

ICNL LLC

LET'S KEEP ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON OUR AGENDA

EVENT: [BREAD&NET](#)
FULL SESSION: [لنضع مواكبة الذكاء الاصطناعي على أجندتنا - YouTube](#)
DATE AND TIME: [WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH 2021](#)

About Bread & Net

Bread&Net is an annual unconference that promotes and defends digital rights across Arabic speaking countries. Hosted by [SMEX](#), Bread&Net is a platform built for and sustained by hundreds of activists, technologists, journalists, researchers, lawyers, academics, entrepreneurs, and human rights defenders from around the world, with a particular focus on digital rights and digital freedoms in Arabic-speaking countries.

BREAD& NET 2021

The Arabic-speaking region faces both dramatic challenges and promising opportunities at the intersection of technology, democracy, and human rights. Communities living in the region have struggled to protect their freedoms and privacy while coping with rampant violations of their human rights, often amid larger political and economic instability. Nonetheless, the digital space remains invaluable for grassroots organizing to dismantle oppressive systems, expressing dissent, and producing knowledge.

In Palestine, we saw tech companies and the Israeli occupation collude to censor Palestinian voices. In the Gulf region, states are increasing their investments in digital economies and spy-tech, fortifying their surveillance infrastructure. At the same time, big tech companies are expanding their collaboration with these authoritarian regimes. In Syria, documentation uploaded online has played a crucial role in the pursuit of accountability for crimes against humanity. In the post Covid-19 reality, privacy concerns continue to be on the rise. Activists and civil society organizations have struggled to hold Big Tech accountable for the impact of their business models and policies on freedoms, both online and in real life. Nonetheless, collaboration and coalition-building in the civic sphere has created a powerful front of defense against digital threats to democracy and human rights. The Bread&Net themes listed below seek to capture the challenges we're facing, build on the progress we've made, and discuss where we go next.

About the Workshop:

AI is developing rapidly and there are numerous examples from the MENA region of AI being used to undermine online freedoms. Qatar and Kuwait, use the AI-based “Netsweeper” application to scan and block LGBTQIA content. Earlier this year, when Palestinian activists took to the social media platforms in the wake of the Sheikh Jarrah protests, social media’s AI systems deleted images of protests, temporarily locked hundreds of accounts, and blocked videos and key hashtags. It is crucial for civil society to engage in the development of AI strategies, policies, and regulations to reverse course on AI being used to undermine online freedoms.

One important opportunity for civil society is participating in the development, governance, and implementation of national AI strategies to ensure human rights are adequately protected. Many countries, including several in the MENA region have developed or are in the process of developing national strategies on AI. These strategies often provide a roadmap for the regulation of algorithm-driven processes and how AI’s impact on people’s lives. However, relatively few national strategies adequately address the human rights impacts of AI or include meaningful consultation with civil society.

Through this interactive workshop, we highlighted several examples of how civil society have engaged in the development of these national strategies in other countries, examine the recent process of drafting a national AI strategy in Jordan, and identify a roadmap for future civil society engagement on national AI strategies in the MENA region.

Workshop Outcome:

The aim of the workshop was to develop participants awareness of the importance of civil society’s involvement in the development, governance, and implementation of national AI strategies. It equipped participants with information, resources, and tools that can help inform their participation in the development of these national AI strategies. Below is an overview of the main points covered during the session:

DEFINITION OF AI: “a science and a set of computational technologies that are inspired by—but typically operate quite differently from—the ways people use their nervous systems and bodies to sense, learn, reason, and take action.” as defined in [Stanford University report](#).

WHY CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD CARE ABOUT AI

1. AI has several implications on human rights.
2. Because human rights are “indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated,” AI affects every human right and its implications may lead to harm to a wide range of human rights.

3. Implementing human rights can help identify and anticipate some of AI's worst social harms and guide those developing technical and policy safeguards to promote positive uses.

EXAMPLES OF THE MAIN AREAS WHERE THE RISKS AND HARMS OF AI:

- **Non-discrimination and equality**

E.g. In China, Social Credit System is being developed to collect data on Chinese citizens. The System scores citizens according to the social trustworthiness, as defined by the government. Depending on the scores, citizens may face, among others, shaming by displaying their faces on large screens in public places or blacklisting from booking trains or flights.



- **Freedom of expression**

○ *E.g. Manipulation of users' experiences on platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, has increased the spread of hate speech and false news and has resulted in filtering unpopular opinions and view expressed on these platforms.*

- **Right to privacy**

- *The right to privacy is found in Article 12 of the Universal Declaration, Article 17 of the ICCPR.*
- *The right to privacy is increasingly disregarded as a result of algorithmic surveillance. When data is collected and analyzed, there is a chance that this process leads to reveal personal information about users. The implications of this are exacerbated when revealed information pertains to, for example, individuals living under repressive regimes.*

- **Political participation**

- *The rights around political participation are referenced in, for example, the right to self-determination and the right to equal participation in political and public affairs in the ICCPR.*
- *AI is being designed to mimic human behavior, and so detecting online bots used to, for example, spread disinformation in political discourse is becoming more difficult. This may have an adverse impact on democracy.*

WHAT ARE GOVERNMENTS DOING ABOUT IT?

Several MENA countries have adopted national AI strategies (Algeria, Jordan, Qatar, UAE, Egypt) and several are currently developing AI strategies (Morocco, Oman, Bahrain) or have established entities to develop and execute a strategy (KSA, Tunisia). These strategies often provide a roadmap for the regulation of algorithm-driven processes and AI's impact on people's lives. However, relatively few national strategies adequately address the human rights impacts of AI or include meaningful consultation with civil society.



- *Some governments are adopting AI policies and strategies that aim at addressing AI deployment and use.*

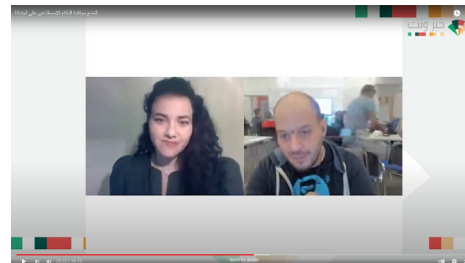
NEXT STEPS:

- Civil Society should work closely with the Government and participate in the development and adoption of AI strategies to consider human rights implications.
- Monitor human rights violations in adopted AI strategies.

Questions and Answers

You were previously involved with the development of Jordan's AI strategy. What was the purpose and objective of this strategy and how will it be used?

JOSA: I am aware that the Jordanian, experience may not be applicable to other Arab countries. The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship is the responsible ministry for developing AI strategies and policies. The MoDEE uses e-consultation with the public by presenting the draft law/strategy/policy/others on their website to receive feedback from individuals and civil society organizations. Part of JOSA's work involves commenting on and analyzing IT policies and strategies. Recently, JOSA have been working with the MoDEE on a series of policies. In 2020, the development of a national AI policy was proposed. The policy certainly includes economic incentives that would encourage investments in this field. However, given JOSA's scope of work, we were interested in the adoption of a human rights' element in the AI policy. . That said, the policy refers to the negative impact of AI on freedoms, rights, and dignity, but does not incorporate a human rights approach or address in detail human rights repercussions. Rather, it makes reference to the creation of a national committee that would work on developing a code of ethics that would tackle these issues. JOSA proposed that representatives of



ICNL report https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DataSociety_Governing_Artificial_Intelligence_Upholding_Human_Rights.pdf
ECNL report <https://www.icnl.org/post/report/being-ai-ware-incorporating-civil-society-into-national-strategies-on-artificial-intelligence>
JOSA Mapping <https://www.josa.ngo/publications/11/mapping-ai-in-the-mena-region>

civil society, academia, and the private sector sit on the committee along with government representatives. It also suggested that the participation of human rights activists and IT experts and professionals be also encouraged. The code of ethics is currently being developed and is expected to be finalized within the coming few months.

JOSA organized several workshops with the MoDEE which aim at raising awareness about the challenges and threats facing CSOs, activists and AI experts, etc., they also aimed at finding solutions which may, in turn, be included in the code of ethics.

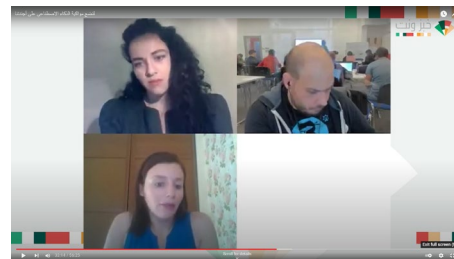
The experience thus far has been positive, and the draft code will soon be open for public consultation. This is an opportunity for CSOs and individuals to participate.

What steps can ensure that the use of AI by the government and the public sector does not undermine human rights?

JOSA: To be honest, we faced some challenges in involving CSOs in the process. This is namely due to the lack of capacity of Jordanian CSOs with respect to AI matters the formulation of policies that address use of technology.

However, I am optimistic that the approval of the e-participation system in Jordan will present a tool and an opportunity for the public and CSOs to participate in any policy-making.

What is the best way to ensure that the full range of relevant stakeholders are engaged in the governance and oversight of the NAS and its implementation and human rights is adequately addressed through emerging AI strategies, regulations, and policies?



ICNL: One important opportunity for civil society is participating in the development, governance, and implementation of national AI strategies.

AI strategy should be designed and developed to operate in ways that is compliant with human rights standards, including civic freedoms, at every stage of the strategy design, development, assessment, auditing, and implementation. To achieve that, AI strategy need to operate within a legally framed institutional space (national, regional, international), that includes oversight and enforcement.

Stakeholders must foster awareness about AI and possible impacts on human rights among the public and civil society, including product developers and policymakers. States should work to promote access to basic knowledge of AI systems for all.

UN human rights investigators and special rapporteurs should continue researching and publicizing the human rights impacts resulting from AI systems.

ICNL report https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DataSociety_Governing_Artificial_Intelligence_Upholding_Human_Rights.pdf
ECNL report <https://www.icnl.org/post/report/being-ai-ware-incorporating-civil-society-into-national-strategies-on-artificial-intelligence>
JOSA Mapping <https://www.josa.ngo/publications/11/mapping-ai-in-the-mena-region>

UN officials and participating governments should evaluate whether existing UN mechanisms for international rights monitoring, accountability, and redress are adequate to respond to AI and other rapidly emerging technologies. UN leadership should also assume a central role in international technology debates by promoting shared global values based on fundamental rights and human dignity.

Can you share a few good examples of including civil society and addressing human rights through AI strategies?

ICNL:

- 2017 Global Symposium on Artificial Intelligence and Inclusion in Brazil highlighted the need to foster diverse voices in AI research, development, policymaking, and advocacy.
- The Digital Asia Hub in Hong Kong has been leading AI discussions in the Asia-Pacific and provides a model of research and engagement on topics important for the region.
- The WEF is continuing its council to address the future of human rights and developing a project on preparing civil society to respond to the challenges of digital and emerging technologies such as AI.

Based on the Mapping, which MENA countries seemed to involve CSOs the most? How?

JOSA: Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon and Palestine.

Where do you think we will be in 10 years if CSOs are not involved?

JOSA: Non-democratic countries will be forcing strategies on the public, in addition to the greed of the Private Sector which will not take into consideration Human Rights and Freedoms. CSOs involvement is essential.