

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299

www.hrw.org

Shutting Out the Critics

Restrictive Laws Used to Repress Civil Society in Jordan

Jordan has long sought to present itself as a country of political reform. The king and his diplomatic representatives make polished presentations when visiting Western capitals about how they are moving forward with legislative and policy changes to bring about increased freedoms and the rule of law. The reality is vastly different. In *Shutting Out the Critics*, Human Rights Watch provides a detailed examination of the Jordanian government's restrictions on the rights to freedom of assembly and association and the impact of these restrictions on the freedom of Jordanians to organize independent organizations or to protest publicly.

In 2007, the Jordanian cabinet sought to impose new restrictions on NGOs through a proposed new law, which is a significant setback to the rights of Jordanians to associate freely. Under the proposed legislation, the government is to be the sole arbiter of which NGOs are allowed to exist and what they are allowed to do, depriving them of any meaningful independence.

Jordanians are even less free to publicly assemble. New restrictions introduced in 2004 mean that a governor must now approve demonstrations or public meetings in advance; most such requests are denied, without any reason being given, especially for groups perceived, however broadly, as an opposition group.

Jordan's major donors, the United States and the European Union, have claimed that an important part of their objective in Jordan is to encourage the development of civil society. Sadly, they appear to have achieved little in return for over US\$600 million in aid to Jordan in 2006 to stop its regression on respect for the rights to assembly and association.

Riot police facing protesters opposing a new political parties law in Amman on May 2, 2007. Amman's governor earlier denied permission for a larger demonstration by 28 opposition parties.

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