

## Arab Scholar and Software Developer Wins Swedish Democracy Prize

Orebro, Sweden  
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An Arab university scholar and software developer has been awarded the Democracy Prize for 2010 by Örebro University in its Annual Academy celebration held today in Örebro, Sweden.

Walid Al-Saqaf, a Yemeni national pursuing his higher studies at Örebro University in media and communications was chosen based on his research work that was 'grounded in the true democratic ideals and ambitions' according to the nominating committee. Al-Saqaf developed YemenPortal.net, which was the first country-specific aggregator in the Arab world, and is specialized in collecting news, forum, opinion, blog and video content from dozens of online sources. Since it was launched in 2007, the engine indexed around 1.8 million items ranging from news and opinion articles to video clips, most which are related to Yemen.

However, in January 2008, the Yemeni government blocked access to yemenportal.net from within Yemen at a time the website witnessed rapid growth in readership and popularity. Al-Saqaf noted in a press conference held on Friday at the university that the action by the government may have been because he had insisted on not succumbing to pressure to filter out critical articles and views that the Yemeni regime deemed anti-unity or threatening to national security.

Since the ban took place, Al-Saqaf proceeded in developing anti-censorship solutions that are used by hundreds of users across the world. The most notable project is the development of alkasir, an online censorship tracking and circumvention software developed with the assistance of the [MidEast Youth network](#).

In a press conference for the Swedish local and national media, Al-Saqaf thanked the university and the Swedish people for their support for him during the ordeal following the ban of his website and expressed his desire to pursue a PhD degree to analyze the phenomenon of censorship in the Arab world using alkasir and its upcoming browser, which he said, will be the world's first browser that attempts to be exclusively used for bypassing censorship across the world. He also indicated the escalating violations against press freedom in Yemen, particularly in the last few months.

It is worth noting that alkasir Browser is to be introduced in version 1.2 of alkasir, which is to undergo testing by alkasir.com members in February 2010 and to be released to the public as a freeware product later this year. Membership with alkasir.com is free.

### **Related links:**

- Yemen Portal Aggregator and Search Engine: [Yemenportal.net](#)
- alkasir software for tracking and circumventing censorship: [alkasir.com](#)
- Örebro University's website: [www.oru.se](#)
- Mid East Youth: <http://mideastyouth.org>