

Shura approves Press freedom bill in Bahrain

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In their last session of the 2006-2007 term, the Shura Council yesterday approved a long-awaited Press freedom bill.

The bill was approved by a vote of 26 out of the 34 present members, while eight members abstained.

The bill stresses the right of the journalists to acquire information and publish it accurately without any outside interference or censorship and the right to live freely after publication. It also stresses the public's right to know. The bill seeks to amend laws that charge journalists under criminal law.

Dr Fauzeyya Saeed Al Saleh, while presenting the bill to the council, said that the bill had been discussed in three different sessions in the Legal Affairs and Legislative Committee and was signed by five Council members: Ibrahim Mohammad Bashmi, Jamal Mohammad Fakhroo, Abdul Rahman Mohammad Jumashier, Doctor Shaikh Khalid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and Khaled Hussein Al Muskati.

The Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs, Shaikh Khaleed bin Ali Al Khalifa, urged members not to demand freedom without responsibility.

"The demands for freedom should also be accompanied by demand for journalists being responsible in their work," he said.

He said that most comparisons with the western models of democracy were misguided as the country was a young democracy.

"We are doing our best to become fully democratic and this needs some time. The West has also passed through the stage we are in right now," he added.

The Minister of Information, Dr Abdulghaffar, was also present during the discussion on Press freedom.

"I thank the Shura members for coming up with the proposal for media freedom. The media freedom law is very important not only for the protection of journalists but also for the protection of the public's right to information," he said.