Bloggers in Prison, Too
A meeting at the Centre for Socialist Studies in Cairo
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Transcribed and translated by Benjamin Geer

(0:00:00)
Ḥusām Al-Ḥamalāwī: ...ʿAlaaʾ Saif, a prominent blogger in the Egyptian blogosphere, is with us, along with blogger Nawwāra Nigm and ʾAḥmad Saif Al-ʾIslām, one of the prominent human rights lawyers in Egypt and is the director of the Hishām Mubārak Law Centre. Let's begin with ʿAlaaʾ... starting on the left.
(0:00:21)
ʿAlaaʾ Saif: All right. I'm not going to talk about the case of Karīm [ʿAbd Al-Karīm Nabīl Sulaimān, an Egyptian blogger sentenced to four years in prison for 'contempt of religion'], which is the essential background of today's meeting, nor am I going to talk about the legal prosecution of Egyptian bloggers on security grounds. I'll leave those subjects to the group. I'm going to talk about the combat against freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet, not just in Egypt but everywhere. What's happened is that, with the appearance of Internet publishing tools for the general public, such as blogs, not only the oppressive states that typically attack journalists and activists, not only the states in which religious institutions attack artists and so on, those aren't the only states that fight against freedom of expression on the Internet. Nearly all the governments in the world are involved in that sort of combat. All the major institutions in the world, whether they're religious or economic, are involved in a struggle against freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet.
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Let's take some very simple examples. The ones I'm going to mention are just the ones I have in mind at the moment, since they occurred recently, and aren't meant to give a complete picture of what's happening. About two weeks ago, a Turkish court ordered that the YouTube web site be completely blocked in Turkey. For those who don't know, YouTube is a web site for uploading videos. It's one of the sites that provides an essential service which we have benefited from here in Egypt, for example in order to publish the video clips of torture [committed by Egyptian police], to publish propaganda videos for the pro-democracy movement, in support of the independence of the judiciary, and so on.
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The YouTube web site was completely blocked in Turkey because there was a video on it that made fun of Kemal Atatürk. In Turkey that's a serious accusation, something like insulting the president and expressing contempt of religions at the same time [in Egypt], something even more serious than the two of those together. In Brazil a month earlier, YouTube was blocked, again by a court order, because a video was published on it that caused a scandal, concerning a fashion model who's famous there, who was at the seaside with her lover without her husband's knowledge or some such thing. Anyway the court ruled that the site should be completely blocked, and YouTube had to make a considerable effort in order to take down those files so that permission could be granted again for the site to be accessible in Brazil.
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While that site was being blocked in Brazil, Brazilian bloggers were uploading videos of state violence and police violence onto the site. So a court ruling concerning one particular individual affected a campaign against state violence. In France, a law has just gone through, in fact there's nothing like this law anywhere else in the world. I'm not sure whether it's been passed or whether it's still... OK, it's been passed. There's nothing else like it anywhere else. If we gave a prize for the worst state in the world in terms of freedom of opinion and expression, I think that as far as the legal system is concerned, France should win. This law says that anybody who isn't a media professional, and who publishes audio or visual material in which there is violence, will be

questioned by the law. So the law distinguishes between the rights of professional journalists and the rights of others regarding freedom of opinion and expression. Even in Egypt we don't have anything like that. Here a member of the Journalist's Syndicate can get a lawyer from the syndicate, but we don't have anything that says that journalists have the right to publish things that citizens who aren't professional journalists don't have the right to publish.
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In France, a web site has been blocked by a court ruling. It's not YouTube, it's a Greenpeace web site. Why? Because that site published a map showing the places where genetically modified maize is being grown. The justification is that environmental terrorists could go blow up those places. As if the terrorists couldn't get through the block, because of course the block is only applied in France. Therefore, there's nothing easier for the environmental terrorists, the bogeyman they're talking about, than to get through that block, see where those places are and go blow them up. Besides, there are plenty of other ways to get information. That block can't stop French newspapers, for example, from publishing the same map, because it only applies to the Internet.
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This demonstrates the backwardness of France's judicial and legislative institutions. Thank God, it turns out that Egypt isn't the only country like that... [laughter] We might even teach them something. Anyway.
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The US may be one of the best states in the world in terms of protection of freedom of opinion and expression, despite its poor track record regarding the other human rights, for many historical reasons, and maybe it would be important for us to examine the difference. In the US, freedom of opinion and expression have been blocked from two directions: the protection of intellectual property and the protection of children from sexual exploitation.
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As for the protection of intellectual property, what's happened is that under this label, according to terrifying legal principles such as the criminalisation of linking... There's a famous case whose circumstances might take too long to describe, so I'll go through it very quickly, a case relating to computer code called DeCSS. Leaving aside the circumstances of the case, the courts decided that this program violates... not that it violates intellectual property exactly, but that it implements a mechanism for violating intellectual property and therefore it was banned by the courts.
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Of course, this program is widely available. So the organisation that represents Hollywood film studios started suing people who linked to the code. Even if you just put up a link, that's a crime. The US may be the only country in which putting up a link is a crime. No, I think it's the case in Germany, too. It's a crime to link to racist content in Germany. What's considered racist content? That's left for the courts to decide, of course. If you link to a site that documents and recounts the history of the crimes of the Zionist entity, that might be considered racist content. In France, we've seen Roger Garaudy convicted because of his book Founding Myths of the Zionist State.
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Therefore, in the name of the protection of intellectual property, security or morals, the protection of helpless children, the protection of producers, the protection of helpless farmers... regardless of what it's called, there are numerous mechanisms that are starting to appear in order to oppress people. All of them, however well-intentioned, have very negative effects on freedom of opinion and expression as far as most people are concerned, and especially activists who care about political and economic change.
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The funny thing is that all these absurd attempts are just like the attempts of those people in Saudi Arabia who are responsible for 'enjoining indecency and forbidding right conduct' [ʿAlaaʾ is

humorously reversing the usual formula, 'enjoining right conduct and forbidding indecency', which is found in the Qurʾān, e.g. at 3:114, and which is the task of the Saudi religious police] and who used to smash...
The audience: It's the opposite. [laughter]
ʿAlaaʾ Saif: I know it's the opposite. Who used to smash satellite dishes every so often. Of course they've completely given up, or I don't know, maybe they still smash satellite dishes. But probably, if they're still smashing them, they're probably working hand in glove with the people who sell the dishes, not just smashing them for any old reason. Because it's entirely a losing battle.
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How can we tell that it's entirely a losing battle? All right, the fact that it's entirely a losing battle is very important. The theory I want to tell you about today is that freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet has been achieved. In Egypt, in Tunisia, in Iran, in France. They can arrest us, they can kill us, they can make us disappear, they can do anything, but for the first time, with the publishing tools we have now, when we publish something, it's over. They can hit the person who expressed an idea, but they can't ban the idea itself.
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The simplest example of this... let's consider intellectual property. Freedom of opinion and expression in Egypt is a fight between Al-ʾAzhar [Al-ʾAzhar University, the main state-run institution of Islamic higher education] and anyone else, between the Egyptian government and anyone else. The participants in the conflict are weak. The Egyptian government is weak, Al-ʾAzhar is weak, bloggers are weak. Let's have a look at the fight over intellectual property.
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We're talking about a fight that concerns multinational pharmaceutical companies, multinational companies that produce films, music and all sorts of content. We're talking about a fight that concerns governments, because of course those companies have all bought out the governments, including the democratic ones. If we look at the US, we find that whenever the intellectual property rights for Mickey Mouse are about to expire, the law is changed retroactively, one way or another, so that the period during which intellectual property is protected is extended by 25 years. This happens every 25 years.
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It doesn't matter which party has the majority in Congress, this is a given. There's an extention every 25 years, to the point where people over there call it 'the Mickey Mouse law'. [laughter] And that's not all. The phrase 'Mickey Mouse law' refers to any elastic law made to suit someone's whim. If I say that this mobile phone is a 'Mickey Mouse'... anyway.
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In this fight, if I try to imagine the amount of resources and money lined up on the side that wants to control and prevent publishing and copying and so on, regardless of what my opinion might be, even if I thought that protecting intellectual property was important and that it was wrong to copy films... whatever your opinion is, whether you like it or not...
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The reality is that the world's major financial institutions, which are behind all these things, along with the world's major goverments, not only the Egyptian government but also the American government and all other Western governments, along with the Egyptian government of course, all of them are completely powerless in this fight. Today you can download any film from the Internet for free. Any book, any idea, whether they're going after it or not.
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The point I'm trying to make is that they're fundamentally unable to control the situation. Therefore it's entirely a losing battle. At the same time, while we're going through this battle, we have a lot to lose. Even though I'm saying it's entirely a losing battle, that doesn't mean we should stop fighting. In another 15 years, what's happening to ʿAbd Al-Karīm now won't matter anymore. All right? But that doesn't mean we should stop fighting.

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There are hazards. As far as people who care about social or political change are concerned, sometimes a single individual can play an important role. If we look at the experience of bloggers in Egypt, we find that Wāʾil ʿAbbās plays a very important role. When Wāʾil ʿAbbās publishes something, they can't make it disappear. But if they made Wāʾil ʿAbbās disappear, of course everything doesn't depend on him. Someone else would take his place, but that would take a long time.
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Whoever tried to take his place won't have the same connections, the same credibility, the same network of acquaintances, he wouldn't have as many readers, and so on. We'd lose a lot. Therefore, what I'm saying is that we need to consider the struggle for freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet as an international struggle, not simply as a local one. We need to recognise that in the end we're going to win it. But it's important for us to look at how we're going to manage it.
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I have a few thoughts on the subject of how we're going to manage it, but I think I'll save them for the discussion and question time. Thank you.
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Ḥusām Al-Ḥamalāwī: Thanks, ʿAlaaʾ for that quick presentation on the destruction of freedoms, because at least it shows that Egypt is not the only country with bad luck. We're even pioneers. Now I think Nawwāra Nigm...
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Nawwāra Nigm: Actually, every year I go through a period in which I realise that I'm stupid. So now is the time in which I've realised that I'm stupid. Because I got into the conflict over ʿAbd Al-Karīm with a naïve sort of attitude. My starting point, or my impulse, was completely based on religious doctrine. Here's a victim of injustice, and it's my duty as a Muslim to stop this injustice that he's being subjected to, and because God created people... people are only creature whose reason for being is freedom of choice.
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So that was my basic motive. To defend humankind's reason for being, and to defend a victim of injustice. That a crime is being committed against someone in the name of Islam. That was my impulse. When I got into the thick of things, I found out that there were a lot of things I hadn't known about. I came to the conclusion that our struggle isn't a struggle for freedoms, nor am I defending someone's right to embrace the beliefs of his choice, and so on. It's a struggle against corruption.
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Suppose I'm a criminal. I won't let you call me a criminal. I'll give you a good beating in the street because you're pointing me out, you're calling me a criminal. But I won't say, 'He's calling me a criminal.' I could have said, 'Kiss me, sir,' like ʾAṭāṭā [a character in the film ʿŪkal]. I'll pin any disaster on you that'll stick, so I can get rid of you because you're pointing me out and calling me a criminal.
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For a long time, bloggers... the government likes to do this with people, the way you take a saucepan and let it boil until the froth rises to the top, so you know who's talking, who's making trouble, so you can skim them off with a spoon. The government has let bloggers boil for a while in the saucepan, so they can all rise to the top and the government can find out who's pointing out state corruption.
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Malik Muṣṭafā said Karīm was the weakest case. I'm not saying that he was the weakest case, but I think he was the one who was least likely to win the sympathy of the public, because people will say, 'What?! An atheist?!' It's a mental shock for them... that's the back door that they sneak in by, to frighten people about bloggers like Wāʾil ʿAbbās.

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Or like a lot of people who expose state corruption. The problem for us isn't state corruption; we divorced the state more than 30 years ago and we know it's corrupt. The problem is that when I went deeper into this mess... I insist on putting the Al-ʾAzhar students [members of the Muslim Brotherhood who caused controversy by carrying out military-style exercises in public]... the ones who were wearing military uniforms, in same basket as Karīm. Their situations are nearly identical.
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People express their opinion in whatever way, whatever their opinion may be, and the government rejects that, because they're pointing out its corruption. Karīm pointed out corruption in Al-ʾAzhar, an institution whose history I'm proud of. I was surprised by the things he pointed out. I hadn't known that those things were going on.
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What annoys me... I'm sorry to have to say it, I'd rather not have to say it, but the truth is that the more serious disaster, the one we're paying the price for as individuals who want to express our opinion, is corruption in the opposition, unfortunately. Every faction judges the other party [unintelligible], a bit like the US.
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The people who said Karīm should be burnt with gas, or those who just looked at the ceiling, '— What's your opinion on that? —I dunno', as if nothing was happening, or the people who said that the Al-ʾAzhar students were militarising the university... If the situation was reversed, between Karīm insulting Al-ʾAzhar and the Al-ʾAzhar professors and the idea of an Islamic state, and the Al-ʾAzhar students in the demonstration wearing Che Guevara clothes, the people who said that they were militarising the university wouldn't have said that, and those who said Karīm should be burnt with gas wouldn't have said that either.
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So those are unprincipled people. They're not consistent or credible, and therefore they can't win over the Egyptian street. That's not the issue. The issue is that we, as people who want to escape from this corruption into the space of the Internet, in order to express ourselves, we're paying for corruption that we have nothing to do with.
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Karīm is in prison and the Al-ʾAzhar students are in prison, paying for other people's corruption. I don't mind if Karīm or the Al-ʾAzhar students pay for their own mistakes, but they shouldn't pay for someone else's mistakes. Nobody can oppose state corruption unless he cleanses himself of his own corruption. And the direct, logical result of corruption is oppression.
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Confronting corruption, and purifying ourselves of internal corruption, is what will guarantee freedom of expression for all of us. Also, maybe what ʿAlaaʾ said about global corruption... I mean, you've got us into a really big battle, going up against the corruption of global capitalism in its entirety, and maybe that's too big a task for us. What we can do is to tackle corruption here where we are, in such a way that, as a natural result, if that corruption disappeared, or at least if there was a clean, credible, sizeable force to confront it, there would be more space for freedom.
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And there would be more protection for people that want to express themselves honestly. I'm as happy as I am suprised to suddenly find myself sitting in a cesspool. I'm sorry to use that word, but that's really what the country has turned into. But at the same time, I'm happy that there are people from 18 to 25 years old, that's the generation that never experienced free education or free health care or anything, nor did this country give them anything, and nevertheless they love it, and are loyal, and ready to pay the price of their loyalty.
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That's a good sign, but I fear for them because of corruption. They'll either become corrupt, lose hope, emigrate or go mad. That's all.

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ʿAlaaʾ Saif: Nawwāra said something immortal, that she's seen a lot of governments that want to monopolise power, but only in Egypt has she seen an opposition that wants to monopolise opposition. [laughter]
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Ḥusām Al-Ḥamalāwī: Good, thank you, Nawwāra. OK, Saif, we have 15 minutes.
ʾAḥmad Saif Al-ʾIslām: OK. I'm not going to talk about the legal aspects of the case at all. Let's leave that to the court. But let's talk more about the context. I think the context is important. The context involves several points that we can focus on. The first point, in agreement with what Nawwāra said, is that we're in a period of political opposition that calls for democratic reform. And democratic reform... there's some agreement about a number of things that should be changed.
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The most vulnerable freedoms, in a situation of political agreement aimed at democratic struggle, are the freedoms that are the subject of an especially sensitive internal social debate, including freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of thought. Because if I'm a representative of a given political force and Nawwāra represents another political force, I'm striving to establish a shared foundation with her, so I want to avoid subjects of disagreement, so that political agreement will continue.
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This is the stage in which the government plays its game very well in order to fragment the opposition that's calling for democratic reform. Follow closely what's happening in the game between the government and the judges. The government proposes the idea of hiring female judges and the judges, like idiots, fall into the trap of a stupid negative reaction, so the situation of solidarity is broken up, weakened or fragmented, or the forces acting in solidarity with the judges start to hesitate to give their support.
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They're playing the same game with the Muslim Brotherhood, using Fārūq Husnī [the Minister of Culture, who made controversial statements criticising the spread of the Islamic headscarf in Egypt], the issue of the headscarf and the issue of Al-ʾAzhar and what's been called militias. First of all, as far as Al-ʾAzhar is concerned, this isn't the first time they've put on that show. It's been done more than once, and I've seen it twice before in different places and different universities.
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Maybe the only difference between this latest performance, which caused the crisis, and the previous ones, is that the previous ones were linked to national occasions [of expression of popular sentiment] regarding Palestine or Iraq. This was the first time it was linked to a specific name, to a specific subject.
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If you follow the subject, you'll find that what sparked it was an independent newspaper, not an Egyptian state-run paper. The government let the opposition shout for a while: 'Help! The Brotherhood is creating militias and they're spreading throughout society!' Then its real battle against the Brotherhood began, not because they're threatening freedom of creative expression, but because they might hinder the passage of the upcoming constitutional amendments.
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That's the context in which Karīm's case is occurring. The state is facing a number of other annoyances, and it's able to deal with them. The rumour about the state being condemned for torture has become a serious risk for the state. And it's not surprising that the case of Huwaida Taha [an Al Jazeera journalist sentenced to six months in prison for making a documentary about torture in Egypt] is going on at the same time as Karīm's case.
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She'll be prosecuted, most likely, she'll be convicted in the next three or four days. That's the context in which it's happening. What I'm saying doesn't mean that the government is behind

Karīm's case. But maybe the government is using Karīm's case to achieve its goals. And that's happened before in Egyptian history.
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In Egyptian history, when ʾIsmāʿīl Ṣidqī [prime minister of Egypt from 1930-1933] had articles added to the penal code, articles that are still there today, criminalising communist organisations, he was inspired by a poem by a Marxist poet of that period, and he distributed it in Parliament. The members of Parliament were scandalised by the poem, so they rubber-stamped all the articles he wanted passed into law.
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It seems to me that the material that Karīm published will be used after the constitutional amendments have been completed, in the next Parliament, or after the next session. It will be distributed, and they'll say, '—Look here, someone's insulting God and the Prophet, and the most severe sentence we could give him, using all the available laws, was three or four years in prison. Do you want to protect the things you consider sacred? —Yes, we want to protect those sacred things.'
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'—All right, then, give us a law that protects what we consider sacred. It'll protect women, and corruption, and anyone who tries to trick us, and make fun of us, and make fun of everything, will know that the government protects sacred things.'
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That's one aspect of the context. Another aspect... think back to Egypt 15 years ago. Think of two pillars. The power of the Muslim Brotherhood and the religious regulations it's creating. The elections of the year 2000. The Brotherhood succeeded to a greater extent than in the previous elections. What was the government's reaction? The Ministry of Culture banned three books at the Cairo Book Fair. The Ministry of Culture itself.
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If you think back, there you have three books. Why? 'Unity and Light' [the name of a chain of department stores whose rich, pious owner divorced his fourth wife and remarried before the legal waiting period, causing a scandal]. The guy married I don't know how many... there's a parallel between the increased influence of the Brotherhood and the government's use of religion so that they can tell people who sympathise with the Brotherhood that the Brotherhood aren't the only ones who defend religion, we're defending it even more.
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Maybe the the really revealing example... think back to the parliamentary debate about Fārūq Husnī's statements... [unintelligible]
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An audience member: He's the most corrupt person in the country.
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ʾAḥmad Saif Al-ʾIslām: [laughter] OK, think back. That's the context of what's happening. If you add the context outside Egypt since 11 September [2001]... every government in the world has agreed on the slogan 'Security first'. And then [unintelligible] basic freedoms even in political discourse. And not only in regulations.
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That's all taken for granted now in every country. And the internal [unintelligible] in Britain, the US or wherever, is extremely similar to what you find in Third World countries as far as fighting terrorism is concerned. You want courts that aren't duly qualified? Courts managed by the administration? You want suspects deprived of the right to legal defence? That's happening in the US. It's happening in Britain. And it was happening in Egypt and they're going to give it a constitutional cover.
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That's the context in which the case of Karīm is occurring. There's a human side to Karīm's case. I don't know whether you've read the interview with his mother in [the newspaper] Ṣawt Al-

ʾUmmah. In my opinion, the people who are suffering the most from a human point of view, even more than Karīm, are his mother and father. Because they're in a contradiction like something out of a Greek tragedy, between their feeling that their beliefs have been wounded by their son, and the fact that their son is in prison.
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And I think the last quotation, if anyone read what the woman said, there's something else where she says that she wants to send food to her son although she's angry at him. And when he was at home, she would go to him in his room while he was asleep and find that the covers had fallen off him, and cover him up again. And that she became educated through the ideas he would tell her about. I think that's a human aspect... I hope that all of us, regardless of our position on Karīm, won't lose our humanity in considering different people's natural emotional reactions to this subject.
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Because sometimes I feel, despite my great respect for all our comrades, that sometimes we react to the lawyer, for example, who brought the civil case against Karīm, as if he was a ravenous beast. It's not true. Why not? I make the other human assumption [unintelligible] a way of defending beliefs, whether that way is right or wrong.
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But we have to try to understand that. That doesn't mean that I agree with him. I don't need to say what my role is in this matter, against [unintelligible] and against all those things, but my role is also to understand what's required of me.
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Why did he adopt that tense, high-strung attitude of his? There's a human situation behind it. He's a product of this society, this society that makes... sorry, I'll just be a couple of minutes more... my conclusion is that in reality we don't have a truly democratic force in Egyptian society. We have democratic individuals, but not a democratic force. Every political force in Egyptian society, from the far left, if my friends here in the Centre for Socialist Studies don't mind my saying so, through the Muslim Brotherhood and all the way to the far right, each of them wants democracy just once, in order to take power, and then you can forget about democracy after that.
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OK. But you'll find democratic individuals among all those forces. Yes, you'll find them. And that's why Nawwāra was saying that there are opposition policies. Of course there are opposition policies. If you'll allow me, today I read the headline of [the Nasserist newspaper] Al-ʿArabī, and got very depressed. I don't know if you've been following the matter of the Nasserist party or not. When I read Al-ʿArabī and it says, 'Victory for democracy at the Nasserist party conference'...
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Audience member: [unintelligible]
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ʾAḥmad Saif Al-ʾIslām: I know. [unintelligible] Of course I don't mean just to focus on Al-ʿArabī. I mean to say we're in a catastrophe.
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The struggle will be long, and I think part of that struggle is against an elite whose time has passed, whether locally or globally, so a new elite can emerge. Don't hope for too much from the old elite, which I'm a part of. Maybe some individuals in it can rise up out of it, but our best hope may be the new generation. I'm very sorry.
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Ḥusām Al-Ḥamalāwī: Thank you. OK, I'll make some very brief comments about the entry of bloggers into the movement for political change in Egypt, and their role in raising the ceiling of freedoms. Then I think our comrade ʿAlaaʾ wanted to make a quick comment, and then we'll open the floor for discussion.
(0:31:07)
Of course it's not a secret that in the past few months in Egypt, for example, there's been a wave

of strikes in textile factories, and in a few other sectors as far as I know. I and a few other bloggers and journalists played a role in those events. And one of the things that attracted our attention is that the age group of the leaders of those strikes varied between about 20 and 35.
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So they're young compared to workers' leaders generally. In discussions with them, as far as the older ones were concerned, the ones who were there in the factory, who were, say, in their fifties, who for example were Communist Party members a long time ago, what I was able to observe briefly about the workers is that those people were actually the most cautious ones in the movement.
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They would think twice before getting involved. They're not very bold or daring. Of course a segment of them played an vital role, and of course that segment has an accumulated experience that the strikes benefited from, but in general the leaders of the strikes were young people. And there's a very simple reason for that.
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The reason is that the older people, the ones who have experience in strikes, who are working now in factories, have witnessed huge failures and defeats. They've witnessed live ammunition being used against strikes. They've witnessed strikes broken by armoured vehicles that broke into the factories. So in general these are people who have witnessed defeats.
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As for the people who are called the fresh blood, who are in their twenties or early thirties, they don't have any experience at all of what happened before. They've heard stories about it. Maybe they were children when they saw those clashes. But they don't have any personal experience of the red lines.
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Exactly the same thing can be said about bloggers and their entry into the movement in 2005. Someone like me, for example... I'm 29 years old, perhaps a bit older than ʿAlaaʾ, my hair's turning a bit grey, and I consider myself to be one of the people who got into the movement at the end of the 1990s.
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For us, organising a single demonstration per year at university, for example, required a huge effort. And maybe we'd criticise the government in a demonstration, we'd criticise the regime, but we wouldn't say a word about Mubārak, for example. If we said a single word about Mubārak, the students themselves would beat us up, out of fear, not because they were spies for Mubārak or something.
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A shift occurred after October 2000, in the week that followed the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada, when suddenly 80,000 Egyptians were in the streets demonstrating all over the country. There were students from primary and secondary schools as well as universities. There was some mobilisation of workers but mostly among the fresh blood.
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Clashes started to happen in the streets between the government and the people who were getting involved then. Someone like me, for example, had never seen that before, to the point where I imagined that the revolution was going to happen in 2000. For 10 years I hadn't seen anything like that. Of course the revolution didn't happen, but that doesn't mean that I've lost hope and that it won't happen someday.
(0:34:22)
After that there was a second wave of mass uprisings in April 2002, and a third wave in March 2003. Each wave was more intense than the one before. These were perhaps the most intense mobilisations that had been seen in Cairo since 1977. Maybe this should give us hope.
(0:34:45)
But the entry of bloggers into the movement in 2005 was a decisive factor in raising the ceiling of

freedoms in Egypt. I remember, for example, that I was... first of all, my background is that I was an activist during the period of my studies at university, and then I worked as a journalist.
(0:35:04)
Most of the newspapers and magazines I worked for were either foreign or published in Egypt in English. I remember that in 2004 I started to hear about blogs, and didn't understand what blogs were. One of my best friends, who was also one of my colleagues at the first magazine I worked for, had started writing a blog in December. He said, 'Come and write for it.' And I even refused, because I didn't understand.
(0:35:25)
I didn't understand what it was. I remember that I wrote a few stories about blogs at the end of 2004, but I admit that I didn't understand what they were. I thought, you know, if I do an interview with ʿAlaaʾ, I'm sitting with him, so why should I go home afterwards and connect to the Internet to see what ʿAlaaʾ wrote? I'm a journalist, so I should be the one telling ʿAlaaʾ what's going on in the country.
(0:35:48)
A lot of journalists were dealing with blogs according to the same elitist attitude. On Black Wednesday, the 25th of May 2005, when thugs hired by the National Democratic Party [the ruling party] sexually assaulted our female comrades, whether they were journalists or activists, and beat up demonstrators, that was a decisive factor. And it shocked a large segment of the population who couldn't believe such a thing was happening.
(0:36:20)
We know that sort of thing happens in police stations and in [the State Security offices at] Lāẓūġlī and Gābir Ibn Ḥayyān and all the other detention centres but it was a shock for Egyptians and for the world in general to see it happening in the street, right in front of us, filmed by cameras. But most of the people who filmed it were bloggers, not journalists from satellite channels.
(0:36:44)
That angered and emboldened a lot of people who maybe hadn't been to a demonstration since the 1970s, like my mother. The last demostration she went to was in 1972, the one that called for a war against Israel and for democracy in Egypt. I remember that it was at ʿAin Šams University and that she was beaten by Central Security police. She stopped going to demonstrations after that.
(0:37:03)
Her first demonstration was the one that happened the week after the [May 2005 election law] referendum, because she couldn't believe what was happening. And we're talking about an older person like my mother. But a large segment of Egyptian youth, who are in their late teens to mid-20s, got involved in the movement even though they hadn't had any connection to it before.
(0:37:22)
Therefore all the red lines that people like me were careful not to cross in the 1990s, people who would wait for a whole year to see a demonstration, and then when you'd organise a demonstration, you wouldn't sleep at home, you'd come back and arrange secret meetings, and wear a white flower so the demonstrators could identify each other, and scratch yourself [as a signal]... all that baggage, all those restrictions that we carried around on our shoulders, are absent in the new generation of young people growing up now.
(0:37:47)
Therefore someone like me, for example in the 1990s... I had to think carefully before criticising Mubārak or chanting slogans against him in a demonstration. For these people, it was normal to go out in the streets and chant 'Down, down with Ḥusnī Mubārak!' Of course this happened gradually. In October 2000, the demonstrations in support of the Intifada, and the demonstrations against the war in Iraq, were already calling for the fall of the regime.
(0:38:11)
This is something that lot of Western journalists and researchers, who criticise the Egyptian [opposition] movement for concentrating on regional issues instead of local ones, have

overlooked. Actually we feel that all the issues are interconnected, and in all our demonstrations we've used the slogan 'The road to Jerusalem goes through Cairo, and the road to Baghdad goes through Cairo.'
(0:38:28)
We were calling for change in Egypt. But the movement wasn't focusing specifically and openly on [regime] change until, say, the middle of 2004, until the first demonstration against torture, in front of the public prosecutor's office on 26 July 2004. Then there was the Kifāya demonstration in December 2004. Then the entry of the bloggers into the movement after 2005.
(0:38:51)
The bloggers added a touch that had been lacking in the movement. First of all, their artistic creativity. That was something that was sorely lacking in the movement for change in Egypt. It's still lacking, of course we still need more, but the banners, the posters, the cartoons, the videos that they were making, the music, these were all very useful as means of communication with the young public that we're ultimately trying to reach.
(0:39:19)
The second thing was that they didn't have any... I mean, the heritage of conflicts between political groups, which was very constricting in the 1990s, it could erupt between people sitting together at a café, they didn't have that heritage. Therefore when they got into the movement, they wanted to interact with everybody.
(0:39:38)
Of course I can make a criticism on one point, which is that I think they have an excessive phobia about the existing political groups because of the negative heritage of those groups, the corruption that we were talking about earlier. But at the same time, that may be an advantage for them, because they don't mind coordinating with anyone.
(0:39:56)
Along with the radical left in Egypt, bloggers, especially secular ones, have played a very important role by taking up the cause of the Muslim Brotherhood, by defending the Brothers when they're imprisoned or tortured, when the government lashes out at them in any way, or freezes their assets or anything like that.
(0:40:18)
They've done that despite the criticisms of some of their secular comrades, and it's been very important. Besides, first of all, that's a principled position we should all take, and second, the people who arrested [unintelligible name] are the same people who arrested Karīm, and who sexually assaulted Aš-Šarqāwī at the Qaṣr An-Nīl police station in 2006, they're the same enemy. We all need to understand that. They're cutting us down one after the other and trying to use us against each other.
(0:40:45)
There's a third important factor, which is that even the young members of the Brotherhood, who in the 1990s, when we leftists used to set up expositions or try to discuss some leftist subject, we were afraid of what they would do to us, we were afraid of the security services and we were also afraid of what the young members of the Brotherhood would do to us... all those feelings of enmity started to disappear.
(0:41:03)
Whereas it hadn't completely disappeared in a lot of areas, for example in assocations and professional syndicates. We, I mean bloggers in general, or the blogging movement if I... I mean, I know that there are different factions and political currents, but if we talk about the community of bloggers in general, I think it plays an important role today in Egypt, in raising the ceiling of freedoms, and in bringing the points of view of different political currents closer together.
(0:41:27)
The government's targeting of that community, whether in the case of Karīm or in the cases that occurred previously... by the way, he's not the first one, there was the case of Šuhdī Surūr in 2001, and the case of Al-Mīṯāq Al-ʿArabī in 2006, both of which were banned by the government.

(0:41:44)
This is only the beginning, not the end. What will the government's attack look like? Nobody can predict that. Will they take two or three and make an example of them? Will they raid people's homes and arrest them? It doesn't matter. It's all because of what ʿAlaaʾ said before, because we've put things online.
(0:42:02)
It doesn't matter. Today for example, ʿAlaaʾ and Ḥamalāwī are around. If they take Ḥamalāwī, ʿAlaaʾ is still there. If they take both of us, Wāʾil ʿAbbās is still there. Even if they take all of us, blogging has already become a phenomenon that I think it would be very hard for the government to stop. I'm sorry to have gone on for so long. I'll let ʿAlaaʾ make a quick comment and then we'll open the floor for discussion.
(0:42:22)
ʿAlaaʾ Saif: Making a comment is going to be tough because there are a million things I want to say, and of course I'm exploiting the fact that I'm the one sitting here. So I'll try just to concentrate on the idea of freedom of opinion and expression and not to comment on everything.
(0:42:40)
Freedom of opinion and expression... I think that if we look back at human history, we find that freedom of opinion and expression, academic freedoms, women's freedoms, children's freedoms, independent institutions, these are all the first things that risk being abandoned, whether you're in a democratic country or not. These are the difficult issues, the issues that we have to fight for after we've taken care of the issue of democracy.
(0:43:04)
I'm sure he doesn't mean it that way, but there are a lot of examples where freedom of opinion and expression has been sacrificed as part of the struggle between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood. This has happened between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood because the Muslim Brotherhood are a force to be reckoned with.
(0:43:25)
But if the left was a force to be reckoned with, people who dared to criticise women would be targeted. Anyone who made some tiresome joke about women might be given the same treatment that ʿAbd El-Karīm has been given. If the nationalists were a force to be reckoned with, it would be anyone who dared to talk about a lot of things.
(0:43:42)
They'd face the same treatment, because I doubt that there's a single political current in Egypt that really believes in freedom of opinion and expression, I won't say absolutely, but at least consistently, with clear rules that are written down and applied as written. There's nothing like that. Liberals today are calling for the regulation of people who speak in mosques.
(0:44:06)
And people go on talking about that as if it was a perfectly natural demand, part of fighting terrorism and extremism, and for me this is completely baffling. How on earth can they call for such a thing? The issue of mosques is just like the issue of the Internet. It's a completely absurd campaign. Good luck if you want to try! [laughter]
(0:44:22)
But people are calling for that, and they call themselves liberals. The left, not all of it of course, but there are definitely issues where they say no, how can we possibly talk about that? And not just about its Stalinist past, I mean we can't say that's the only point where the left has a problem. So this is a struggle that concerns all political factions, but it's a struggle that we have to fight on its own. It's a decisive struggle.
(0:44:49)
When I said it's an international struggle, I didn't mean to say that there's no hope. On the contray, that means that we have a lot of people on our side, in solidarity with us, and we have to be aware that we're part of an international movement. When they start blocking web sites in Egypt, in fact they're already blocking web sites but only in small numbers, so we can ignore it,

but when they start blocking web sites on a large scale, there are tens of thousands of programmers around the world who are programming solutions to that problem right now.
(0:45:14)
Those are partners with whom we should show solidarity. The content that ʿAbd Al-Karīm wrote, whatever we think of it, because of the presence of tens of thousands of people who care about freedom of opinion and expression, is being copied and translated and published, to the point where... Two days ago a crazy woman in New York, I think, projected one of ʿAbd Al-Karīm's articles against the wall of the Egyptian Embassy for two straight nights. [laughter]
(0:45:44)
Those are partners. That's what I'm talking about. That's the sort of struggle it is. You were saying that we should sympathise with the human situation. All right. We'll be humane and sympathise with the human situation. But. But we're going to have a very serious clash with that sort of human situation in the upcoming period. Because things like blogs don't just represent a revolution in political thought or in the struggle against global capitalism. They represent much more than that.
(0:46:26)
A big part of the fight against those things in Western democratic countries is a social, moral struggle. And lo and behold, the generation of the youth revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, that went to demonstrations for sexual freedom, and so they could take whatever drugs they wanted and so on, now they're utterly shocked by their children's generation, not because their children are doing those same things more or less than they did.
(0:46:51)
It's because their children are talking about those things. Because their children's generation has embraced the lack of privacy. There's a fierce war going on against publication tools like blogs, MySpace, FaceBook, Twitter and so on, because what's happened now is that children from the age of nine are recording on the Internet everything they do. So you can find out... so now you have scenarios like, 'OK, so someone who rapes children can find out everything about my son and will be able to kidnap him' and so on and so forth.
(0:47:24)
'And what about my religion?! My religion has become a laughingstock and people are mopping the floor with it! And what about my country's history?! The republic! What..?!' and so on. And of course all these feelings are entirely human. That person is worried that someone is going to kidnap his son... but it's over. The battle is over.
(0:47:44)
Completely. And there's no going back. I think there are a lot of positive sides to this issue. I think the lack of privacy has a lot of positive sides, because what's happening, and this is just an example, what's happening is that political privacy is gone. Governments can and do find out everything. All the major capital cities now have cameras in nearly all public squares. The amount of space covered by cameras depends on each country's level of [technological] progress.
(0:48:13)
We have them in Egypt. Nobody knows how much space they cover in Cairo and Alexandria. We found that in Paris, and in England, it's reached the point where almost 100% of public places are covered, with such high resolution that they can follow somebody, for example... in the Metro they're not allowed to trace passengers' tickets because it's considered an violation of privacy, but they're allowed to put cameras in the the stations for security reasons.
(48:41)
So they've put cameras in the Metro, and they can zoom in and read the number on a passenger's ticket while he's going in or out. [laughter] It's no joke, there was really a case in 2001 of somebody who kidnapped and killed a girl, and they caught him by zooming in on his ticket. OK. I'm not saying that this is something horrible. I'm saying that it's a reality. What's happened is that the same tools that are in the hands of the governments are also in our hands. But in order for us to know how to use them, we need to understand, culturally and psychologically, that there

is no privacy. It's been abolished.
(49:11)
If I tell you a dirty joke about [blogger] ʿAmr Ġarbiyya and tomorrow it's published, I'm prepared for that. I have to understand that that's how it is, that's what's happening, and I have to embrace it completely. These are generations growing up with the awareness and understanding that there's no privacy. Their parents are very shocked, even those parents who are from the generations that brought about a fearsome revolution in morals and values and so on. [to Ḥusām] Your generation is the one in between; it didn't do either of these things. [laughter]
(49:38)
OK? My points aren't very well organised, and I'm throwing out examples right and left, but what I'm trying to say is that there's a battle going on against freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet. It will get bigger and much more intense, and it has political and cultural sides as well as very human sides. OK?
(0:50:04)
I think... I'm sure the same thing happened when the printing press was invented, when cassettes were invented, when television was invented. I rememger that it happened before my very eyes when satellite TV was introduced. All the tools that are in their hands, the ones they now use in court cases, such as blocking web sites, are on the way out.
(50:34)
Today Tunisia, Iran, China... there are lots of things that people can't see there. They can see them with a bit of effort, but most people don't know how to make that effort. But that's coming to an end. Today if you go to my home town in Buḥaira, in Al-Kawm Al-Aḫḍar, you'll find wireless Internet antennas on the towers in which pigeons are raised.
(50:57)
That's a local area network. They can block web sites so that when I'm sitting in Egypt I can't see what's out there, but as soon as something gets into our local area network, it will spread. This wireless technology is very cheap, very easy to use, and it's the sort of thing Egyptians are good at.
(51:17)
You know, just like we've got car mechanics who know how do things that nobody else knows how to do, just wait until you see what will happen with wireless technology in Egypt. And we're still in the stage of using technology that we're legally allowed to use, on frequencies that the police, the army and so on aren't using. We haven't reached the stage of revolutionary technology.
(51:35)
All this is still at the stage of technology that the law permits. When we get to the stage where I say no, why should I just set up the kind of antenna that they allow me to have? I'm going to set up an antenna that can reach a distance of 100 kilometres, and the government won't be able to do anything about it. Then we'll see that there's absolutely no way to block anything. It'll be a completely decentralised network. They won't be able to do anything about it.
(52:00)
But it's going to be a very difficult struggle. All along the way it will be hard for people that you'll be able to sympathise with easily or with difficulty, like ʿAbd Al-Karīm's parents. This is the birth of a new world, the moment of discovery... like when the printing press was invented. The other thing I want to say, and this is the last thing I'm going to say, is that this struggle will turn into a fight over culture, art and politics, depending on the basic factors and components of the situation in each country.
(52:27)
The cassette revolution in Egypt was about [singer ʾAhmad] ʿAdawiyya. The cassette revolution in Iran was about Khomeini. Both of them are equally important in my view. The cassette was what enabled Khomeini to get his message to the Iranian people so they would bring about the Iranian revolution. The cassette was what enabled ʿAdawiyya so he could break up the monopoly of the

state's musical institution, which was devoted to glorifying the achievements of the revolution and so on, until it went completely bankrupt.
(52:58)
Both are equally important. Maybe the cassette was political, or it has become political via the cassettes made by Muslim preachers, whether we like them or not. But in the beginning, in the 1980s, I don't know whether it had that Islamic character, maybe others can correct me if I'm wrong in saying that it was just a cultural revolution. In any case it's the same sort of thing.
(53:22)
If we look at other Arab countries, we find that in most of them, blogs play an important role in smashing the status quo, but maybe not on a political level. The countries in which blogs play a big political role are Egypt, Lebanon and Bahrein, for reasons connected to the political dynamics of those societies and the presence of a movement, not for reasons connected to the nature of the Internet itself. Thank you.
(53:50)
(Announcement of the Cairo Conference. A question about Nawwāra Nigm's blog. Discussion about the case of ʿAbd Al-Karīm.)
(1:03:40)
Question: If I have a blog, for example, can they get to the owner of the blog, can they find out where he is via his blog?
(1:03:46)
ʿAlaaʾ Saif: OK, maybe I can answer that second question first, because that's an important question? The Internet is not a secure means of communication at all. And that doesn't just apply to publishing, it applies to any form of communication. If I have an online chat, send email, talk to someone using voice over IP, not only can the government see and find out who I am and where I am.

Nearly anyone can find out. All governments, and anyone who has a bit of money and is willing to make a bit of effort, can find out who I am and where I am. So if I'm on the Internet, I have to work under the assumption that, as a rule, I'm completely exposed. If I want to hide, there are 100% effective tools that I can use to hide digitally. Let me explain why I mean by digitally.
(1:04:36)
Most of those tools have been designed on the basis of the assumption that kidnapping and torture have a very high financial and social cost. So they say: 'I'll make you an email encryption system in which the cost of breaking the code…', that is, you can send me an encrypted email and I'm the only one who can read it.
(1:05:01)
So if they got a copy of that encrypted email and wanted to decrypt it, the cost of breaking the code would be ten thousand times more than the cost of kidnapping you and torturing you and saying: 'Tell us what you said in that email.' [laughter] But that's based on the cost of kidnapping and torturing you where? In Switzerland. [laughter]
(1:05:21)
Great! OK, what's the cost of kidnapping and torturing you in Egypt? About 5 Egyptian pounds [i.e. next to nothing]. [laughter] See what I mean? I'm totally serious. Therefore, if I want to make it hard for them to see me, or to know anything about me, so they'll have no reason to suspect me and won't tap my phone calls or watch my house or anything like that, I can disappear completely.
(1:05:41)
If I want to secure my digital communications, I can secure them completely. But that won't stop them from standing behind you and watching what you're typing on your keyboard. It wont stop your brother or your fiancée from reporting to them what you're doing. [laughter] It's possible… these are all possibilities. I don't think our situation is quite that gloomy in reality, but these are all possibilities. [laughter]

(1:06:07)
OK. If you're interested in knowing how to protect yourself digitally... I can't help you if your fiancée reports on you, but if you want to know how to protect yourself digitally, we're planning to organise a session or a course soon on secure communications on the Internet. It will probably be at the Hišām Mubārak Centre, but we haven't set the exact date yet. We'll announce it on the blogs.
(1:06:34)
(Discussion on the case of ʿAbd Al-Karīm and the likelihood of similar cases.)
(1:15:50)
Question: ʿAlaaʾ, you said that you have some thoughts or that you see things people can do about the crisis concerning freedom of opinion and expression... Can we hear a bit about that?
(1:16:01)
ʿAlaaʾ: Yes, that was the idea about the struggle... What I'm suggesting is that, because of the changes in technology itself, the struggle is now focusing on the issue of freedom of opinion and expression. And I'm suggesting that we consider, on the one hand, the battle over the issue of intellectual property and the total defeat of the film production companies and the like, and on the other hand, the issue of wireless Internet, and how it will break up centralised control over the network.
(1:16:47)
But that battle may take ten years. It might be over in three years. Nobody can predict how long the technology will take to spread. While that battle is going on, we stand to lose a lot. And we can observe that even in the example of intellectual property. The film companies have lost that battle, but the pharmaceutical companies haven't lost it.
(1:17:14)
I think the political power of the film companies is greater, but it's more urgent for us to win the battle over pharmaceuticals. OK? But what's happened is... because... it's easy for me to copy a film but hard for me to copy a drug. What's happened is that inside... we've penetrated the film production companies, so the films are leaked from inside the studios and they're copied before their shown in cinemas.
(1:17:39)
But there aren't any pharmacists whose conscience is alert to the point where they publish the formulas for drugs. And that's actually baffling. If we look back in the history of science, we find that the scientists that were working on nuclear research programmes had the courage and the conscience to publish the plans for the weapons they designed. But that's not the case with the scientists who are working in the pharmaceutical industry. And that's very worrying.

But, well, maybe it's because the scientists who have a conscience in the field of pharmaceuticals are working outside the mechanism of the multinational companies. Maybe that's the reason. So I think it's important for us to get involved in this battle and not to wait, because we're going to win it anyway, but the form the battle takes will determine a lot of things, because there's a lot we might lose before it ends.
(1:18:42)
(Chitchat.)
(1:20:00)
Question: OK, I have a question for ʿAlaaʾ as well. Usually we have the impression that... when we talk about antennas on the pigeon towers...

ʾAḥmad Saif Al-ʾIslām: And on palm trees. [laughter]
ʿAlaaʾ: On palm trees. Tall ones. I don't mean to practice Orientalism here. [laughter] Those are just the high places.
Question: So we have the impression that so far, this business of the Internet is just for the middle class, and we see the adverts in the street, I mean the middle class and young people now, all that

stuff. Do we know to what extent it's broader than that?
(1:20:40)
ʿAlaaʾ: When mobile phones arrived in Egypt, for maybe three years people were saying things like, 'Would you believe it, I saw a carpenter with a mobile!' They saw this not just as a novelty, but also as something frivolous, you know, mobile phones are for businessmen, when actually a businessman generally sits in a place where there's a telephone, while the carpenter's mobile phone frees him from needing to have a shop just so people can call him.
(1:21:08)
And a mobile phone is much cheaper than paying rent for a shop, and of course it also saves him from having to pay the taxes, so it has a lot of advantages. But leaving aside the absurdity of the question in itself, while mobile phones were spreading to different classes in Egypt, and the same thing was happening in the global North, while mobile phones were starting to be marketed to the rich, an amazing phenomenon was occurring in sub-equatorial Africa.
(1:21:46)
At the time, mobile phones were more expensive there than they are here, which isn't the case anymore, and they were being marketed to the poor, sometimes to people whose lives are totally austere. The basic reason for this is connected to the infrastructure in those countries. In jungles or deserts and so on, governments, that is, assuming there is a government...
(1:22:18)
Of course, there are countries where there's no government and there's anarchy... there are countries with stable, democratic governments, like South Africa and Ghana, there are countries where it's kind of iffy like Uganda, there are countries where the state has collapsed, like [DR] Congo or Somalia... anyway, whether or not there's a stable state or democracy, they don't have the resources, and sometimes they don't have the political will, to get services to every part of the country.
(1:22:43)
It's easy and cheap for mobile phone technology, compared to land line technology, to reach every part of the country. While we in the North were thinking of mobile phones as a luxury, something for the upper classes, mobile phones were spreading like crazy in sub-equatorial Africa, causing changes that have had very significant effects on development.
(1:23:15)
The driving force behind the spread of mobile phones was of course profit, and these were capitalist projects, but it caused big changes in development and politics, because people were now able to stay in touch. It caused a big cultural change, and I could go into details, but I think we're pressed for time. All that was just because it was an easier technology.
(1:23:40)
The same goes for the Internet and for wireless Internet. What's happening is that we're on the threshold of a major technological shift. I didn't mention, for example, [unintelligible] just science fiction, outer space. Three years ago a spaceship was built, for a cost of 6 million dollars, and the people who researched it and built it aren't a government or a big financial institution.
(1:24:12)
Of course it was made in the US, it wasn't made in a third-world country, but what I'm getting at is that this was a technology that we used to see as something only accessible to governments prepared to waste huge amounts of money. It's become simpler and smaller. We've almost reached the point where we can launch satellites. In fact we do launch satellites. There's something called amateur satellites. The first amateur satellite was launched four years after the launch of Sputnik.
(1:24:37)
But it was in cooperation with... for example, we knew how to make a satellite but we neded the government to launch it for us on a rocket... so we'd make agreements with governments and when they launched something of their own, they'd launch your satellite as well. Now rockets have been invented that we can launch, and balloons that we can release and that rise slowly, and

three months later your satellite is in orbit, and there are really people doing that.
(1:25:04)
The cost is very low. The obstacles are that only a few people have the required knowledge, and that governments are of course very worried about this sort of thing because it completely abolishes sovereignty and borders and all that, so they're trying to control it. My prediction is that very soon, all communications infrastructure will start to become decentralised.
(1:25:29)
Some of it will be in the form of things in the hands of financial institutions, like mobile phones, and some of it will be in the hands of very small economic entities, like what's happening in Al-Kawm Al-Aḫḍar, where they're connecting people via wireless Internet.
(1:25:45)
Some of it will be done by activist networks. Some of it will be done by people as part of development work, and so on. The natural situation is for this alternative technology, leaving aside the question of its cost, to be adopted among the poor. And if it's being adopted among the poor in sub-equatorial Africa, where experience and scientific knowledge are very limited, I don't see why it wouldn't happen in Egypt, where we still have universities, graduates, engineers, inventors and so on.
(1:26:15)
One important thing is that we have to get in early as creators and inventors. What's happened now is that we reuse technology that was designed for us elsewhere, and we're very good at putting things to new uses. But for some things... that might not be good enough in some cases, so we need to come up with solutions ourselves.
(1:26:42)
For example, there's the question you asked about [Internet] security. All the thinking about securing digital communication deals with the risks faced by a European or an American. It doesn't deal with the risks faced by an Egyptian. Therefore the tools are very often not appropriate for our use, or they are appropriate but the level of confidence in them is lower and hasn't been confirmed.
(1:27:12)
So it's essential for us to begin getting involved in that. We're involved in it as creators but at the stage of implementation and... not as pure consumers, but at the stage of... at the end of the development cycle. We have to get involved as creators early in the process, and we have to be aware that this is an international struggle, to show solidarity, and to understand the experience of sub-equatorial Africa, south-east Asia, Europe and Latin America, in these sorts of things.
(1:27:39)
(Discussion on the content of blogs and the writing style used in them.)
(1:42:30)
(End of the conference.)