

## International Day for Universal Access to Information

On the International Day for Universal Access to Information, Belady seeks to shed light on the freedom of access and share of information in Egypt.

### Definition

**The Utilization of Information:** Universal access to information means that every person has the right to request, receive, and share information. And it is considered a fundamental right in free speech. The media plays a significant role in drawing people's attention to the most crucial issues. However, the access to information also relies on the individual's capabilities to search for and receive information. Therefore, the universalization of information is fundamental to the freedom of the press.<sup>1</sup>

**The right to access to information:** To enable every person to have an access to the state's public institutions' operations such as ministries, public enterprises and entities. Mainly, the right of the citizens to obtain information from public institutions that are funded by the state.

### Legal basis for free circulation of information:

Article No. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the freedom of obtaining and disseminating information as a fundamental right:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Article No. 68 of the Egyptian constitution also affirmed this right:

“Information, data, statistics and official documents are owned by the people. Disclosure thereof from various sources is a right guaranteed by the state to all citizens. The state shall provide and make them available to citizens with transparency. The law shall organize rules for obtaining such, rules of availability and confidentiality, rules for depositing and preserving such, and lodging complaints against refusals to grant access thereto. The law shall specify penalties for withholding information or deliberately providing false information.”

### The reality of information circulation in Egypt:

Despite legalizing this right in the Egyptian constitution, it has not enjoyed an organized legislative framework, though numerous legislative attempts have been made to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> [International Day for Universal Access to Information, United Nations](#)

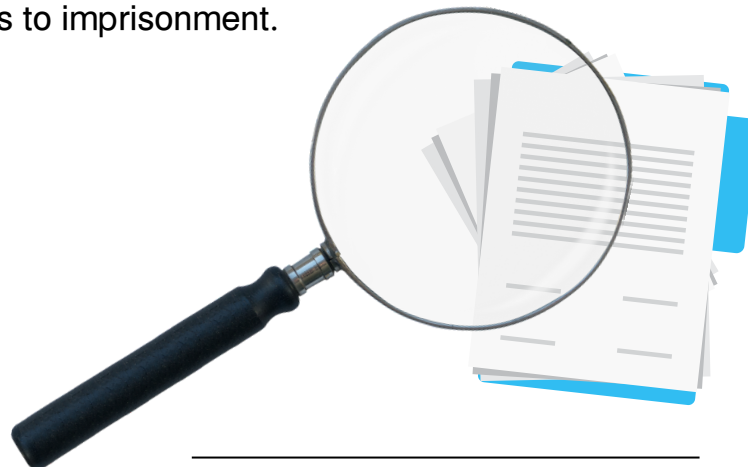
Furthermore, the Egyptian authorities censor a large number of websites that are thought to deviate from the political narrative of the regime. Additionally, the state prosecutes journalists who work for private media outlets, as happened recently for "Mada Masr" journalists' team.<sup>2</sup> In law No. 149 of 2019, The Egyptian legislature restricts nonprofits and organizations from conducting, publishing, or making the results of a survey accessible, and conducting field research and sharing their findings. These restrictions limit the release of information and the conduct of field research to state institutions which are dedicated to the authorities.

### **The importance of the right to access to information:**

The right to access to information allows individuals to make decisions based on accurate data published by the state or acquired by individuals after submitting requests in accordance with the law. This right can help combat corruption and the misuse of public resources, in addition to revealing violations and abuses of human rights. Thus, the dissemination of information can help accomplish democracy through shared governance.

### **Belady's recommendations:**

- The legal regulation of the right to access to information by establishing a legislative framework that guarantees the implementation of the constitutional amendments.
- Involving citizens in the political and institutional operations as well as providing them with accurate data about the state institutions' conduct.
- Ensuring the freedom and independence of the press so that citizens can interact with state's institutions.
- The immediate cease of website censorship and the amendment of any law that might subject information providers to imprisonment.



<sup>2</sup> [Egypt: Prosecution of Mada Masr Journalists, Human Rights Watch](#)