

## **Press Legal Regime in Iran: Flexibility and Adaptability with New Communication Technologies**

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that Iran needs to review and reform its press legal regime with much greater consideration for new technologies in today's information society arena. A free press is one of the few, and possibly the only, means to force the government to be held accountable for its actions. The history of press law in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) dates back to the creation of the first legislation (1930) in this country. Today, with the innovative advances in communication and the needs of "netizens" (a term for citizens who use networks for communication), the IRI Press Law does not have sufficient flexibility with international documents or reflect the impact of new technologies regarding the freedom of expression. Therefore, many of the questions in this era remain unanswered.

**Keywords:** Iran, Internet, Press Law, IRI Constitution, Press Supervisory Board.

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## **1. Introduction**

As with other Muslim countries, the issues of press freedom in Iran attract criticism, especially for their limitation or control by the State (Koprowski, 2011; Souaiaia, 2007). (This comparison has been done because mostly the way governments treat the freedom of press in Muslim countries including Iran is the same). The fight for freedom of the press in Iran is full of challenges and mirrors human rights struggles in other developing countries (Izanloo, 2018). (This comparison has been done because mostly the way governments treat the freedom of press in Muslim countries including Iran is the same). Media freedom, and especially freedom of the press as a category of freedom of information, has been recognised as one of the most fundamental freedoms of human beings (Sussman, 2000). An efficient press legal regime in which Iran has been faced with challenges - is a means through which citizens and groups in a society can voice their interests, mediate their differences and exercise major rights and obligations (Manoochehr, 2013). Media law is one branch of the law that develops rapidly, and all countries including Iran must try to adapt their local laws and regulations to the revolution of modern and new communication technology. Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) Press Law dates back to the creation of the first legislation (1930) in Iran (Esmaeeli, 2018). The established regulatory structures and present Press Law of IRI often violate and fail to cope with the new revolution of information (Tarock, 2010). In fact, this is one reason the authors believe that the IRI Press Law must be reformed and revised.

Under Iranian Law (including the IRI Press Law), freedom of press is not adequately protected (Merat, 1999). There is no explicit provision, except 1(3), about electronic newspapers, their activities in the virtual era and the obligations of their editors. The courts usually treat the writers and editors of newspapers and sites under the notion of “disturbing public thoughts”, which is very abstract. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the Association of Iranian Journalists, which can be useful and helpful for media supervision and at the same time very cheap, priceless and influential, have no position in IRI media legislation (Gasiorowski, 2000). In addition, the IRI Press Law ignores the independence of the press (Tarock, 2010). Moreover, the IRI Press Law also contains some ambiguous terms and conditions and has insufficient adaptability and flexibility with international instruments and new communication technologies. The legal position of electronic media, including electronic newspapers and magazines, is not clearly stated. Thus,

the role of the Press Supervisory Board (PSB) is a subject that also needs to be explained.

Today's world, especially with the birth of the Internet and satellites, has witnessed a revolution of electronic media. Governments around the world including Iran find it difficult to hide facts, including financial and political corruptions and administrative injustices, from their citizens, as technology has made it nearly impossible to censor what has been disseminated via the Internet (Esmaeeli,2007). Moreover, information is the oxygen of democracy, and greater transparency can be achieved through a general right of access to official information - a freedom of information law (Abu Bakar Munir and Siti Hajar Mohd. Yasin,2010) Therefore, it is not possible to silence people on the Internet because there are many websites and many avenues for people to voice their opinions (Avasadanond,2010). We have to approve the idea that censorship with the existence of new communication devices cannot be the answer to public needs. At the present time (2011), the basic instrument of most democratic movements of the people throughout the world - including Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt as well as other parts of the world - is the Internet and other modern communication technologies (Tessler and Gao, 2005). Communication science with its rapid changes requires up-to-date, unambiguous, transparent and useful legislation. In this paper, we will argue that the IRI Press Law, in some cases, has no flexibility and coordination with new communication technologies and international documents.

## **2.The Press Law from a Constitutional Perspective**

The IRI Constitution in Article 3(2) states that "raising the level of public awareness in all areas, through the proper use of the press, mass media, and other means; is the duty of the government". In the same Article 3(6), it says that "the government must do its best to remove the elimination of all forms of despotism and autocracy and all attempts to monopolize power". The first guarantee, found in Article (175) on freedom of expression and government control, states that (1) the freedom of expression and dissemination of thoughts in the Radio and Television of the IRI must be kept in keeping with the Islamic criteria and the best interests of the country; (2) the appointment and dismissal of the head of the Radio and Television of the IRI rests with the leader. A council consisting of two representatives each of the President, the head of the judiciary branch, and the Islamic Consultative Assembly shall supervise the functioning of this organisation; and (3) the

policies and the manner of managing the organisation and its supervision will be determined by law.

It can be clearly seen that according to the Constitution, radio and television are exclusively owned and run by the government. Additionally, as stipulated by the Press Law, all newspapers and other publications may operate only under the supervision of the government. Violators under the Press Law will be tried in special courts established for such seditions including libel (*Iftera*), publishing false news, propagating against the authority or ruling body, jeopardising national security and insulting the leader. This has even led to an independent newspaper, which rarely can be found, adopting a policy of self-censorship so as not to face accusations as ‘accomplices of aliens’, and hence being closed down by the government. Meanwhile, Article 24 of the Constitution of the IRI (1979), establishing the right to freedom of expression, qualifies that right by wide-ranging restrictions on the exercise of press freedom:

" Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law". Here, we see that what is pointed out in the Constitution are liberties and exceptions to those liberties - not forbidden acts (Ghamami,2017) - while what is mentioned in Article (2) of Press Law is forbidden. The Article says the following constitute the objectives of the press in the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- a.To enlighten public opinion and increase the level of their knowledge on one or several topics mentioned in Article ;(1)
- b.To advance the objectives outlined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic;
- c.To endeavour to negate the drawing up of false and divisive lines or pitting different groups of the community against each other by practices, such as dividing people by race, language, customs, local traditions, etc;.
- d.To campaign against manifestations of imperialistic culture (such as extravagance, dissipation, debauchery, love of luxury, spread of morally corrupt practices, etc.) and to propagate and promote genuine Islamic culture and sound ethical principles; and
- e.To preserve and strengthen the policy of "neither East nor West ."

The above objectives seem to be the duty of the government and are beyond the strength and power of the press. At the same time, dictating predetermined tasks for the press is not according to the principles of the IRI constitution

(Ghamami,2017). Each publication should enforce at least one of the above goals, and such goals must in no way be in conflict with the other goals specified above or with the principles of the Islamic Republic.

Article 168 of the constitution sets special conditions for the way in which press offenses are to be dealt with, stating that "political and press offences will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury in courts of justice...". The law is open to broad interpretation and arbitrary application in its sweeping prohibition of "discourse harmful to the principles of Islam" or to "the public interest". Moreover, under the notion of these principles, the government can be empowered to take more restrictive actions against freedom of information. The authors are of the opinion that having freedom of information legislation is not only an ideal but also a necessity for Iran. Furthermore, any legislation must be free from ambiguity. While, on the one hand, the terms of the Iran Press Law provide little meaningful guidance to journalists and editors, they provide officials with ample opportunity to censor, restrict, and find offences on the other hand.

The Assembly or Press Supervisory Board (PSB) must investigate complaints and provide satisfactory responses. In cases where the complaint relates to the executive or the judiciary, the Assembly must demand proper investigation of the matter and an adequate explanation from the subject of the complaint and announce the results within a reasonable time. In cases where the subject of the complaint is of public interest, the reply must be made publicly. Article (113) concerns the president's duties, including "---- His responsibility for implementing the Constitution ----" and, pursuant to article (121), he swears to "----- devote all my capacities and abilities to the fulfillment of the responsibilities that I have assumed; that I will dedicate myself to the service of the people, the honor of the country, the propagation of religion and morality, and the support of truth and justice, refraining from every kind of arbitrary behavior; that I will protect the freedom and dignity of all citizens and the rights that the Constitution has accorded the people ----." These are among the other guarantees for press protection in the area of freedom of speech.

### **3.The IRI Press Law and Freedom of Expression**

With satellites, the Internet, mobile phones and other social media today, it is more difficult to keep anything a secret, as technology has helped in the diffusion of news to anyone and anywhere as long as they have the right

equipment to access it (Avasadanond,2010). The IRI Press Law is now the main legislation by which all legal claims are to be solved, but it has some inadequacies, the biggest of which is lack of implementation. Article (2) and parts of Article (6) of the Iran Press Law forbid publishing anything criticising Constitution Principles. This means to confine and limit any criticism of the law. Article 4 declares that "no official or nonofficial authority has the right to exert pressure on the press for the publication of any material or article, or to attempt to censor or control the press." At this time, Article 6 forbids, among other things, publishing material that "creates divisions among the different strata of society", or "harms the bases of the Islamic Republic". Such sweeping language is open to abuse repetition. A case in this regard is the press court of Kabudvand. Under the notion of "creates divisions among the different strata of society", he was convicted by the Court of Sanandej (a province in the west of Iran with primarily Kurdish people) Branch 76 in 2010 and sentenced to 1 year of imprisonment, a 5-year bar from pursuing his profession, and voiding of his professional licence.

The Press Law forbids censorship while, at the same time, broadly establishing a basis for the harsh punishment of content deemed inappropriate. Additionally, on December 31, 2002, the government issued the "Decree on the Constitution of the Committee in charge of Determination of Unauthorized Websites" (Official Gazette no:16877) stating that, "To safeguard the Islamic and national culture, a committee comprising the representatives of the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Broadcasting, the Cultural Revolution High Council, and Islamic Propagation Organization shall be set up by the Ministry of Information to determine and notify to the Ministry of ICT the criteria respecting unauthorized websites". Websites reported to the Ministry of ICT by the committee are added to the list of the websites that were subject to censorship. The government has a monopoly on all Access Service Points used in the country. Like other media in Iran, the Internet is subject to a monopoly by the government. The following table (1) shows the Internet growth and population statistics in Iran.

**Table (1): Internet Growth and Population Statistics in Iran**

Year	Users	Population	% Pop	Usage Source
2000	250,000	69,442,905	3.8 %	ITU
2002	5,500,000	69,442,905	7.5 %	ITU
2005	7,500,000	69,442,905	10.8 %	ITU
2008	23,000,000	65,875,223	34.9 %	ITU
2009	23,200,000	66,429,289	48.5 %	IWS
2010	33,200,000	76,923,300	43.2 %	IWS

(Source: [www.internetworldstats.com/me/ir.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ir.htm))

As shown in the above table, the public need for Internet use is very high; therefore, the government must apply a mechanism to provide additional opportunities for the public to use new communicative systems and media rather than imposing restrictions on their use. Iran makes use of social networks such as YouTube and Facebook, but they are not free and are filtered.

There are also some restrictions and obligations for Internet Service Providers (ISPs). All ISPs must install and use filtering systems to “block access to forbidden immoral and political websites and other undesirable sites” and record the activities of users to provide to the Ministry of ICT. Any individual applying for an ISP license must be an Iranian citizen, practically committed to the Constitution, a believer of one of the country’s officially accepted religions, and must not be a member of an anti-revolutionary or illegal group. For example, after the movements of the people in Iran which were against the result of the presidential election in 2009, most of the sites such as Kalameh were blocked under the notion of “anti revolutionary or illegal groups”. Internet service providers may not without a license use any codes for the exchange of information or offer any extra services (such as Voice over Internet Provider or IP). Individuals applying to run a social networking site (for example. the CoffeeNet) must be married. These are general rules, but at the same time, they create some restrictions for the free circulation of information.

Censorship of the Internet in Iran includes two layers. The first layer applies to the Application Service Provider (ASP) level on which the Telecommunication Company has a monopoly. As for the second layer of censorship, the government obliges all providers including Internet Connection Providers (ICPs) and ISPs (which obtain bandwidth from the government) to use censoring and filtering software. They are also required,

when notified by the government, to add new websites to their censor list on a continuous basis. Occasionally, CDs containing the list of new websites and suspicious ports to be filtered and blocked are sent to all ISPs and ICPs.

Free media and press is not a luxury; it is at the core of equitable development. The media can expose corruption and keeps a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government actions. The media lets people voice diverse opinions on governance and reform, and helps build public consensus to bring about change (Sutton,2003). Having such press not only helps government to strengthen its democratic pillars, but it is also essential for good governance in which both people and the government can benefit. Therefore, Iran's government should not consider that easy access to online media and press will be threatening to the political and economic status. It must bear in mind that without free circulation of information, the citizens cannot participate in the decision-making processes of the country. Encouragement and improvement of the NGOs for supervising the functions of the media is something that can help governments and judicial powers. In some countries, these civil and professional NGOs have the right to appeal to the courts (Esmaeeli,2007). However, the IRI Press Law never takes a position on this critical matter.

Article 34 of the Press Law requires that "press offenses should be prosecuted in a general court before a specially constituted press jury". At the same time, Article (168) of the IRI Constitution declares that "political and press offenses will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice. The manner of the selection of the jury, its powers, and the definition of political offenses, will be determined by law in accordance with the Islamic criteria". With the ignorance of those who are the members of the jury and how they are chosen, the jury, after hearing a case, is empowered to make recommendations to the judge in two areas: on the guilt or innocence of the defendant and, if recommending a conviction, on the severity of the penalty to be imposed. The jury's advice is not binding to the court in either regard. Some legal commentators have seen a contradiction in the role of the press jury, which was created as a safeguard for press freedom but possesses only an advisory capacity (Hashemi,2019). It is unclear from the law whether the press jury must also be convened for the appeal hearing.

The powers of the Press Supervisory Board are not clearly defined in the Press Law. A debate has arisen over whether the board's powers to order the closure of newspapers (Article 27 of the Press Law) contravenes the



provisions of Article 168 of the Constitution, as it concerns the function of press courts. Iranian legal scholars have argued that the constitutional provision should take precedence and have called for the revision of the Press Law to do away with any ambiguity regarding the need for all proceedings against the press to be dealt with "openly... in courts of justice" rather than through the administrative channel of the press board. Impartial, transparent judicial control over the regulation of constitutional freedoms, such as freedom of the press, would be more likely to result in such freedoms being upheld in practice. Moreover, the lack of integrity in applying the legal rules and regulations is a serious problem for the IRI Press Law. Considering an action in one media as an offense and in another media as a lawful one (Esmaeeli,2007) is a sign of the lack of integrity. The final point of concern is the investigation of some of the press cases by the Revolutionary Court or Special Court for the Clergies. As these are exceptional courts, the rights of defendants may be ignored, which seems to be against the articles of the Constitution.

#### **4.The IRI Press Law and International Documents**

The more numerous and varied the press and media are, the more information citizens will receive (Jackson and Stanfield,2004). According to UNESCO (2006), there are three universal criteria for a successful Public Service Broadcasting ("PSB") regardless of the country: (It has been brought here only as a report. Services whose governing boards and structures are independent of government and commercial interests;

1.Services with guaranteed funding that are adequate to serve the needs and interests of the public and to promote the free flow of information and ideas; and

2.Services that are directly held accountable to the public.

The right to freedom of speech and expression is provided in international human rights law. In the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "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". Even the Charter of the United Nations refers to justice among the nations and respect for fundamental freedoms in Article 1(3), which includes "...promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion...".

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Iran in 1975, reads in part:

- Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference;
- Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of choice .

The ICCPR requires that restrictions on expression "will only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals"(Article 19 (3)). The practice of the Iranian government clearly exceeds these narrowly drawn limits on the restrictions of freedom of expression in which, for instance, national security grounds are permissible only in serious instances of political or military threat to the entire nation (Nowak 1993).

From another viewpoint, the IRI Civil Code (1931) in Article (9) states that "Treaty stipulations which have been, in accordance with the Constitutional Law, concluded between the Iranian Government and other government, shall have the force of law". Thus, the provisions of this covenant are a part of Iranian local legislation and must be implemented and respected. Article 14(1) of the ICCPR further provides that "in the determination...of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law." In cases where rights such as freedom of expression are at stake, administrative actions such as newspaper closures should be subject to immediate appeal to an independent judicial authority, in keeping with the obligation of states under Article 2(3) of the ICCPR to encourage judicial remedies to civil and political rights violations. In Iran, the Supervisory Press Board, dominated by members of the executive branch of government, is neither independent nor impartial, and its rulings are not subject to judicial review. Moreover, in practice, the Supervisory Press Board exceeds the powers assigned to it by domestic law. Because there is no right to appeal an administrative decision and because of the law's catch-all restrictions on the freedom of expression, the government falls short of its obligation under Article 2 (3)(a) of the ICCPR to provide an effective remedy to those whose right to freedom of expression is violated.

### **5. Freedom of Expression, the IRI Press Law and the Internet**

Today, in an information society in which the printed press is to be replaced by the electronic press, cyber literacy of the public is an essential component that must be part of government policy. In Iran, where all rules and regulations must be made according to Islamic law, restrictions in human relationships through any media system can be considered a violation of human rights. In other words, one of the essential interests in Islamic law is honour (Elsaidi,2011) and respecting human dignity. Freedom of opinion in Islam is closely related to the freedom to criticise and to be open to criticism. Positive Islamic law, as revealed through the Quran and Sunna (prophet's conducts), highly regulates religious rituals and private matters.

Iran has a population of nearly 75 million with approximately 56% of Iranians under the age of 25. This demonstrates the reality that although Iran is very ancient, the country is a nation of young people who mostly use the Internet. For a multiplicity of purposes, the government controls the Internet in terms of speed and access. While the Internet in Iran has become an influential tool for accessing information and self expression for the younger community, with the country occupying the world's fourth largest position among the large nations of bloggers (with approximately 60,000 Persian blogs), Iran is still one of the toughest and strictest states regarding Internet censorship. The Telecommunication Company of Iran (ICT) dominates the telecommunications industry in the country, with its subsidiaries serving customers in the Internet, broadband and domain names areas, ("Ministry of Information and Communications Technology | Iran Data Portal",2023) which ironically is against the freedom of speech and expression mentioned in the Constitution .

In 1993, Iran became the second-ranked country in the Middle East to be connected to the Internet ("Ministry of Information and Communications Technology | Iran Data Portal",2023). However, in an age when Internet speed is considered one of the significant factors in evaluating the development rate of any country, Iran sadly ranks 181st among 185 countries of the world (see Table 2). In spite of this, Iran is still among the top five countries, which have had a growth rate of over 20% and the highest level of development in telecommunication, and is also proud to have been awarded the UNESCO special certification for providing telecommunication services to rural areas ("Ministry of Information and Communications Technology |

Iran Data Portal”,2023). Meanwhile, regarding the freedom of speech and expression and easy access to information through the Internet, there are no adequate and specific rules and regulations in Iran (Meftah,2019). The only legislation in this regard is a by-law, which has been ratified by the executive power that seems to be outside its area of legal authority. The government has had a dual policy with respect to the Internet. On the one hand, the Government has tried to promote Internet use through the development of required infrastructure, but on the other hand, has sought to control the Internet through continuous censorship of websites and other new communicative technologies. (All the above highlighted parts seem to be critical, as they criticise the existing situation of the freedom of press in Iran).

**Table (2): Iran’s position in terms of the Internet speed among 185 countries in the world**

175	Angola	0.82 mbs
176	Yemen	0.80 mbs
177	Suriname	0.78 mbs
178	Iraq	0.77 mbs
179	Bangladesh	0.76 mbs
180	Gabon	0.65 mbs
181	Islamic Republic of Iran	0.63 mbs
182	Vanuatu	0.62 mbs
183	Cameroon	0.55 mbs
184	Bolivia	0.54 mbs
185	Lebanon	0.47 mbs

(Source: Asreiran, Electronic newspaper: <http://www.Asreiran.com>)

The table above shows the catastrophic and ironic position of Iran in terms of Internet speed among the countries throughout the world. This happens despite the fact that, through improving Internet speed, the government will open the door for the use of new communicative technologies into the dark corners of the governmental operations and help disinfect the government from corruption, thereby helping to hold the government accountable for its action (Abu Bakar Munir and Siti Hajar Mohd. Yasin,2010).

Another illustration of the inadequacy of Iran Press Law provisions to protect freedom of the press is found in the report of Reporters without Borders. In 2009, Reporters without Borders (“RWB”) ranked Iran 172nd out of 175 countries for press freedom, with only Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea ranked lower—places where the media is so suppressed that it is non-existent .

The Press Law of 1986, which was amended in 2000 under Article 1(3), have brought electronic publications under the category of this Law; this is the principal instrument for regulating online media in Iran and frames the boundaries of permissible speech in the virtual world. This legislation is unusual because it not only describes restricted speech but also lays out normative objectives for the press, who are required to “propagate and promote genuine Islamic culture and sound ethical principles”.

The Press Law outlines broad restrictions on speech, including prohibitions on “promoting subjects that might damage the foundation of the Islamic Republic ... offending the Leader of the Revolution ... or quoting articles from the deviant press, parties or groups that oppose Islam (inside and outside the country) in such a manner as to propagate such ideas... or encouraging and instigating individuals and groups to act against the security, dignity and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Other provisions prohibit insulting Islam or senior religious authorities. In April 2009, another amendment to the Press Law was passed by the Iranian parliament that could facilitate the application of the Press Law to online sources of content. The 2009 amendment stipulates that “the rules stated in this Press Law apply to domestic news sites and domestic websites and set out their rights, responsibilities, legal protection, crimes, punishments, judicial authority and procedure for hearings.” Given the ambiguous wording of the April 2009 amendment to the Press Law, critics say that personal websites and blogs may also fall within the new definition, allowing greater scope for inhibiting the freedom of expression and filtering on the Internet (Table 3). The government claims that the law now applies to all “internet publications.” In this way, all online media sources would also be subject to the regulatory authority of the Press Supervisory Board under the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (MICG), which has the power to revoke licenses, ban publications, and refer complaints to a special Press Court. Both supporters and critics of the 2009 amendment to the Press Law agree that implementing these new provisions is beyond the capacity of current regulatory agencies. For the implementation of these new provisions, it must be noted that the limits to the freedom of press in Iran are grounded in the Constitution, and speech restrictions extend over a broad range of topics including religion, immorality, social harmony, legal inadequacies, and politics.

**Table (3): Internet Filtering in Iran**

Filtering	No Evidence	Suspected	Selective	Substantial	Pervasive
Political					•
Social					•
Conflict/Security				•	
Internet Tool					•
Other Factors	Low	Medium	High	Not Applicable	
Transparency		•			
Consistency			•		

(Source: [opennet.net/research/profiles/iran](http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iran))

The table above shows filtering in Iran, which is pervasive in the areas of political, social and Internet issues, which in itself makes barriers to the free circulation of information. At the present time, transparency and consistency are also not in a satisfactory position. However, the above table shows that policies that discourage the freedom of information facilitate greater participation in a civil society.

## 6. Conclusion

The press should be clearly allowed to do its job and report on the activities of the government without fear of job loss, injury or imprisonment. An up-to-date and active media will provide people with more information to become informed citizens. The IRI Press Law dates back to the creation of the first legislation in the country, demonstrating that Iran historically has a rich legislative system toward freedom of speech. The present Press Law of IRI suffers from some inadequacies, which must be addressed. If we consider liberty as obedient to logic and respectful to the law, (Naser,2019) then we can apply this to the freedom of speech (Janidi,2013). The Press Law in Iran must equip itself with logic and be updated. Blogs and Internet websites are great venues for people to express themselves, but insofar as they are unregulated and can incite violence, hatred and chaos when they deal with topics which are extremely sensitive in nature, the laws of the nation must

equip itself with efficient and updated rules and regulations. As the IRI Fifth Developing Program is about to start, it is necessary to compile a plenary and general act for the media in general and not just for the press. Attention to virtual media and the press in this age of information revolution is another essential matter. Professional independence of the press must be respected, and the government monopoly on IRIB must be regulated. All the ambiguities in the current legislation must be solved, the civil society and public opinion must be respected, and there should be defined and clear regulations for censorship. The duties and decisions of jury in the Press Court must be defined clearly. Finally, the role of international documents, NGOs, and the IRI Constitution in protecting the freedom of speech must not be ignore.

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