



## The Middle East Partnership Initiative

### *Supporting Independent and Professional Media*

*“A free media is essential to democracy and it fosters transparency and accountability, both of which are prerequisites for sustained economic development.”*  
Secretary Clinton - In Observance of World Press Freedom Day - May 1, 2009

The **Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)**, located within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, is a unique program that implements President Obama’s vision to directly engage with and invest in the people of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). MEPI creates vibrant partnerships between the citizens of the U.S. and MENA to foster the development of pluralistic, participatory, and prosperous societies throughout the region. To achieve this, MEPI works with local and international non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and academic institutions, as well as governments to expand political participation, strengthen civil society and the rule of law, empower women and youth, create educational opportunities, and foster economic growth.

State-owned or operated television and radio stations dominate the press environment in the MENA region. There are many challenges for activists working to promote free, independent, and accurate news coverage. Restrictive legal frameworks and environments stifle free expression and frequently result in self-censorship, limit opportunities for reporters to gain experience and new skills, and discourage young people from pursuing a career in journalism.

**PROMOTING AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA** To empower independent journalists and promote the free expression of ideas, MEPI supports the development of independent media outlets and reporters. New technologies and the evolution of satellite television are increasing access to media sources outside of government-owned or operated outlets. MEPI partners with local and international organizations to empower journalists and shape an atmosphere more conducive to the development of independent media outlets and provides training opportunities for industry professionals on issues including journalistic ethics, basic reporting skills, and blogging.

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT** MEPI is supporting a series of pilot projects to connect people—particularly youth—to expand civic participation and increase the new media capabilities of civil society in the Middle East and North Africa. These projects prepare future media professionals, bring young voices to the forefront of public debate, and introduce youth to new technologies.

**MEDIA & LEGAL REFORM** In response to the legal challenges to establishing an independent media sector, MEPI engages in efforts to produce legal environments more favorable to free press. MEPI educates legal and media professionals in law reform and best practices, and supports efforts that encourage governments to undertake necessary reforms to establish transparent legal systems.

#### **Examples of MEPI Media Support**

**Algeria** – MEPI, the Journalism Development Group, and local news organizations implemented a media management consulting project to assist select local print outlets to improve journalism standards, profitability, independence, and objectivity.

**Bahrain** – Through the Bahrain Journalists Association, Bahraini journalists are equipped with the skills to investigate trafficking in persons (TIP) cases. In addition to increasing public awareness about TIP, the project empowers the press to serve as a watchdog on TIP issues.

**Palestinian Territories** - Search for Common Ground is implementing a project to support the only two independent Palestinian television outlets. Technical assistance has allowed these stations to increase broadcasting and newsgathering capabilities, providing coverage from a local perspective.

**Oman** - The High School Journalism Education Program, administered by iEARN-USA, equips high school students in Oman with a foundation in journalism. High school teachers receive training in the field of journalism and journalist mentors offer additional training and guidance to the students.

**Regional** - The MENA Media Program of the International Research and Exchanges Board, IREX, expanded the skill-base of reporters and bloggers in the region. Journalists attended a six-week program that included an executive training course and internships with U.S. media outlets. Bloggers in the region participated in two regional workshops to discuss the nexus between journalism and blogging as well as ethics and content quality.

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Pictures used in this FS:



Drafted: KOsterthaler, ext. 68627

Approved:

NEA/FO

TCWittes

Cleared:

NEA/PI

KVolker

NEA/PI

CBourgeois

NEA/PI

AMosley

NEA/PI

SSaeed

ok

NEA/PI

RFalzone

NEA/PI

JSchmonsees

NEA/PPD

MRatney

PA