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Middle East/North Africa - Egypt

Dangerous conviction

Jail sentence for defamation is bad sign for freedom of information

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[In Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

A court in Luxor yesterday convicted **Tawfiq Okacha**, the owner of the TV station *El-Faraeen* (*The Pharaons*) and a program presenter known for his hostility to the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi, of defamation under the criminal code and sentenced him to four months' imprisonment and a fine of 100 Egyptian pounds (12.55 euros).

Such a conviction and sentence based on the criminal code sends out a highly negative message for freedom of information in Egypt. Reporters Without Borders urges the country's new authorities to review the provisions relating to press offences and to abolish imprisonment as a penalty for comments judged to be offensive or defamatory.

The case arose from a complaint by a former member of Parliament, Nasreddine Moghazi, after a [program](#) was aired in late August in which Okacha was highly critical of Morsi. His trial opened on 1 September.

A court ruled on 20 October that the TV station, ordered off the air in August, could resume broadcasting, the French news agency Agence France-Presse reported.

Okacha is also charged with inciting the president's assassination and the government's overthrow. His trial on these charges is due to open on 7 November. He was arrested on 30 September for outstanding petty offences and released the next day.

When he went to a police station to ascertain his judicial status, he was told he had been given two six-month sentences in his absence for issuing bad cheques and two of one month each for stealing electrical power.

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