Internet Masr Statement on Internet Situation in Egypt

June 2017

The Internet is recognized as a matrix for enabling digital economy, as well as a future platform for many different Internet of Things applications. Adoption of the Internet in Egypt during the last ten years has been rapid and swift. Today, it is estimated that there are more than 35 million Internet users in Egypt with more than 4 million fixed broadband lines and 35 million mobile broadband wireless users.

The Internet has had a deep effect on the Egyptian society with solid adoption and enthusiasm across different segments of the society especially youth, academia and businesses transforming the way Egyptians live their lives and conduct their daily activities and affairs.

However, over the past year or so, several incidents have surfaced causing unusual service disruption and making access to some online applications and services much more difficult. During the summer of 2016, problems started to arise regarding connectivity and stability of SSL and HTTPs and VPN connections in the country with no clarification from service providers to user community.

In April 2017, it has been observed that several VoIP applications suffered from repeated interruptions across Egypt. Service providers said that VoIP blockage had nothing to do with them, according to several users who have took the issue to their ISPs. Reports continued to confirm service disruption while noting that users could mostly continue to use VoIP applications through VPN connections. Few days later, accessing such applications through VPNs has become, and continues to be, a challenge as most VPN applications have also seemingly been subject to similar patterns of distributed unexplained disruptions. The lack of clear explanation has left the users and businesses, large and small, evidently mystified and confused.

Over-The-Top and Cloud applications are critical for many businesses, start-ups, civil society organizations, and individuals, and any disruption thereof would make the services they offer in Egypt degraded and global operations virtually impossible. This would on the longer run affect the overall business environment in the country, and constitute a major setback for Egypt's competitiveness and e-readiness ranking regionally and worldwide.

In May 2017, Egyptian authorities have reportedly blocked more than 20 news websites in a concerted counter terrorism effort with other Arab countries in the region according to some media sources. The number of blocked websites has been increasing to reach over 100 sites according to a recent report.

Internet Masr, the ISOC Chapter in Egypt, observes these developments with caution. We call upon all Internet stakeholders in Egypt from service providers, government, private sector, and civil society to promote and maintain an open, and unfragmented Internet access for all.

We emphasize the key role of the open Internet as a key enabler of socioeconomic development, and as the major platform of opportunity for individuals in the 21st century, at a time the world is promoting opportunity for youth in a key effort against radicalization and terrorism. We also stress the importance of maintaining a positive environment for the exercise of the constitutional rights online, including freedom of speech, privacy and citizen protection.