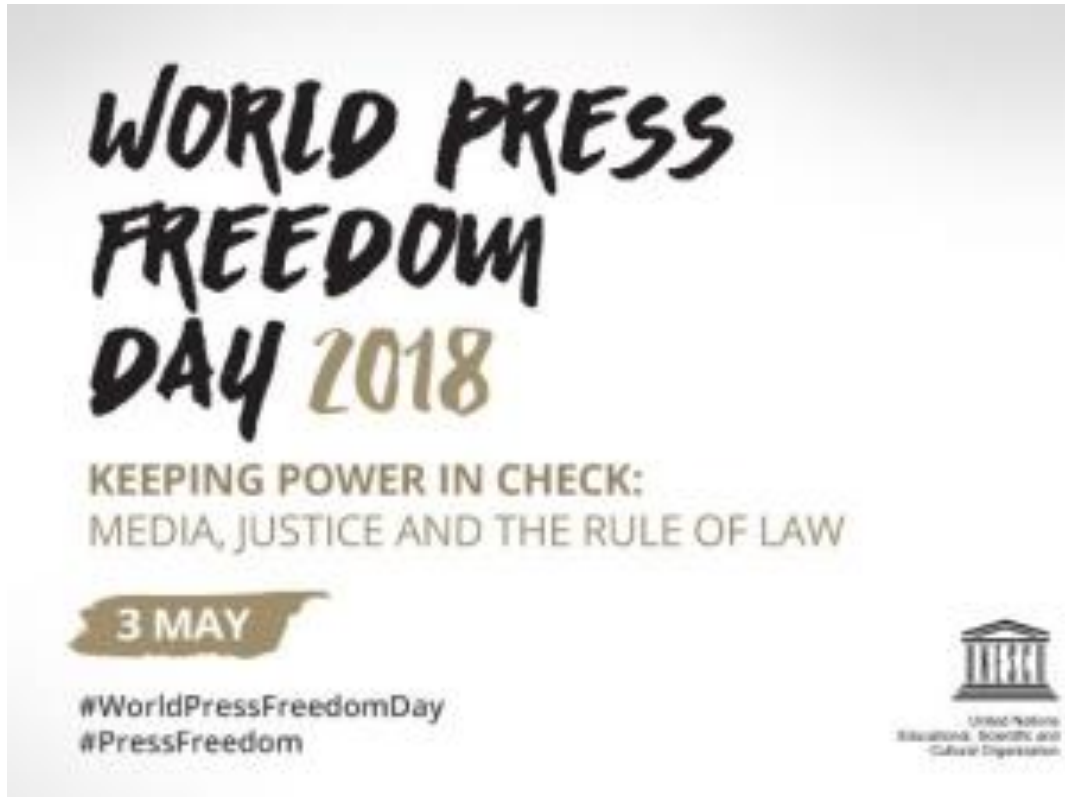




**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING  
FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS**

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION



**ICSFT Stands with Human Rights Defenders,  
Journalists and Citizen Journalists on World Press  
Freedom Day**

May 3rd is known globally as World Press Freedom Day. It is spearheaded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The theme for 2018 is “Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and the Rule of Law.”

The event and the international day of “will cover issues of media and the transparency of the political process, the independence and media literacy of the judicial system, and

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the accountability of state institutions towards the public. The Day will also examine contemporary challenges of ensuring press freedom online.”<sup>1</sup>

ICSFT stands for freedom of speech, including and especially online, as foundational principles in our work. **Our advocacy emphasis arises from concern against injustice and attack against human rights defenders, civil society, journalists and citizen journalists.**

**Our President, Dr. Abdul Hamid Dashti's, unjust and illegal mistreatment and eventual forced exile by the Kuwaiti government, after he used means of the modern Press- Twitter- to shine light on the human rights abuses occurring in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other countries is an example of such abuse. With the violation of the rights of human rights defenders, journalists and citizen journalist being as they are, this World Press Freedom Day is a significant moment of advocacy for our organization.**

With this in focus, we support UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarks today at the World Press Freedom event in Geneva, Switzerland, that crimes against journalists must be prosecuted, and promoting free press is standing up for our right to truth. No country or region has impunity from this mandate- yet some, including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Kuwait continue to severely abuse and oppress their media and the right to free press and freedom of expression.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/worldpressfreedomday/2018>



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**Repression of freedom of press in the GCC region is pervasive:**

## **Bahrain**

**Bahrain ranked 166 on the 2018 World Press Freedom index. This is two positions lower than 2017. There has been increased persecution and censorship of dissidents since 2011. Across the country, journalists and activists are jailed and harassed for participating in demonstrations and reporting on injustice.**

Ruled with an iron hand by the Khalifa royal family, Bahrain is notorious for jailing many journalists, especially photographers and cameramen. Fear that the regime could be overthrown led to an increase in the persecution and censorship of dissidents in 2011, especially after the uprisings by the Shia opposition in the east of the country. Convicted on charges such as participating in demonstrations, property destruction, and supporting terrorism, journalists and citizen-journalists are given long jail terms and sometimes even life sentences. Many have been mistreated in detention and some have even been stripped of their citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

## **Saudi Arabia**

**Saudi Arabia ranks 169 on the 2018 World Press Freedom index.**

**In Saudi, journalists and citizen journalists will be detained arbitrarily without trial.**

## **Israel**

**Israel ranks at number 87 on the 2018 World Press Freedom Index.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/bahrain>



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**2 journalists have been killed in 2018 alone by Israeli occupying forces through illegal and unilateral attacks on peaceful protests.**



**On April 7, 2018 a Palestinian journalist Yaser Murtaja working for a Gaza based free media company was shot in cold blood by Israeli occupiers.**

Interrogations and detention without any charge are part of the price that journalists pay for the political rivalry between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. Several media sites were labelled as opposition media by the Palestinian Authority and blocked in 2017. The political tension combined with harassment by the Israeli authorities complicates the work of Palestinian journalists so much that many of them censor themselves. The Israeli authorities have forcibly closed several Palestinian media outlets in recent years, accusing

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them of inciting violence. Palestinian journalists also encounter problems when covering protests or clashes with security forces.<sup>3</sup>

## **Kuwait**

**Kuwait is ranked number 105 in the World Press Freedom Index, moving down one number, with increasing press oppression since 2017.**

Ruled by Sheikh Sabah IV, Kuwait is reputed to be the Gulf's least repressive state but the UN Human Rights Council voiced concern in 2015 about "excessive restrictions on freedom of expression contained in the Press and Publication Law and related legislation." The vaguely-worded provisions of a cyber-crime law that took effect in January 2016 pose a threat to bloggers and online journalists who post any critical content, and an electronic media law also forces them to apply for a license from the government. The restrictions are reflected in online censorship, arrests, and conviction of bloggers and online activists who are accused of destabilizing Kuwait if they make any disparaging comment about the emir, his family, or their allies. Al Watan TV's closure in 2015 for "anti-government" comments and the 25-year jail sentence passed in absentia in January 2018 on the London-based Kuwaiti blogger Abdallah Saleh for insulting Kuwait's allies sent a very clear signal to Kuwaiti dissidents.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/palestine>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/kuwait>



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**ICSFT's President Dr. Abdul Hamid Dashti, who stood up as a human rights defender against oppression and voiced his opinion through the modern Press, Twitter, and was unjustly charged and forced to go into exile by the repressive tyranny of the Kuwait government**

## **ICSFT's Stance**

We believe that no countries are above the norms of Press Freedom and freedom of expression, and call all countries, in particular Israel, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE to be accountable to the values, norms, laws, statutes and treaties relating to freedom of the press, and freedom of speech.

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**We especially call on, and condemn the United States, the UK, France, and their allies for their funding of oppressive regimes, including those listed above, as well as their own oppression and repression of freedom of press within their own countries while simultaneously proclaiming their own innocence. This hypocrisy must be noted and punished by the international community through the relevant bodies.**

**Journalists and human rights defenders: their freedom is our freedom!**



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