
The government retained the right to close down any media outlet at any time, and Ministry of Information censors strictly enforced the Press and Publication Law, which authorized the government to censor all domestic and imported publications.



OMAN

In October 2008, the Minister of Information announced that the Sultan of Oman ordered the training of all Omani print and broadcast journalists, both public and private. The announcement led Omani journalists to believe there was the political will to empower the media and give it more press freedom.

Other media developments during 2008 included the launch of a new entertainment radio station and the start of the television station Asala and the television channel Majan. A new commercial Internet provider was licensed to operate. Al Nawras was also the first private and the only telecommunication company providing mobile phone service in Oman.

But other facets of Oman's media structure remained the same: The government retained the right to close down any media outlet at any time, and Ministry of Information censors strictly enforced the Press and Publication Law, which authorized the government to censor all domestic and imported publications.

Information and news are widely available in Oman, and foreign broadcasts are often accessed via satellite in urban areas. However, there is a basic lack of coverage of local topics such as the economy, unemployment, or minority and migrant issues. Candidates for the October 2007 Consultative Council elections were allowed to place campaign advertisements in the local papers for the first time, and foreign journalists were invited to cover the voting. While both private and state-run print and broadcast media tend to support the government's views, some "constructive" criticism of the government is permitted. Journalists, however, still practice a high degree of self-censorship, and reporters have been jailed in the past for coverage of colleagues' arrests. Journalists are required to obtain licenses to practice, and since 2005 they have been obliged to reapply each year as an employee of a specific media outlet, thus making the practice of freelance journalism problematic. Journalists may have their licenses revoked at any time for violating press laws or for crossing red lines.

Various media companies reportedly refused to publish articles by journalists who previously criticized the government. Some journalists alleged that the government maintained a "black list" of journalists and writers whose work could not be published in the country. The authorities tolerated a limited degree of criticism of policies, government officials, and agencies, particularly via the Internet; however, such criticism rarely appeared in the mass media. The government used libel laws and concerns for national security as grounds to suppress criticism of government figures and politically objectionable views.

OMAN AT A GLANCE

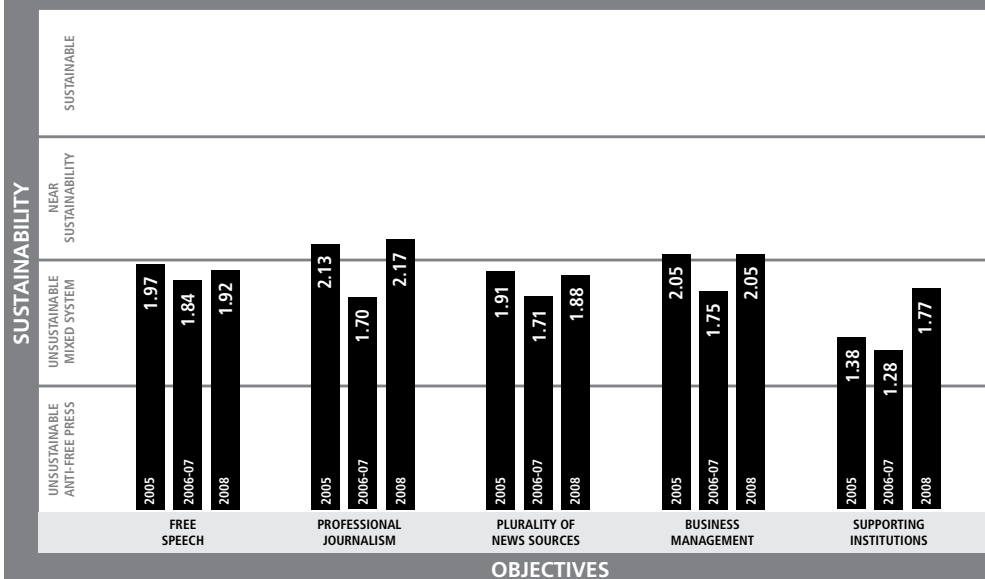
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,418,085 (*CIA World Factbook*, 2009 est.)
- > **Capital city:** Muscat
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Arab, Baluchi, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi), African (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Ibadhi Muslim 75%, other (includes Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslim, Hindu) 25% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Arabic (official), English, Baluchi, Urdu, Indian dialects (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2008-Atlas):** \$32.76 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **GNI per capita (2008-PPP):** \$20,650 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2009)
- > **Literacy rate:** 81.4% (male: 86.8%, female: 73.5%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Sultan and Prime Minister Qaboos bin Said al-Said (sultan since 23 July 1970 and prime minister since 23 July 1972)

MEDIA SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 7 dailies (4 in Arabic, 3 in English), 40 other newspapers and magazines, 13 bulletins; 8 media establishments and 70 printing presses Radio: 2; Television Stations: 2 (Ministry of Information)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top 3 by circulation: *Al Watan* (circulation 34,000), *Times of Oman* (circulation 34,000), *Oman Daily* (circulation 26,000) (Arab Press Network)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Oman News Agency (state owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 465,000 (2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: OMAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Oman Objective Score: 1.92

The 1984 Press and Publications Law is one of the most restrictive in the Arab world and serves to create a highly censored and cautious media environment. Articles 29, 30, and 31 of Oman's 1996 Basic Law guarantee freedom of expression and of the press; however, these rights must be exercised "within the limits of the law."

Panelists said if Omani journalists were working according to the limits of the law, the media environment would be much better than it is now. Faiza Al Himli, a reporter for *Al Zaman* newspaper, explained there are no clear or specific rules that protect or encourage freedom of expression or open access to information. Even so, some individuals try to create a professional environment.

Kalfan Al Abri, public relations officer at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture added that there is some freedom provided by the law, but it is restricted by many unwritten rules and instructions. These rules force journalists confront editors who often refuse to publish investigative stories. Kalfan said that self-censorship and withholding information, along with fear of making mistakes that could result in a charge of libel, are additional obstacles for journalists, making them cautious and afraid to pursue stories.

Fatima Al Ismaili, public relations officer for the Disabled Children's Association, mentioned that in 2008 many journalists reported on daring stories that would not have been published before. Journalists have started to write what readers think is important and relevant, she said. Salima Al Ameri said private newspapers started recently to publish bold stories about sensitive issues without any punishment by the government. However, people are divided in Oman between conservatives who do not want these kinds of stories to be publicly discussed and those who think publishing such stories would lead to solutions of intractable problems.

Professor Anwar Al Rawas of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department at Sultan Qaboos University said that as Oman is a developing country, the government sets its own rules and instructions to control the media. While the basic law granted freedom of expression and freedom of press, there are some barriers to media development. Bader Al Nadabi, producer at Oman Radio, said that the biggest problem facing journalists is editors who are afraid of government and business pressures. Al Rawas added that there are some journalists who are eager to establish new professional standards, and their new vision will ultimately change the government policies.

Licensing is fair and not political, confirmed some journalists; instead it relies on the amount of investment, which is very high and feasible for only the wealthiest investors. Kalfan Al Abri said capital is the most important consideration in opening a media outlet. The level of capital needed is very high and difficult to meet for most journalists seeking an independent media. Mohamed Al Bulushi, the head of local news for *Al Shabiba Daily*, added that licensing could be political because of the high capital requirements—about \$1 million. Only powerful business people and royals close to the government have this level of capital. The Ministry of Information might delay or refuse a license for "untrustworthy" people, even if they have the capital required, he said.

Journalists in Oman often complain about restrictions on access to information. While international information is easily accessible, local news and information are not, and details are hard to come by. Mariam Al Abri, reporter for *Al Zaman*, said that government organizations usually refuse to release information and require official letters from the editors and signatures from certain senior supervisors, so journalists frequently abandon or delay stories. Information is accessible for most issues except for local news. It is difficult to obtain from officials who mark it as confidential.

Al Bulushi said the situation is different from one media outlet to another, depending on the editors and the people dealing with journalists at the Ministry of Information. The Publications Law gives journalists some space to tackle

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

social issues but traditions and societal rules play the role of censors. Many journalists restrict their reporting based on these social traditions, because they believe in them. In fact, when some journalists try to write about social issues, other journalists oppose them. Issues such as marriage, racism, and homosexuality are extremely sensitive and fall into this social issue category.

Khalid Al Adawi, reporter for *Oman*, added that government officials and editors sometimes request that all news sources be Omani and do not accept foreigners as valuable sources. Faiza added that even photos published with stories must be of Omanis. There are restrictions in using non-Omani citizens in the media, whether as sources or subjects of news. Al Bulushi explained that approach does not stem from discrimination but from the government's desire to emphasize patriotic aspects in all news and programs. But that limits access to information and puts more difficulties in the reporter's way.

Whether Omani or not, all doctors are required to have permission from the Ministry of Health to speak with the media, whether or not the subject matter is related to medical issues.

Most panelists expressed hope that more freedom would be gained in the near future because the number of journalists and private media outlets is increasing. Equally hopeful are the signs that young journalists are willing to challenge past restrictions and to address issues that matter to readers, viewers, and listeners.

Journalists can use news from foreign sources and the Internet without restrictions, except for stories considered sensitive by the state or to other friendly states.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Oman Objective Score: 2.17

As media competition grows, more journalists are adopting professional principles in order to compete and achieve success. MSI panelists said that they try to write and broadcast news stories as professionally as possible, but they are confronted with obstacles: limited access to information, few resources, and official requirements by government employees. Furthermore, despite the efforts of some to improve professionalism, other journalists still lack sufficient skills.

Al Bulushi said that having many nonprofessionals with poor reporting skills leads to low quality reports and raises questions regarding overall professionalism. He said Omani newspapers have no research departments to support the

editorial departments. Khalfan Al Abri said that one problem in improving reporting skills is that originally Omani media outlets were opened to support government development plans and policies. They cannot move ahead from there and keep playing the same role.

Hamood Al Touqi, editor-in-chief of *Al Waha* magazine, said many journalists work in media just to make a living, because it was an available job for them, and once they find a better one leave the profession. Al Touqi added that many journalists learn their profession on their own or from other reporters. The awareness of the real mission of journalism is very low.

In addition to lack of skills, obtaining information is the most difficult problem facing journalists. It is difficult to get information directly from sources. Sometimes journalists have to simply depend on public relations people or press releases. Mariam Al Abri said some journalists do not bother to produce stories, choosing instead to write exactly what they were told. Therefore, journalists write news in the same style. Khalfan Al Abri said some journalists have become lazy because of this and prefer to wait for news instead of looking for stories. Al Adawi indicated that some journalists ignore professional obligations in order to retain their sources, regardless of the specifics of the story. He said some journalists look for information undercover. Getting information depends on the personal skills of the journalists, as there is no law that requires officials to release information.

All panelists agreed that none of the media organizations in Oman have a code of ethics and journalists as a group have yet to adopt one. In general journalists follow acceptable

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

ethics in pursuing their stories in spite of this. Salima Al Ameri said some media organizations do not respect the ethics of the profession because they do not consider them obligations like laws.

Al Rawas said that self-censorship is widespread among journalists. The government practices censorship on some levels, but it leaves it to journalists themselves, who very strongly practice self-censorship. Lots of journalists are afraid of being fired. All stories or comments that criticize the government might lead to questioning journalists or detaining them. Some journalists have been banned from writing, or they were transferred to another job.

Faiza Al Himili, a reporter with *Al Zaman*, said editors often censor stories, so even when stories are executed according to professional standards, the story that is published does not resemble what was originally written. Al Ameri said editors prefer to accept the influence of commercial interests over maintaining professional, independent editorial policies.

Coverage of key events is limited by editors to those topics that do not create undue controversy. Journalists cover all events they are asked to, but they cannot freely choose what to cover. They might be threatened or banned from writing if they dare to publish articles on forbidden subjects.

Panelists had mixed reviews of salaries for media professional in Oman, but said that salaries are increasing because of the growing number of private media outlets being launched and the rising competition between them. Many journalists are paid poorly, especially those who work for the private sector, and can be as low as \$500 a month. Mariam Al Abri said journalists do not feel satisfied by the salaries they get, so they do not care about their work. "Most of these journalists are young people like me, who graduated from college and are enthusiastic and want to practice good journalism, but low salaries made them hopeless," she said. She expressed fear that most young journalists would leave for other jobs. She said that many of her colleagues already left to work in public relations departments in different organizations.

On the other hand, Al Ismaili said, "Regarding salaries, I know that they are good. I work as a freelancer and with a comparison to other careers, working in journalism is rewarding," she said. She said that competition is the reason for this, because most media outlets are looking for good professional journalists.

Entertainment programs dominate the radio and television channels, compared to newspapers that present news stories and are balanced with entertainment pages.

Al Himili added that 2008 was notable in that newspapers tried to stick to high quality layout and printing standards. Media outlets usually own modern tools and equipment which allow them to have good quality production.

Specialized reporting is rather lackluster. Al Bulushi noted that many journalists who write about the economy do not know how to report on the issue to make it understandable for readers or viewers. Instead, they usually print their sources' information without any analysis. Investigative journalism is almost absent from Omani media. Frequently investigative journalists are asked not to do stories because the media outlet fears legal reprisals or other problems with the government. "Several times I did investigative stories, but I could not publish them," Al Himili said.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Oman Objective Score: 1.88

The number of newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting outlets has grown. A new radio station and two television stations started operating in 2008. Panelists expect that many other media outlets are on their way, due to the successes of current media outlets. While many sources of information exist in Oman, there are limitations to the plurality of news that local media provide to Omanis. The state still dominates news over broadcast channels, with local private broadcasters providing little in the way of an alternate. Instead private broadcasters focus on entertainment or other shows that remain on the fringe of "news and information."

Furthermore, journalists attempting to do professional quality reporting with a plurality of views face problems, including lack of access to sources and information and a lack of awareness about the media's role. Journalists are afraid of the Ministry of Information, which practices severe censorship on both public and private media organizations. Government censorship of private media is more stringent, which affects how news stories are presented even when information is accessible.

However, panelists noted that since last year there has been progress regarding the plurality of news sources, as journalists are eager to do a professional job despite government control of most news resources.

Most media establishments are in Muscat. However, most people have access to, and can afford to buy or subscribe to, local and international media outlets. Omanis rely on television, including international and regional satellite, and radio for much of their news. Print media is less in use, mostly because of poor readership. Newspapers are read

mainly by employees of government ministries and state-run companies because all government bodies subscribe to them. Nonetheless, the number of newspapers is increasing in Oman, and international publications are easily found at local newsstands.

While the Internet is widely available, there is no professional, independent news web site to take advantage of the relative freedom that the Internet provides. Omanis cannot create serious forums for discussions and political debates in cyberspace. But the existing Internet forums give local events more importance and allow for more free expression on some web sites.

The state-owned media reflects government views and dominates all media, including the private sector. Some panelists said the government's views might on occasion reflect the public interest or represent the people's views, but that different points of view do not commonly appear in Oman's television and radio.

The state-owned Oman News Agency (ONA) is the only one in Oman. Local media have to use news broadcast by ONA as the official news from the government. ONA is considered the spokesperson for the government, and any official news must be taken directly from it and confirmed by the agency, especially important stories involving the Sultan or government VIPs. Al Touqi said that Omani media depends on the official agency because it is the most trusted source on that level. But citizens do not usually trust the government sources and prefer stories told by journalists directly.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

Other foreign news agencies are accessible and affordable through the Internet. But media outlets can use the Gulf, Arab, and international news agency stories without changing or adding information or only making changes with caution.

Omani state television and radio produce their own programs, which panelists said mainly express the government's views more than the people's. As noted above, local private broadcasters produce little news and information programming; what little is to be found is taken primarily from government sources. Media owners are known for being either part of the government or powerful investors.

Oman does not allow minorities to own media. The owner and editors-in-chief have to be Omanis, according to the law. However, Al Rawas said there is more freedom to report stories about social or community problems. But reporting them has not yet reached a high professional level because the process reflects the journalists' views and incorporates self-censorship.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Oman Objective Score: 2.05

The media business is growing in Oman. Al Nadabi confirmed that optimism about the media means more will flourish in the future. Good management would make media more successful and independent. He mentioned that the market share of advertising for private media is growing compared to the state-owned media outlets. Al Ismaili said having many media outlets helps to open the market commercially and advances the quality of the media product. Many people believe that privately owned media are independent, and they are trusted more than the state-owned media. People also consider private media better sources of information. Therefore, they have a competitive edge.

Al Bulushi said that some media outlets are linked to the profit they make from other businesses. For example, some private newspapers were established because of the profits made by their printing companies. The managers of these media outlets realized their businesses could grow if they owned a newspaper or a radio station. But this did not free the media and did not make it independent, he added.

Al Adawi said that business people who do not have any real interest in journalism operate most of the private media outlets. Profit is the goal of owning a media company. The managers of private media outlets come from various backgrounds unrelated to media. Management employees also suffer from low salaries.

Al Ismaili said that private media has many financial resources. Faiza Al Himli said private media makes a lot of profit from advertising, making them independent financially but not editorially. They have the choice to be different but not to the extent that they upset the government. Mariam Al Abri explained that because management of media establishments is weak, advertisers apply a lot of pressure. Private media is established on a commercial basis, so it does not try to balance editorial content and advertising. This confuses journalists about their real mission.

Al Zaman, the newest newspaper in Oman, tried to be independent but faced financial problems. It had to abandon its goals of independence in order to continue to pay employee salaries.

The Internet has helped in opening new advertising space, and this may gradually allow media outlets to become independent. Lately some media outlets have used text messages and other means to advertise.

Although only Omanis can own media companies, non-Omanis dominate the advertising market. Businesses believe that Omanis do not have enough experience in this field, which limits the opportunities of young graduates seeking careers. Panelists noted that the number of advertisements in Oman is not as numerous as in neighboring countries' media outlets.

Advertising is the main financial support for private-sector media. Subscriptions and sales form a much smaller source at print media.

Al Touqi, the editor and owner of *Al Waha* magazine, said independent media in Oman do not receive funding

or subsidies from the government and rely completely on commercial advertising and circulation. Until recently the government subsidized the private media, but now it is giving loans on easy terms as an alternative. The government has supported media outlets such as newspapers through subscriptions and advertising as well. Many government bodies and private companies put pressure on and attach conditions in order to have a business relationship. They sometimes stop their advertisements and subscriptions if a media outlet does not obey them.

Panelist Salima Al Ameri said market research is done by academic institutions and there is no cooperation between them and the media. Panelists agreed that studies and research are not really used for strategic planning. A few establishments understand its importance but are not yet conducting research. Mariam Al Abri said most Omani media outlet do not realize the importance of research.

There is no independent organization that provides statistics about circulation or audience size in Oman. Print media companies announce any circulations numbers they want for propaganda purposes and without any references. Some private media companies make false claims about their products and provide false statistics, saying the information came from experts and specialists.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Oman Objective Score: 1.77

Media-supporting institutions in Oman are rare, but the few in operation did better in 2008. The Omani Journalists Association (OJA) tried, along with the Omani Writers Association (OWA), to develop journalists' and writers' rights and protections, but they cannot openly support media interests or media independence. The 2006 law allows the formation of labor and trade unions of all kinds, yet there are no media unions in Oman. The OJA, which is still the most relevant NGO for journalists, typically does not deal with issues related to freedom of expression or independent media. Many journalists accuse the OJA of acting as a government supervisor more than as a supporting media association.

However, panelists agreed that OJA is moving slowly on journalists' rights and had played significant roles in some cases to protect journalists. Faiza confirmed that OJA's role in protecting journalists is not clear, and that its members are still working on its mission and objectives. Bader Al Nadabi said the problem is that the government encourages the "one voice" policy and does not believe in a plurality of news and opinion. Instead it emphasizes increasing the level of self-censorship among journalists.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Al Bulushi said that media-support institutions, which sustain independent media, do not exist in Oman generally. OJA and OWA are the only relative forms of media NGOs, but they do not have clear or influential roles. "These two associations put some pressure on when three journalists, including myself, were questioned by the general attorney about articles published regarding launching new ferries without planning. The associations succeeded in moving [the government's response from a] verdict of jail to signing an official letter that we wouldn't write about such things without permission from the authorities," he said.

Al Rawas said OJA is relatively new, and the problem is with the members because they are not specialized in media or journalism. Some of them are technicians working on electronic media or web sites. Most of the members are either working for the government or very close to it.

The NGO law in Oman prohibits dealing with political issues—asking for freedom of speech and journalists' rights are considered political issues. Panelists talked about the importance of media organizations protecting their own journalists. They said that journalists are often forced to confront security forces on their own because editors would abandon them so they do not damage their relationships with government's officials.

Journalists mentioned that one public organization, which is supervised and managed directly by the Ministry of Information, monitors employees, including journalists, by putting cameras all over the building. This situation is extremely disappointing for journalists who asked, how are we supposed to request freedom while they work in a jail-like environment.

Some panelists view this situation as a normal transition period. They believe that during the next 10 years the

face of Omani media will change completely, because the government will not be able to control the waves of new media, the growing role of civil society organizations, or the expectations of new generations of journalists and citizens.

Khalfan Al Abri said that few educational institutes offer media training. One that does is Sultan Qaboos University, but some media outlets believe its graduates are not qualified. Students do not get training on freedom of expression or freedom of the press. Also, most of their training is in Arabic, while English is needed more in the media market.

Warda Al Lawati, senior reporter with *Oman*, said that private colleges train students in English. Public colleges should focus on teaching in English. Journalists who are specialists in economics, for example, need to read and get information from different sources—and most of the Internet sources are in English.

Panelists indicated that media professors and teachers never practiced journalism, so their teaching is theoretical and too academic. Faiza mentioned that media students are required to show some journalistic skills, and they are interviewed before they are accepted in journalism departments. Al Bulushi said he was refused enrollment as a journalism student because of his overall grades. "I had to study something else and after graduation I worked hard to become a journalist," he said. What is needed in media training institutions, he said, is liberal thinking and good skills training.

The announcement in 2008 about the training of journalists on orders from the Sultan of Oman has had a major impact on Omani journalists, who have expressed optimism and hope. The training project includes all Omani journalists, whether in public or private media outlets. The Ministry of Information is in charge of the training process. Panelists said that the ministry already distributed forms to media organizations in order to determine the number of journalists in the country and the areas of training that are needed.

Al Bulushi said he was optimistic about the comprehensive training, which editors and governmental employees cannot ignore, because it came by orders from the Sultan. This training includes all media, even the electronic media. As the ministry announced, training will be at all levels and will be provided by local, regional, and international media training organization.

Al Adawi remarked that training might exclude correspondents in the regions and towns outside the capital. Most of these organizations do not recognize correspondents as part of their staff.

Al Bulushi mentioned that the Diplomatic Institute (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) offers training for three journalists from each media organization annually. The training includes how to write investigative reports.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

List of Panel Participants

Anwar Al Rawas, professor, Mass Communication and Journalism Department, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

Hamood Al Touqi, editor-in-chief, *Al Waha*, Muscat

Wardah Al Lawati, senior reporter, *Oman*, Muscat

Khalid Al Adawi, reporter *Oman*, Muscat

Faiza Al Himili, reporter, *Al Zaman*, Muscat

Fatima Al Ismaili, public relations officer for disabled children's association, Muscat

Mohammed Al Bulushi, head of local department, *Al Shabiba*, Muscat

Bader Al Nadabi, producer, Oman FM Radio, Muscat

Khalfan Al Abri, public relations officer, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Muscat

Abdulmonem Al Hassani, professor, Mass Communication and Journalism Department, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

Mariam Al Abri, reporter, *Al Zaman*, Muscat

Saeed Al Hashmi, writer, State Council, Muscat

Moderator and Author

Rafiah Al Talei, program director, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Muscat

The Oman study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, Gulf Forum for Citizenship, Muscat.