

## **Re: Internet Disruption in Duraz**

Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Alamer

*Chairman of the Board, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority*

Mr. Kamal Ahmed

*Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications*

22 August 2016

Your Excellencies,

We are writing with regard to the ongoing nightly internet disruptions in the village of Duraz. Every night since June 23, 2016, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have shut down fixed line and mobile internet access from about 7pm until 1am in Duraz. While the government has been silent about the ongoing disruption, ISPs have claimed that the disruption is a result of technical issues. However, a [technical study by Bahrain Watch](#)<sup>1</sup> analyzed the disruption, and found it to be the result of deliberate actions by ISPs.

Specifically, the Bahrain Watch investigation found that ISPs are shutting down 3G and 4G mobile base stations in Duraz, and are configuring 2G base stations to send messages indicating that mobile data is not supported. On fixed line connections, ISPs are introducing astronomical levels of latency and packet loss (around 90%) into connections of people located in Duraz, making the internet unusable for most online activities.

Since the shutdown is coordinated at the same time across different ISPs, we suspect the internet disruption may be the result of a Service Restriction Order from the government. The international community considers such government interference with internet connectivity to be an unacceptable restriction on human rights, as per a [resolution](#)<sup>2</sup> passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2016. The resolution states, in relevant part, that the UN “condemns unequivocally measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information online in violation of international human rights law and calls on all States to refrain from and cease such measures.”

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<sup>1</sup> Bahrain Watch, “Time for some Internet Problems in Duraz”: Bahraini ISPs Impose Internet Curfew in Protest Village (August 2016) <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2016/08/03/bahrain-internet-curfew/>

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Council, The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet (June 2016) [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/32/L.20](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/32/L.20)

Such disruptions, which are popularly called internet shutdowns, have also been condemned by technology associations. The Global Network Initiative and the Telecommunications Industry Dialogue -- which together include major telcos such as AT&T, Orange, and Vodafone, and companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Facebook -- issued a joint statement in July 2016 that strongly pushes back against disruptions. The statement reads: "Government-mandated disruptions of communications networks, network services (such as SMS), or internet services (such as social media, search engines, or news sites) can **undermine security and public safety**, threaten free expression, restrict access to vital emergency, payment and health services, and disrupt contact with family members and friends." (Emphasis added.) Importantly, the statement also underscores the impact that disruptions have upon "a broad range of economic activity."<sup>3</sup>

The internet disruption in Duraz prevents people in the village from communicating with those on the outside. Not only does the disruption target protesters, but it also affects ordinary citizens, who may be unable to gather crucial information about how to protect themselves, or contact emergency services.

We, the undersigned organizations from around the world, urgently and humbly request that the government of Bahrain:

- Cancels any Service Restriction Order responsible for the internet disruption in Duraz, which has continued every night for more than fifty days, and has no apparent basis in national security or public safety;
- Commits to transparency regarding Service Restriction Orders, in line with international principles, by publishing information about existing and prior orders;
- Refrains from issuing internet shutdowns in the future;
- Respects the right of all Bahrainis to seek, receive, and impart information; and
- Ensures that all citizens of Bahrain have equal access to the internet and that internet shutdowns are not used as a policy of collective punishment against areas involved in protest, or perceived to be opposed to the government.

We are available to speak to you about this issue at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

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Access Now, [deji@accessnow.org](mailto:deji@accessnow.org)

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<sup>3</sup> *Global Network Initiative and Telecommunications Industry Dialogue Joint Statement on Network and Service Shutdowns*, July 12, 2016. <http://globalnetworkinitiative.org/news/global-network-initiative-and-telecommunications-industry-dialogue-joint-statement-network-and>

## Signatories

Access Now

ACI-Participa

Bahrain Center for Human Rights

Bahrain Watch

Bytes for All

Center for Media Research Nepal

Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law

Committee to Protect Journalists

Digital Rights Watch Australia

European-Bahraini Organization for Human Rights

Hivos

Human Rights Foundation

iFreedom Uganda

Internet Sans Frontières

Media Rights Agenda

Pacific Freedom Forum

Paradigm Initiative Nigeria

PEN America

Projet pour une Alternance Crédible au Tchad

R3D Mexico

Salam for Democracy and Human Rights

Sinar Project

Social Media Exchange

Sunlight Foundation

Turkey Blocks

Unwanted Witness Uganda

Viettan