboard blog, Egypt.
- Anas Fouda: Al-Arabia website – UAE, Egypt
- Gamal Eid: Director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information.
- Hamdy Al-Assuity: Activist and lawyer, Egypt.
- Hisham Al-Sharqawy: Human rights activist, Morocco.
- Ismail Mohammed Al-Koraietly: head of Research and Studies in Al-Jazeerah.net Qatar, Libya.
- Kamel Al-Abeidi: Representative of Committee for Protecting Journalist CPJ, Tunisia.
- Karem Yahia: Journalist and Press Syndicate activist, Egypt.
- Khaled Al-Sergany: Editorial manager of Al-Doustor Egyptian newspaper, Egypt.
- Magdy Said: Islam-online website, Egypt.
- Maged Saleh: Human rights activist from Mada Center, Palestine.
- Manal Hassan: Manal & Alaa blog, Egypt.
- Mina Zekri: Blogger and human rights activist, Egypt.
- Mohammed Said: Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Bahrain.
- Moneir Edeibes: Aman website, Jordan.
- Noura Younis: Noura Younis blog, Egypt.
- Rawda Ahmed Sayed: Lawyer in the Arabic Network, Egypt.
- Violet Daguerre: Arabic Committee for human Rights, France.
- Wael Abbas: of "Al-Waei Al-Masry" or Egyptian Awareness blog, Egypt.
- Wessam Fouad: Islam-online website, Egypt.

Report on the Workshop Organized by:

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

Cairo, February 21-22, 2008
Topic: Internet and Human Rights: Mechanisms for Mutual Support

Wednesday, Day one :

Session 1: "Steps for the Achievement of Our Goal, Internet and Human Rights"

Session 2: Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings

Session 3: "Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings"

Session 4: "Traditional press and electronic media – rivalry or integration?

Thursday, Day 2:

Session 1: "Human Rights Issues in the Arabian Gulf"

Session 2: Human Rights & Internet (obstacles and available possibilities)

Session 3: Internet as a tool for bringing out ideas & opinions and gaining supporters

Session 4: legal protection of electronic publishing issues

Session 5: kinds of mutual support – what to do??

Wednesday, Day one :

Session 1: "Steps for the Achievement of Our Goal, Internet and Human Rights"

Session 2: Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings

Session 3: "Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings"

Session 4: "Traditional press and electronic media – rivalry or integration?

Session 1: "Steps for the Achievement of Our Goal, Internet and Human Rights"

Chairman: Gamal Eid, Director of The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information

Spokesmen: Abdallah Abd Al-Aziz, researcher HRInfo
Mina Zekri, blogger and human rights activist

The session was opened by Gamal Eid who laid out the goals of the workshop, particularly the increasing importance of the internet in the field of human rights and HRInfo's interests since the beginning in the importance of the internet.
In this regard, Eid talked about the initiative undertaken by HRInfo in August 2006 when it launched a study entitled "Electronic Media and Human Rights." As part of this study, HRInfo held two training sessions for volunteers from Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries in the use of internet particularly in the field of human rights. HRInfo also published a booklet entitled "Human Rights: Fundamental Concepts" to explain the culture and concepts of human rights to the non-specialists, particularly responding to the rumors and charges that are common for people to hold about human rights work in the Arab world.

Having achieved certain the goals, Eid clarified that the basic aim of this meeting was to think collectively about the possibility of a relation of mutual exchange between the fields of internet and human rights.

The second speaker, Abdou Abd al-Aziz, the researcher in HRINFO, gave a summary of the study published by HRINFO "Electronic Media and Human Rights" (which he also helped

prepare). This is the first study of its kind in the Arab world that deals with this topic, especially how the Internet has become an important resource for the exchange of information. There were 29 million users at the time of the publication of the report, a number that has continued to grow annually.

The aim of the study was to record the perspective of media Internet sites regarding human rights on the one hand, and on the other the use of the Internet among human rights organizations. The study took six months, and among the issues it focused on were women's rights, rights of minorities and tolerance of others, rights of refugees, and the sanctity of private life. The study ended with the conclusion that there Internet sites do not contain adequate information about human rights and some web sites simplify human rights and others provide incorrect information about the field.

The third speaker, Mina Zekri, gave a presentation on the two training sessions last year organized by HRInfo for volunteers interested in working in the field of human rights. The idea was to train the bloggers and activists both in understanding the basic concepts of human rights work and to get them accustomed to the use of Internet. The first session was held in a village "Zad al-Musafir" in Fayyoum for five days, and attended by 15 volunteers from Arab countries and five from Egypt. Its focus was basic concepts and history of human rights work in the world, key historical documents that have helped establish the field and its international reception. The second session was held in the offices of HRInfo in December 2006 and was attended by 10 volunteers from the Arab world and Egypt. The aim of this session was to introduce the volunteers to the use of the Internet, to use its resources to help advance human rights work.

Discussion: After the presentation, a general discussion ensued. The first to comment was Ismail Al-Quretly from "Al-Jazeera.Net." He stressed on the importance of rights activists to better understand how journalism works because this would provide them with greater objectivity. Unlike a few organizations, such as HRInfo and a handful of others that are indeed treated as objective sources of info by journalists, the other human rights organizations tend to be obscure in their work as a result of which their data is difficult to use by journalists. The second point Al-Quretly made was the lack of information in the media about human rights, something that the human rights activists should try to correct by doing more training sessions for journalists. He also stressed that it was important for human rights organizations to respect existing discourse and historical human rights documents in order to be able to transform these documents into something better.

Amr Magdy, the host of the blog "Keyboard Tarka'a," commented that it was important to realize both the global and particular aspects of human rights: whereas the general conversation about human rights tends to be simplistic, the charters and agreements respect the particularity and identity of the people. One of the problems is that "we live in a climate of conspiracies." Magdy also criticized the position of some Islamists who think that the world revolves around them whereas the human rights is a knowledge that has its own fundamentals and procedures. He said that there seems to be a general lack of communication between the human rights movement and the media. But it would be wrong to say this as a generalization since sometimes the problem is with the news editor who issues the news rather than with a particular web site or the media in general.

Hisham Sharqawy, a member of the human rights organization in Morocco and a blogger ("Warakum warakum"), also stressed the importance of the relationship between Internet and human rights work. He commented on the earlier comments about cultural particularity and the universalism of human rights by saying that there was a conference in Vienna in 1993 about the same topic that was attended by Arab governments.

Majid al-'Ururi, from the Center of Human Rights in Palestine, also emphasized the importance of the use of Internet to the field of human rights. The problem, he said, that those who work in this field deal with it as if the issues are known to people at large. They should deal with it instead as something that is little known. It is our responsibility as human rights activists to pressure our governments and to hold them responsible for the respect of human rights. He finally said that it is important to train journalists in issues of human rights so that this thought becomes known and accepted among the journalists.

'Alaa Abdul-Fattah, blogger of the site "Manal and 'Alaa", offered the criticism that conversation about human rights often tends to be focused on charters and activists, whereas what is important is to honor the sense of people for justice and respect for life. He gave the example of torture in Egypt, which had become an accepted and widesrepad fact of life, and the existence of charters and activists did not change anything. The blogger Wael Abbas had a big role to play when he broke this sense of acceptance and torture has now come to be understood as a violation and rejected by the society. For this, Wael did not depend on charters but upon what is more effective and has a wide reach in the society. 'Alaa invited everyone to focus on concepts of rights that are already present among people in reality even though they do not organize around it but it is possible to work on it through other mechanisms. He stressed that human rights is not something only limited to human rights organization but that there are mechanisms in the society that are already present and that support notions of human rights.

In the same context, Magdy Sa'id said that the issue specific to the relation between electronic media and human rights is distinct from the issue specific to the field of satellite communication itself. The problem these days exceeds that of Internet communication. Internet communication specialists now are talking about the newest example, that of mobile activism. It is important to deal with the existing context, whether it pertains to time, place or people's beliefs about human rights. Magy Said stressed the importance of opening up the concept of human rights, and breaking it into its constitutive parts so as to have people comprehend it.

Violet Dagher, from the Arab Human Rights Front in Paris, said that the internet is not used well and so it is hard to make generalizations about it. She asked about the methodology followed in the previous studies (about which Gamal Eid talked in his opening remarks), and she also inquired about the standards that one should follow so as to unfairly treat the work of the media specialists.

Gamal Eid concluded the session with the following comments: he agreed that talking about human rights should not simply be about charters but nonetheless it is important to use them so as to pressure the tyrannical governments to abide by the charters they have signed on to or they should sign onto. He also responded to the earlier comment about universalism of human rights and cultural particularity by saying that a number of Arabs had helped formulate the global

campaign of human rights. By way of an example he mentioned Charl Malek and also Egyptian jurist Sherif Basyouni who participated in formulating the basic criminal court system (that was opposed by the U.S.)

Session 2: Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings

Part I: The Use of Internet: Experiences and Exemplars

Chairman: Anas Fouda (founder of the website Arabiyyanet)
Spokesmen: Wael Abbas (blogger al-Wai al-Masri)
'Alaa Abd Al-Fattah (blogger Manaal and 'Aalaa)

Anas Fouda opened the second session by commenting on the report "Electronic Media and Human Rights." He said that most of the material in this report pertains to "methodology" and it was not clear how the results presented in the study were related to the proposed method. Another problem in the study relates to a lack of understanding about the nature of the media work and how media professional perceive the issues.

As for blogs, he said that bloggers are distinct in that they express their own views and the way common people talk about these on the street. But this creates a particular problem in that the news presented is often from the point of view of the blogger and embedded within the news is the opinion of the blogger. Whereas from the media's point of view, there must be a distinction between news and personal opinion and this effects the objectivity of the news presented. Another problem particular to the bloggers is that their personalities are often unknown as is therefore the source of the news. Furthermore, Foda expressed his fear of the influence of agencies (Juhat) on bloggers whose interests are different from those of the nation and as is the case with international organizations that bestow awards on bloggers.

'Alaa Abdul Fattah started his comments by saying that he feels bored with repetitive questions about blogs whereas now blogs have become a part of reality and will effect the reality as well. Abdul-Fattah focused on the effect of society on technology more than focus on the proper use of technology's use. He gave the example of poor people sharing the satellite dish which is not legal but is common among people and has effected changes in the society at large. As a result, the election campaigns of the Nationalist Party and the Ikhwan now reaches rural Egypt (the "rif") with ease via the television medium.

'Alaa gave another example from his personal experience with friends who use "wiki" and "open source programs" and how they have created an independent democratic collective which opened up the central organizational structure of human rights organizations. He stressed the importance of understanding technology not in its technical effects but as an instrument of social change. He gave the example of the use of electronic emails by the "March 9 Organization for the Independence of the University" that instead of using the university space itself have used emails for communication, discussion, and ultimately the voting and signing of documents.

Wael Abbas: the blogger (of alwai almasri) introduced himself as a graduate of English Department, Cairo University, and how when he graduated he thought he would be engaged in

usual kinds of occupations. "I wanted to become a journalist and was surprised when I discovered that this requires "contacts or connections" and was also amazed at the attack on youth by big media personalities, and I was looking for a way to express myself and my opinion." But the question I faced was "Where and how? Even in journalism there is the editor in chief and politics o the journal/newspaper and state security! And I thought about Radio FM and that itself is a crime with state police!"

This is how Wael Abbas told his story of coming into Internet which is a medium without limits and conditions. He began using Internet in 1994 when it was not that available to Egyptians. He began with chat rooms in which he began to participate in religious and political discussions. There were a lot of important opinions expressed in chat rooms but they were lost after the session ended. He added, "We began to write articles and sent it to some and discussed it with others. And then arrived the email technology as an alternative, but of course the appearance of Arabic language on the Internet was an important step. After that appeared electronic web sites of newspapers and I began to send my articles to these web sites. But with every new medium has its own limits. When we founded the email collective there were 10,000 members but then it was destroyed because it dealt with the role of Suzanne Mubarak and the president's son. At that time I was held by the police for six hours."

Then came the political movement at the end of 2004 and it was accompanied by the emergence of the Kifaya movement and the Al-Ghad party, and the Organization of the Revolutionary Socialists. At that point demonstrations started to occur by word of mouth and there was not sufficient coverage in the media. The neglect of the calls for the ouster of Mubarak and the condemnation of hereditary rule, made the bloggers and Wael think differently. We began to bring to the people what was happening in the streets of Cairo the coverage for which was not possible through electronic newspapers and emails. At that point I discovered the blogs, and I grasped the distinct style of blog writing and its effectiveness, the possibility of commentaries, and presenting anything and everything without limit."

Wael Abbas explained that what distinguished the Egyptian blogs because of its use by political activists and the use of news blogs. What helped with that was the national control of media insomuch as people ended up needing to know what was happening from the heart of the events themselves. Beyond that the Press Union has no role due to the security conditions that dictate participation in the Union. It is in fact the unions and the government that make journalism weak and its primary role is its relation to state security apparatus. Wael pointed out that the satellite channels are not beyond this state oppression as is evident in the seizing of tapes, the attacks on satellite television stations, and the pursuit of certain journalists.

It is natural then that the bloggers emerged as an alternative media due to their provision of news devoid of any political agenda. The bloggers are different from the traditional journalists because they are often in the midst of the events they report and are in fact often leading them. It came to a point that the journalists were stealing the stuff that the bloggers were presenting and covering. However, soon thereafter there emerged a cooperative relationship between the bloggers and journalists, particularly with the famous incident of the torture of Emad Al-Kabeer and thereafter cooperation between bloggers and journalists became common.

Wael also noted that bloggers do not require money since the medium they use is free and they are also do not need a central organization but are rather a network. "It is enough that state security had not succeeded until now to destroy the bloggers movement." It is possible to say that bloggers have raised the ceiling of freedom in traditional journalism. For example, it was bloggers who circulated a caricature of the President, and since it has became common in the oppositional newspapers.

At the same time, the bloggers have been subjected to important restrictions that the traditional journalists are not, such as harassment of bloggers by the security police, and the arrest of Karem Amer to teach a lesson to other bloggers, and also 2006 saw the arrest of tens of bloggers and the court cases raised against them. Wael's blog "Al-Waii Al-Masry" showed clips from these arrests and satellite television stations displayed this material too.

Wael ended his presentation by saying that among the positive contributions of the blogs was that the Egyptian national had become more aware of his right to oppose torture and that is a new thing in Egypt.

Session 3: "Internet and People's Issues: the Beginnings"

Part II: Internet and Campaigns in Support of Human Rights

Chairman: Amira Abdul Fattah "Frederich Nauman Organization"

Spokesmen: Noura Yunis (blogger)
Ahmed Gharbeia (blogger)
Amr Magdy (blogger)

Amira Abdul-Fattah in the beginning stressed the importance of Internet and the role blogs and email communication has played and this is evident in the arrests and the harassment suffered by the bloggers.

Noura Yunis, a blogger and journalist, whose blog says "I blog because of human rights!", said that she would like to add to this slogan that she blogs also so as to "open herself." She said that her blog is a personal blog that expresses what aggravates her or pleases her regardless of whether it is personal or general." Noura explained that she does not seek popularity through her blog which is apparent in that she does not sometime write for a couple of months, and then writes five entries in one day.

Noura explained that she started to blog as a result of Ahmed Gharbeia's encouragement. It all started when she started to report on the various demonstrations and events that occurred as part of the political mobilization of 2005. At that time she did not know any of the activists, but it all started when she and one of her friends were attacked by the police as were other journalists. This was at the 2005 demonstration against the changes in the constitution. At that point she was transformed from being a reporter to a participant in the events.

With the passage of time, her writing has become more trusted among its followers. When she would put an announcement on her blog about a demonstration, she would also participate in it, and then come back and write about it. She is also happy that there is a communication between the older generation of 2005 and the younger generation and the experience is being now transferred to the new generation. At the time of 2005, there was a huge gap between traditional journalism and the what was happening, and it was at that point that journalists became dependent upon us for information and news.

Noura spoke at length about the important transformation in electronic activism with the use of mobile phones as a means to transfer information about ongoing events—moment by moment—from the heart of the events themselves. In this the technology of SMS was useful in sending messages to hundreds of people at one time, and how to let people know about the names of those arrested and the location and time of demonstrations. After that came the service "twitter" which made it possible to send the same message to tens of people over the mobile phone. Recently Noura used this means to convey information about what she saw and experienced in North Sinai at the Rafah border when she spent 11 days there between the border and Gaza. With the Internet completely down in the area, she was able to send moment by moment news through SMS and Twitter.

Noura then turned to the use of Internet in campaigns. She gave the recent example of the use of the Internet for the issue of the Bahais and their right to acquire identity cards. Despite the importance of the issue, there was not much popular support for it. So what they did was to open a web site on this issue and started an intense conversation about the issue. There were people who insulted the Bahais and this was fine as long as the Bahai's had a chance to respond so that they could argue their case. After this, when the court case was going on, a group of the bloggers showed up with signs, one of which was a big sign with a picture of the ID card on which was written: "Religion: Bahai." One of the bloggers who is an Islamist held up a sign that said "I am a Muslim and I acknowledge the right of Bahais to have an ID card." This grabbed the attention of people despite the fact that there was not much in the popular press covering the issue and it suddenly became a major issue. The success of the story is that the Bahais were able to get the court decision that allows them to leave the space allotted for religious identity, whereas before they had to put one of the three religions: Islam, Judaism, or Christianity.

Noura compared her experience as a journalist and then later a blogger. She worked for a foreign newspaper that required its employees to not be activists. I think that I distinguish between my opinion and news on my blog, she said, and have acquired a writing style where I am able to do this.

She also stressed that it is important to not generalize about journalists and their negative role, since many of them do excellent work. She gave the example of the journalist and photographer 'Umro Nabil who lost one of his eye and his camera was smashed during the course of his work. And there are a lot of photographers and journalists who give the bloggers their photographs that their own newspapers refuse to publish, and they do this without asking for any thing in return. Noura ended by saying that the secret of success in campaigns lies in cooperation between different agencies and the use of a variety and a lot of mediums.

Amr Magdy the director of the blog "Keyboard Tarka'a" spoke about his start with blogging in 2005. He clarified that his blog wasn't devoted to human rights issues in the beginning. It emerged more randomly, as activists started to use blogs and the Internet to communicate their ideas, particularly drawing attention to the limitation on freedom of Internet use by governments.

Magdy raised the issue of extremist groups who espouse violence and use the internet to spread their ideology which in itself threatens the idea of human rights. How, he asked, would we deal with such a situation if we do not want to violate the principle of freedom of expression?. Magdy also spoke about blogs devoted to the defense of rights by those targeted by the state and police such as the blog "Torture in Egypt" that follows torture incidents under police custody across Egypt, and "Ensa" that defends the right to fair trial for Muslim Brothers many of whom are facing military tribunals. Magdy also mentioned the Brotherhood's young bloggers who have used this medium to support their issues and address the humanitarian crisis among those facing detention and oppression. Using bloggings to unmask the violations that occur during military tribunals has been regarded as important and has been a success.

Regarding Gaza strip siege crisis and the mass punishment of Gaza habitants, Amro gave the example of bloggers who visited Gaza and came back with eye witness accounts of the crisis in Gaza. Amro also mentioned the experience of the young Brotherhood bloggers who have launched an internal critique of the old autocracy in the Brotherhood. These blogs represent an internal criticism expressed by Brotherhood youngsters of bloggers in regards to the proposed program of Brotherhood party. One of their key contributions lies in commenting and expanding the Brotherhood's new program that is currently under consideration for approval by the Brotherhood's leadership.

Magdy pointed to the role played by a bloggers initiative to oppose religious discrimination, entitled "Explicitness & Reconciliation". This initiative shall be announced soon and it was initiated by bloggers. Magdy believes that blogging has negatives as well as positives. The negatives include using insulting language and the usurpation of opinions by other commentators. He concluded by saying that "We want to stay as a good example [for others to follow]".

Ahmed Gharbeia , the director of the blog "Taie Al-Motassel" ("The Communication Fold"), responded to some of the issues raised by Amr Magdy by saying that we should not use our mechanisms to prevent the spread of certain ideas since this is not our [the bloggers] concern.

Gharbeia started by giving a brief history of how solidarity campaigns were initiated over the internet. They were, he said, random and showed the lack of experience of the users. Once basic skills were acquired, it became easy to communicate effectively so as to draw the reader's attention.

About his own experiment , he said that he was initiated into blogging when he witnessed police violence against protesters. He was able to express his solidarity with the protestors by communicating this violation to other through the use of a simple "placard" to the viewers of his blogs. He attributed the relative lack of police violence against the detainees arrested during the demonstrations in support of the judiciary in 2006 to the bloggers successful attempt. This in

particular was the result of one of the greatest bloggers, Alaa Seif who is now in prison. This campaign helped define blogging particularly in relation to other mass media. What is important to realize is that in the beginning it was important to know some basic techniques that helped us deliver our message—such as the creation of embedded links to other web sites. Another is the ability to find a trustworthy sources to check information. These are things we learned in a short time. We acquired many skills that we are now trying to convey to the people as much as we can.

Number of blogs and websites was few in the beginning, but it increased awfully which poses a problem without solution. However, delivering experience is not that easy. The internet advantage is that the content published cannot be erased which in itself is regarded as an essential historical achieved of this new media.

Comments on the above session followed. The first was Dr. Magdy Said who said that it is important that we use all sorts of instruments and mechanisms to get close to the people. In India he gave the example of the use of Internet to communicate to people who are illiterate and cannot read and write. We need to learn from them. Similarly Mobile Activism and other resources are important to learn from. There is a need to conduct training courses for all levels and categories.

In response to Amr Magdy, the blogger Ahmed Nagi responded that the basis of tough language used on the Internet is the political suppression of expression. He argued that all forms of opinions even those of the extremists and fundamentalists and other expressions that some of us do not like. He gave the example of certain Palestinian and Saudi rappers who use racist language but this should be allowed and not be a matter of worry. The point is to debate these views. He also commented on online campaigns of solidarity "The most important thing is how to coordinate blogging campaigns. For example, the famous website "Face-Book" is providing possibility to launch campaigns to support certain issues of concern to viewers despite of controversy raised around launching solidarity campaigns on websites."

Ahmed Gharbeia commented on the point concerning about lobbying on a website like Face-Book saying "Human rights activists do not have to restrict their campaigns and calls inside 'besieged gardens' of the web. Despite free registration that users can have, there are obstacles that prevent access to it as an open arena (which doesn't mean technical access). The use of blogs requires more than simply opening the general web pages. It is considered a big advantage when blogs can be accessed with one click. Such kinds of websites are not open for electronic indexes and search engines, but this doesn't mean the negligence of such digital communities as it includes a high condensation of web visitors and interconnected bonds that make it very useful for advertisement and lobbying. So human rights activists have to be active in both fields till other alternatives are available on the internet – which is of course inevitable. Regarding the point about technology transfer and training people how to use it, Gharbiyya replied "This technical barrier is only related to the current generation of human rights activists. The next generation would find such tools so natural that it would be like using a pen! We don't have to worry so much. But this doesn't mean that we can ignore the issue of providing training or technical support for associations and activists right now."

Dr. Violet Dagher called for providing training courses for activists just to know the new available means and tools as a way enabling us to deliver news items effectively. Dagher pointed to their experiment at the Arab Commission for Human Rights that proved the utility and effectiveness of establishing such means to communicate with people.

Manal Hassan also raised couple of points related to the lessons learned in successful campaigns. First: the message has to be clear, brief and focused in order to be successful. This comes through using language that connects you to the viewer and make him get the best use of the campaign. Second: the campaign can not be a declaration for solidarity only, but it has to provoke the viewer to participate even by creating a link for the campaign.

Session 4: "Traditional press and electronic media – rivalry or integration?

Chairman: Kamal Al Ebidi, the coordinator of the Middle East & North Africa Committee for Protecting Journalists.
Participants: Ahmed Nagy, director of blog "Wasaa Khayalak" or (set your imagination free) and a journalist in Adab newspaper.
Abdul-Monem Mahmoud a journalist and the director of blog "Ana Ikhwan".

Kamal Al Ebidi, the coordinator in the Middle East & North Africa Committee for Protecting Journalists introduced the spokesmen of the session, then he pointed to the workshop's importance which provided the chance for Arab bloggers to meet, as those bloggers are the ones who have raised the ceiling on freedom in the Arab world. He hoped for another meeting in the future that gathers bloggers and human rights activists focusing on the importance that the activists have to listen to the bloggers to derive benefit from their experience. He said "It is not accidental for bloggers to be subject to oppression in a way greater than what traditional journalists were subject to". Then he mentioned examples of Tunisian bloggers who faced the worst kinds of oppressions and torture such as: Zoheir Al-Yehiawy, Salim Abu Khodeir and Mohammed Ebbo. In addition to journalist and blogger Dayef Al-Gazal who was assassinated in 2006.
This brutality indicates the failure of Arab governments and administrations in controlling blogs and internet. What is really important is, "How we can support the Arab bloggers and raise awareness of what they are providing or what they are subject to in return."

Ahmed Nagy the owner of blog "Wasaa Khayalak" ("Expand your Imagination") and a journalist in Al-Adab newspaper indicated that he will expand the paper he submitted to the workshop. His paper is a basic guideline for establishing more elaborated studies. Nagy displayed a comparison between traditional press and popular press which developed from chatting rooms passing by mailing groups and electronic blogs.

Nagy spoke about relation between blogging and traditional press and pointed to the newspapers discussing blogging issues. He gave the example of the journalist Ehab Al-Zallaky in al-Doustor newspaper whose writing about bloggers was an important point in the history of the relationship between bloggers and traditional press. The important change came when Haitham, the owner of

the blog "Gar Al-Qamar: (The Moon's Neighbor) published a detailed coverage of the sectarian incidents that occurred in Alexandria and journalists started to call Haitham to get more details. It was a point of real success for the independent electronic media when Al-Doustor newspaper devoted a full page to Haitham's blog reports.

Nagy also pointed to the role played by bloggers in posting the torture video clips which were made available through mobile phones as entertainment. But the bloggers took this issue up as something that must be prosecuted. So, the bloggers influence was more important and stronger in changing the people's viewpoint and media when it comes to issues like police torture.
About Wael Abbas's experiment, Nagy said "Wael's effort is an institution in and of itsef." He said that Wael doesn't have political links and he only defends and adopts basic human rights lines.
About redlines exceeded by bloggings, he cited the crisis of Al-Qursaya island which illustrated how bloggers exceeded the normal lines. In the case of Al-Qursaya island, publishing in the traditional press was prohibited. Journalists who provided their materials and press coverage for the bloggers to be published, are doing this because there is no redlines prohibiting bloggers from publishing anything. So, freedom of bloggings will always be higher than what is allowed in traditional media.

Kamal Al Ebidi talked to Abdul-Monem Mahmoud (who was detained before) and asked him about how aggressions committed against bloggers could affect other bloggers?
Journalist and blogger Abdul-Monem Mahmoud replied "I was in jail not for being a blogger but for being an activist, that any activist in Egypt or any other autocratic state is subject to such a violation. Kareem Amer wasn't imprisoned because of his blogging, but because blogging is a part of his activities on the blog."

About the panel of thw workshop "Rivalry & Integration" Abdul-Monem Mahmoud illustrated that integration is something useful for the reader. Then he mentioned the case of torturing Emad Al-Kabeer in which the role of popular and traditional press were united that the torturing clip was much better than scores of human rights reports. Monem concluded that electronic media has raised awareness about human rights issues. So, the focus hasn't to be related to rivalry, but to an integrated entity in which all efforts can join to serve the people's issues.

Gamal Eid commented on " Rivalry & Integration " and said "The idea is the existence of a new player who is playing an important role and we must look for integrating different media and roles." While Kamal Al Ebidi argued "we in the Arab world have a number of bloggers from whom human rights activists and traditional press can benefit given their own experience."

Thursday, Day 2:

Session 1: "Human Rights Issues in the Arabian Gulf"

Session 2: Human Rights & Internet (obstacles and available possibilities)

Session 3: Internet as a tool for bringing out ideas & opinions and gaining supporters

Session 4: legal protection of electronic publishing issues

Session 5: kinds of mutual support – what to do??

Session 1: "Human Rights Issues in the Arabian Gulf"

Chair: Abdullah Al-Reiami – Oman – (writer and electronic activist, farrq.net).
Participants: Ahmed Mansour, human rights activist – U.A.E
Ahmed Al-Omran, "Saudi Jeans" blogging – Saudi Arabia

Ahmed Mansour, the activist from the U.A.E, presented a panorama about the Emirates, dealing with the role of electronic media in human rights issues and explaining that Emirati media is government-affiliated while the visual media cares is largely concerned with financial considerations, so the tendency would be towards entertainment for fear of colliding with the state. Newspapers in the U.A.E (even the independent) are governmental. There are opportunities in audible media for the citizens to communicate with the programs to express their concerns, but human rights issues are still not under consideration. Hence the internet can be considered the only room for our voices to be heard as screening and censorship affected it.

Mansour pointed to two important experiments related to suppression of freedoms in U.A.E. The first was the detainment of Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken, subjecting him to house arrest and confiscating his passport. Besides the "Majan" website problem, which was blocked because the government felt it exceeded the limits. The website inventors were prosecuted and the owner was sentenced to imprisonment. While reviewing the "Majan" problem, Mansour illustrated that there is integration and support between lawyers, activists, electronic media and human rights institutions which played the most important part in pressuring the government. The decision on the case was the nullification of the decision to ban the website owner and the passage of a decree that now bans the imprisonment of people for expressing their journalistic views in the U.A.E.

Saudi blogger Ahmed Al-Emran (owner of the Saudi Jeans blog) reviewed a number of issues as he used the internet and blogging to back up liberties such as: the case of nine reformers detained on charges of sponsoring terrorism who remained in detention for one whole year without an official accusation or trial. Saudi bloggers played an important role in defining this case and supporting the detainees. The case of the Saudi blogger Fouad Al-Farhan who has been detained – until now - without an explicit accusation, was a turning point for blogging in Saudi Arabia. The bloggers made important contributions to defining the case and calling for Al-Farhan's release through a large online solidarity campaign titled "Free Fouad", in addition to using the "Facebook" website to launch a widely- supported campaign and establishing an online petition calling for the release of Al-Farhan, which was signed by more than 1,300 people. Despite the campaign's success in publicizing the case on both the international and Arab levels, Al-Farhan was imprisoned again after two months. Al-Omran also mentioned some other examples of cases related to freedom of expression such as the case of Hady Al-Notaeif, who was sentenced to capital punishment – the penalty was commuted to imprisonment for life – because of something he said that is considered offensive to Islam. Saudi bloggers have also taken an interest in other human rights cases.

Al-Omran also stated that more than 30,000 human rights-related complaints are exchanged online annually, in addition to the screening of hundreds of electronic websites by the Body of Saudi Communications. The Saudi Jeans blog owner concluded, "In spite of the many examples painting a gloomy picture, people are creatures made of hope, and hope is what enables us to improve this image".

The Omani activist Abdullah Al-Reiami dealt with the situation in Oman and mentioned that without the internet, the human rights movement wouldn't have happened in Oman at all, or it might have come much later. Discussion forums started in 2002 were an objective alternative because of the lack of liberties in Oman. Al-Reiami indicated that internet services (privacy, speed and high prices) in Oman are very bad and that there are various factors that make the whole matter very frustrating. The absence of civil society and the few state-controlled civil associations restricts any natural, legal space for movement and human rights civil activity. "Any move carried out by activists can be considered as a violation of the law and the state, but internet activists had eradicated many taboos that existed four years ago." For the first time activists managed to "criticize the security institution" to raise awareness about the possibility of such criticism. The authorities' reaction of course was very aggressive. For the period 2001 – 2006, more than 40 online activists were detained and threatened with dismissal since they are all working with governmental or state-controlled institution..

Omani online activists managed to raise awareness of human rights activists and criticized laws violating free of expression & conscience, and privacy, such as a law enacted to force internet café owners to prepare a record of user's data and to install closed-circuit television to film people coming and going from their shops. Indeed, the activists achieved success as they moved instantly to criticize the law and threatened the launch of a wide range of campaigns of denouncements.

In spite of the gloomy picture of the human rights situation and internet freedom in the Arab Gulf countries drawn by online activists, Majid Al-Arori expressed optimism about the "frustrating" situation. He believes that these brave and effective initiatives are grounds for optimism as these cores have to be developed in Gulf countries to become an effective "human rights movement".

Regarding this, Ismail Al-Qureitly suggested a large human rights process which allows human rights activists to integrate with bloggers and that an artificial personality has to exist as a "gateway" which gathers all of them and which would facilitate obtaining highly-credible information.

Kamal Al Ebidi drew attention to the fact that bloggers were the first ones to inform international organizations about Fouad Al-Farhan' case. Even in semi-closed communities, bloggers have the power to penetrate the blockade.

Kamal wondered if the Saudi bloggers were more careful after the Al-Farhan detention. Al-Omran answered and said "some were already afraid and stopped blogging for some time, while others insisted on continuing, and that some Saudi bloggers had launched a campaign last week to republish Fouad's notes, which are considered the reason behind his detention.

Session 2: Human Rights & Internet (obstacles and available possibilities)

Chai: Dr. Mohammed Said (human rights activist, Bahrain)
Participants: Hisham Al-Sharkawy, Morocco (Moroccan Association for Human Rights)
Violet Dagher, France (Arab Commission for Human Rights)

Dr. Violet Dagher, the head of the Arab Commission for Human Rights in Paris said since the launch of the Commission, they realized the importance of the internet as an important weapon to bring out ideas and promote the stature of human rights. Email is an effective communication tool for activists in the Arab world. Many proposals were suggested to create mutual support among Internet and human rights activists in order to overcome all current obstacles. These proposals include: 1-Linking aesthetic and technical competence on human rights websites to convey data as quickly as possible 2-Establishing a rapid communication network to denounce and unmask violations. 3- Establishing an emergency cadre that consists of intelligentsia, a consultative council of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, and human rights activists that all are devoted to providing information and data in addition to communicating with media professionals and journalists in a way that ensures credible information and protection. 4- Coordinating training courses to improve technical skills and help human rights activists use the best technological methods, focusing on volunteers organizations that lack financial support.

Hisham Al-Sharkawy, the Moroccan activist, pointed to some obstacles that prevent human rights organizations from getting the best use of the internet. These obstacles include: 1-The lack of a volunteering culture and the absence of people assigned to construct and update websites. 2- the age of the founders of human rights organizations and their avoidance of the tools of modern technology 3- The absence of professional activists in the field of human rights 4- The problem of translation – that most documents are in English, while the Moroccan society's culture is primarily Arabic and French. There is a need to Arabize tools. 5- Self obstacles that can be overcome through a successful experiment like that achieved by the bloggers.

Many proposals were suggested such as: 1- Training for how to use the internet that the Arabic Network can coordinate through a workshop in Morocco. 2- Attempting to connect online human rights defenders with each other and preparing a simple guide for anybody who wants to join. 3- Taking greater interest in solidarity campaigns.
Al-Qureitly's viewpoint: "One of the most important obstacles is that the human rights movement is an elitist movement that is distant from people's issues and problems which make it – in his opinion – not credible or trustworthy for people. Al-Qureitly suggested that human rights organizations concentrate heavily on economic and social rights as well as political ones and that they need to go to the streets to gain credibility".
Gamal Eid also replied "There is a problem in considering political and civil rights as elitist in that the focus on political and civil rights is also a problem for mass media as well as human rights organizations. Mass media care more about issues related to these rights".
Alaa Abdul-Fattah suggested two practical proposals: 1- Assigning technical experts to human rights organizations' websites. 2- Conducting specialist training courses to raise the level of technical competency for experts working in the developmental and human rights fields.
Magdy Said also suggested to use online electronic training, which is available through activities provided by the Islamonline website. Said focused on the idea that any successful plan depends on people taking ownership of it and making use of the available skills and possibilities.
Kamal Labidi pointed that last years' experiment in the field of human rights showed that the

aforementioned organizations are deprived of media coverage of its activities. Most organizations don't have a list of newspapers' addresses and lack good communications with the media. He also confirmed that human rights organizations need to write press releases in a way that grabs the attention of the press and mass media.

Session 3: Internet as a tool for bringing out ideas & opinions and gaining supporters

Chair: Mr. Karem Yahia
Participants: Moneir Adeibes (director of Aman Jourdan)
Wessam Fouad (Islamonline website)

Karem Yehia started talking about the internet as a powerful force and an increasingly used, effective, and popular tool. It is very hard for journalists to keep up with how quickly news is published online and with how electronic media can provide for detailed coverage. In addition to the possibilities of amending and updating news items online. About the continuity and survival of electronic news items, he said, "News doesn't die online!"

Moneir Adeibes mentioned two successful experiments: Aman website & Insan website which were founded recently. Aman is one of the most important websites in the Arab world as it is notably caring about women rights. The website experienced multiple penetration attempts by Arab governments , that eventually succeeded in 2006. It was republished on another server with more protection. The website undertook many solidarity campaigns to support female victims of violence. Aman was filtered in some Arab countries like Tunisia for defending the Tunisian activist Sihem Bin Sedrin, and also was filtered in Saudi Arabia for reviewing important files about women suppression in Saudi Arabia. Some Saudi women journalists played a pivotal role in stopping the website filter in Saudi Arabia. The website is considered an important center for documentation because it provides many training manuals in addition to documentation (labor documents and images) for women's conferences.
The other website that Adeibes talked about is "Ensan.net" which includes a search engine for human rights issues in the Arab world and a huge archive of 5 million pages about human rights in the Arab countries. In addition, it is possible to use to launch campaigns. Moreover, Ensan's news center provides news coverage for Arab regional human rights issues.

Wessam Fouad talked about a post-blogging stage, stating that the internet became not only a collection of online published websites but also a podium for opinion. There is a need to provide new information with a new quality, to rely upon networking philosophy and to develop databases which depend on new techniques like Wiki. Fouad also suggested the necessity of developing a system of indexing, Web Folkosonomy. Then he moved to talk about typical changes occurring in the internet like Web 3.0 and the development of applications and available techniques like RSS and Syndicated Voting, in addition to many new functional applications. He cited examples of multiple applications available on the Facebook website that make it possible to establish an electronic non-central government. There are modern communication means which can be used for the electronic space as it can make a social affect e.g. interactive T.V and blogging via cellular phone as Noura Younis do.

Alaa Abdul-Fattah presented a model for new online applications that can be useful in human rights. He drew attention to an electronic map prepared by Tunisian blogger Samy Bin Gharbiyya who cited Tunisian prisons and concentration camps locations by using some applications added to the Google Earth program, which has detailed spatial maps for all the regions of the world. This led Karem Yahia to suggest the design of a similar application to be used in creating an electronic map for areas of repression in the Arab world.

Session 4: legal protection of electronic publishing issues

Chairman: Gamal Eid (director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information)
Participants: Hamdy Al-Assiuty (Activist and lawyer of cassation)

Hamdy Al-Assiuty said "Freedom of expression & conscience is a thorny issue" and that bloggers who are looking for freedom and liberty represent a great hope for a different future. He illustrated that the crisis in the Arab world is not a thought-exclusive (people can think what they want) but it lies basically in restricting expression.

Al-Assiuty also explained some laws and articles constraining freedom of expression & conscience, and mentioned stretchy ambiguous terms of laws related to publishing issues such as the charge of Insult, Injury, Lie (particularly the president). He also pointed to declarations concerning electronic publishing due to which one can be subject to punishment. He said "All crimes in the world can be committed online", and mentioned a number of issues for which online publishing was the common factor, such as: "Revolutionary Socialists" and "the Kareem Amer" case. Al-Assiuty expressed his satisfaction with blogging and addressed bloggers saying "Freedom of expression is subject to the goal [of writing]. Goal is opposite to duty which is not a constraint on my conscience which can continue to control me while I write and publish."Regarding criminal responsibility of what is published online, Al-Assiuty illustrated that we can place responsibility on a blogger who publishes online and this responsibility is shared by the website director. While declaration does not apply to e-mail correspondence unless the message is delivered to many people.

Alaa Abdul-Fattah commented on the strict legal system (which in fact restricts freedom of expression) and said "Any attempt to increase the limits of freedom will violate the law. But without such courage, no change will happen since multiple violations of repressive laws renders the laws meaningless."

Blogger Noura Younis commented on these restraints imposed by the law "I prefer basically not to define the law." Hisham Al-Sharkawy suggested the building of a legal team to follow possible issues of electronic publishing, reiterating that human rights activists have to raise the ceiling of freedom by themselves and not be occupied with repressive laws that confiscate all kinds of freedom. Blogger Amro Magdy had reservations about Alaa's comment saying "We need to define points of legal inaccuracy as we can't proceed through the state of no-law!". He also suggested that the Arabic Network provide legal studies of laws just to know whether some are already violating human rights or not.

Session 5: kinds of mutual support – what to do??

Chairman: Khaled Al-Sergany (director of board of editors of Al-Doustour Egyptian newspaper)
Participants: Moneir Adeibes (director of Aman Jourdan)
Ismail Al-Qureitly (aljazeerah.net website)
Magdy Said (Islamonline website)

Khaled Al-Sergany started the session pointing to that the most important means for mutual support among electronic media, traditional press and human rights organizations is the existence of a common basis between the whole of human rights aspects and countering autocracy.
Moneir Adeibes submitted his suggestions which were in brief as follows:
1- The need for training on how to use written mechanisms, skills and techniques.
2- Drafting a plan to gradually open channels between mass media, bloggers, and human rights activists which would facilitate the exchange of information.
Magdy Said also submitted suggestions:
1- The need to connect information technology with human rights.
2- The need to document experiences (one presenting part and another one related to lessons learned)
3- Transfer of experience to the community in Arabic.
4- Training on how to use modern techniques & tools like cyber activity and mobile phone activity which are all available freely online.
5- Simplifying human rights aspects and making them easy for everyone. [does "Tafkeek" really mean simplifying?]
6- Studying and analyzing the recipients' aspects of human rights.
7- Respecting, understanding and dealing with people's beliefs in a proper way.
8- Considering a context of mutual support including the legal, political and economic context, and the crisis of illiteracy, poverty, and ignorance.
9- Getting the best use of former experiences such as "night schools" which were established by the National Party and existed during the days of Moustafa Kamel and Mohammed Fareid – educating adults to use tools (Paulo Fereri curriculum) – and electronic training on how to use internet.
10- Releasing a guide that contains experiences of success & failure and how to use such experiences in human rights combat.
11- Giving people ownership of the principles.

Ismail Al-Qureitly also submitted a number of suggestions divided into two pivotal points, the first one related to bloggers:
1- Humanitarian deal with human rights issues and how to bring it close to people.
2- Developing a humanitarian language that brings us together irrespective of our backgrounds.
3- Separation of information and opinion in bloggers' discourse to support their credibility and a separation between ways of blogging (opinion - and thus the news).
4- Focusing on credibility – self-correction of mistakes is something that deserves respect and grants a high degree of credibility.
5- Getting documents from different sources and opinions.
6- The call for discussions in blogging and using non-imperative expressions.
7- Caring about events and documenting them (as what happened in torturing video clips).

8- Fine-tuning of media content in order not to force mass media to accept you as a source of information and news.
9- Establishing relations ruptured between bloggers and mass media.
10- Caring about the style of websites.
11- Common coordination among the bloggers.

In regard to the second one, related to human rights activists, Al-Qureitly suggested the following:
1- Finding solutions for why human rights websites are not updated permanently.
2- Being away from political digression and establishing accuracy & objectivity in regards to some websites releases.
3- Fast publishing.
4- Establishing corporate entities and networking among human rights websites.
5- Clarifying rights & aspects and interpreting rumors & accusations through varied presentation of subjects and issues.
6- Human Rights participation in raising awareness of employees and media professionals through mutual communication, as well as a focus on the need for education, training and generalizing reports criticizing electronic media , keeping in mind that media institutions worry about their reputation and credibility.
7- Communication among human rights activists & media professional, establishing public relations and visits, as well as and putting pressure on mass media by sending credible reports and data.
8- Building human rights activists' knowledge of media language, journalistic verbiage and, style; fine-tuning and educating human rights activists so the human rights discourse is accepted.
9- Making the human rights movement popular and going into the streets, such as the strategies and mechanisms used by. the Kefaya movement.

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