

PRESS RELEASE

Egypt: Court ruling to block YouTube is disproportionate and violates right to information

ARTICLE 19

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ARTICLE 19 is dismayed by a Cairo court ruling on 9 February ordering the Egyptian government to block access to YouTube for one month due to its continued hosting of the 14-minute trailer of the movie "Innocence of Muslims".

“The seventh district administrative court’s decision is a blatant attempt to deny people in Egypt their right to seek, receive and impart information on the basis that some people may – if they seek the video out - be offended. Free speech is fundamental to democracy, and that means tolerating speech that may shock, offend or disturb,” said Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 executive director.

“Blocking an entire website as vast and diverse as YouTube because of one video would also be regarded as grossly disproportionate and a violation of the right to free expression as set out in international law,” she added.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Prime Minister and the Head of the National Telecommunication Regulatory Body, to whom the Court’s decision was assigned for implementation, to reject the ruling, and to ensure that access to the internet and YouTube remains free and protected against all threats.

The lawsuit against YouTube was filed last year under the Hisba system by the lawyer, Mohammed Hamid Salim. The Hisba allows any Muslim to defend “public morality” and the right to file lawsuits against any person or institution on behalf of “Muslim religion”. Conservative lawyers and religious scholars under the former President Hosni Mubarak often used the Hisba to silence free thinkers or critics of the government or the Islamist movement.

“We call on the government to urgently review the Hisba which has been abused by lawyers and religious scholars to file criminal proceedings against

critical journalists, writers and bloggers under the pretext of heresy, blasphemy or threat to religious morals and values,” added Callamard.