



Privacy, at a price?

May 2011

Ex-motorsports boss Max Mosley has lost his European Court of Human Rights bid to force newspapers to warn people before exposing their private lives. He was fighting for tighter privacy laws for individuals.

In 2008, the UK High Court awarded him £60,000 damages after ruling a newspaper invaded his right to privacy by reporting on his sex life.

Although he was awarded a substantial sum, he argued money alone was not enough as it could not restore his reputation – everyone had already learned the details of his sexual preferences. He went to court to defend his privacy and, ultimately, to fight for his right to not have his privacy violated by others.

His case challenged UK laws, which allow publication without giving targets advanced warning. He said he had not been made aware of the paper's intention to publish, so never had the chance to apply for an injunction to stop the story, and so protect his privacy. So called 'super-injunctions'¹ are court orders banning the publication of certain information, and even banning the reporting of the existence of the ban.

Some argue that super-injunctions are being used as legal tools by the rich to limit free speech in their own interests. Prime Minister, David Cameron, has admitted to being uneasy at the increasing use of court orders obtained by celebrities to ban media reports about their private life.

Privacy, and the rights of individuals, are often prioritised in Western society – people want to protect their privacy at all costs. However, in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, privacy is often only a theoretical concept.

Famous or rich people are able to take out injunctions, protecting themselves from unwanted intrusion and privacy violation. In comparison, poorer people, especially in other countries, often find that privacy is a rare commodity that they can only imagine.

In Egypt there is a large gap between rich and poor. The village of Beni Khalil, 75 miles south of Cairo, has about 750 residents and, until

¹ With an injunction, the press can state that they cannot give details of an event because an injunction is in place. With a super-injunction, they can make no reference to the event whatsoever – they can't even say that there is an injunction in place.

recently, conditions were extremely hard. Families, of up to 8 members, lived in small one-room apartments, with no chance of privacy. Health problems were common, including chronic diseases caused by malnutrition or a lack of hygiene, because no houses had running water or toilets. The village's illiteracy rate was 80% and unemployment was high.

In 2003, BibleLands began working with DUET (Development of Upper Egypt Trust) in Beni Khalil, providing a comprehensive plan to break through the vicious circle of desperate poverty, to increase the standard of living for the entire village.

The programme aims to improve social and economic conditions, and provide residents with the dignity and privacy they deserve.

Other extreme cases of poverty can be found in Ezbet El Nakhl, a rubbish dump in Cairo housing 15,000 people. The people who live here, the Zabaleen (meaning 'rubbish pickers'), live in small huts built from the rubbish that surrounds them.

Conditions at Ezbet El Nakhl are so appalling that they are hard to imagine. The area is affected by chronic overcrowding, as well as pollution, illiteracy, high unemployment, high infant mortality and a lack of basic health, hygiene and welfare services.

This is where the Salaam Centre works. It was founded by some nuns, who began by living in a small hut in the middle of the rubbish dump, visiting every family, sharing their experiences and building relationships with them.

All of the centre's services (child healthcare, schools and a hospital) are provided at a reduced cost, or free to those who cannot afford to pay anything. They are crucial in helping to better the general health of this incredibly impoverished and neglected community.

The issues of privacy and rights are fundamental ones for effective community cohesion, and shouldn't be ignored. Basic rights for people in the Middle East aren't always guaranteed so we need to use our voices to ensure these issues aren't kept private.

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