

General Secretariat

Media and Communication Sector

Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Information Ministers

The address of His Excellency Ambassador Ahmed Rashid Khattabi,

Assistant Secretary-General and head of the Media and Communication Sector,

At the second meeting of the team negotiating with international media companies

(Riyadh: 18 July 2024)

In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful,,

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the beginning, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Information in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the warm reception, the usual generous hospitality, and the excellent preparations for hosting this meeting. Everyone recognises the importance of advancing efforts to establish an effective Arab stance in dealing with international media companies.

This meeting is part of Arab efforts to crystallise a unified and harmonious negotiating vision with major digital companies in their financial dimensions. This aligns with Resolution 533 issued by the 53rd session of the Council of Ministers of Information, held in Rabat on 21 June 2023, which mandated the team to promptly activate a mechanism to apply a digital tax of at least 15 percent on these companies to benefit from the income they earn in the Arab region from sales and advertising.

This negotiating vision is also meant to protect Arab media content, with a primary focus on defending the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause and protecting the digital rights of Palestinian media entities amid unfair practices against journalists, bloggers, and influencers, including restrictions, deletions, blocking, and censorship, especially with the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza and the repeated incursions into the West Bank.

In this situation, we are required to make a concerted effort to implement this strategic direction, which embodies a strong and clear collective will to confidently engage in the knowledge and communication society, protect Arab digital interests, and combat the speech of terrorism, hatred, and discrimination to preserve our spiritual, moral, cultural, and societal values. On this occasion, I would like to commend the team for their dedicated work and the seriousness and responsibility they demonstrated in developing important recommendations

during the first meeting held in Amman on 29 August 2023, which contributed to advancing this negotiation process.

These recommendations are the result of the constructive observations and proposals from member states, reflecting their commitment to enrich the valuable groundwork laid by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Arab States Broadcasting Union on how to deal with major companies within a safe and balanced contractual framework. This framework is inspired by similar regional models, particularly the European Union's digital services law.

It is evident that these recommendations emphasise the necessity of establishing a gradual implementation timetable, collecting relevant data and technical information from member states, and seeking assistance from competent professionals, including, when necessary, a specialised expert office. This approach will ensure the team completes its task under optimal conditions and within the best deadlines.

I am confident that the agenda prepared by the esteemed Ministry of Information, characterised by in-depth discussions, workshops, and presentations on the Arab digital landscape and the European digital experience, will impart a practical dimension to this high-level meeting. As we live in a country marked by ambitious development trends, including unprecedented media transformations, we anticipate that the conclusions of this meeting will mark a qualitative and bold step forward in the process of Arab media work.

May God's peace and mercy be upon you.