

To Mr. Osama Heikal, Minister of Information

Dear Minister Heikal,

As you have promised that Egyptian citizens will notice a clear change in media production and stated that you are engaging in restructuring the Ministry of Information to be the media of all Egyptians without excluding any group or sector, and as we believe in the role of the media in shaping the citizens' awareness and their positions, particularly in this vitally important period, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) submits several media studies and research conducted by the institute which contain relevant recommendations. In this important transitional phase, all concerned parties must join forces in order to restructure the media to meet the aspirations of all sectors of the population in conformance with the importance of the media and its role in democratic transition.

For the media to perform its role successfully, we request that you adopt the idea of independent commissions composed of experts and media professors to serve as a building block of the democratic system by evaluating the professional performance of the media sector in accordance with professional and objective standards, particularly in critical junctures such as elections or civil strife. These commissions would also oversee broadcast licensing and monitor funding, revenue, and ad policies to guarantee wage equality and ensure that public funds are not squandered. This was the key demand of Maspero workers who staged a sit-in for more than two weeks in anticipation of a new wage structure. Additionally, CIHRS emphasizes the importance of organizing access to information and of ending policies that block information in order to guarantee that the state-owned media does not possess a monopoly on certain information that would allow it to unilaterally control citizens' access to information, which would constitute a violation of the citizenry's right to know.

In the same context, CIHRS aspires that the restructuring of the media sector involves introducing human rights values into the media discourse and elevating the values of democracy, citizenship, and equality, which can act as a shield against many types of civil strife in our society. As such, we hope that the presentation of these values is not dependent on the occurrence of a specific incident or violation, but rather that we work together to increase citizens' awareness of their rights. Let us start from within by reexamining appointment policies inside the media sector, realigning them to

reflect Egypt's cultural diversity and giving real representation to all groups, cultures, and ideas in our society without exclusion based on religion, color, school of thought, gender, or ideology.

In addition, the media sector must explicitly embody the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This requires reexamining the issue of media ownership and its impact on this right as well as establishing minimum guarantees for the genuine independence of state-owned media as delineated in a public plan with a specific timeframe. Subordination of the media sector to the state does not mean that it is the state's property to be used to disseminate its policies and to close the door in the face of all who oppose or disagree with them; nor should state-owned media be used as a platform to refute the opinions of opponents of state policy. The philosophy of "red lines" must end and blacklists banning certain figures from state television must be abolished. This requires considering a means to purge the ministry of its security cadres.

Last but not least, we would like to reiterate that the subordination of state-owned media to the state does not mean that the citizen has no say in its policies, but rather that the citizen is the primary beneficiary of this sector. Thus, the rights of viewers and readers should be the charter guiding the operation of all state-owned media. CIHRS further affirms the importance of treating the Ministry of Information as a temporary ministry, for the media should not be viewed as a government institution or as a government responsibility in a democratic state.

Please find attached a set of books, studies, and reports on media performance in Egypt and recommendations for restructuring it.

Sincerely,

Ziad Abdel Tawab

CIHRS Deputy Director