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Myanmar: Workshops on Media Law and Defamation

The second Conference on Media Development in Myanmar, held from 20-21 May 2013 and attracting over 300 participants, noted progress in several areas of media development, including the ongoing preparation of four laws, namely a print law; a printers and publishers law; a broadcasting law; and a public service media law. Participants at the conference also discussed reform of existing laws, and especially the defamation law, and the possibility of preparing a right to information law.

In an immediate follow-up to the conference, Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) and International Media Support (IMS), in partnership with Mizzima Media, hosted two workshops to discuss these issues: one for members of the national and regional parliaments, focusing on media regulation; and one for lawyers, focusing on international standards and defamation.

“These workshops were part of our ongoing programme of support to the media law reform process in Myanmar,” said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. “It is essential that different stakeholders understand key international standards regarding media regulation, and also other freedom of expression standards, especially as the reform process deepens.”

CLD and IMS have been working together to support the development of democratic media legislation. This has included a number of workshops for different stakeholders, and the provision of technical advice and written submissions on the four laws and related issues, such as the constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression and the draft code of ethics being prepared by the Press Council.

The workshop on defamation was the first time IMS and CLD have held an event focused on that issue. The aim was to provide lawyers with tools they can use to defend journalists and media outlets who face defamation suits. At the end of the workshop, participants agreed to take forward a discussion on ways to work more closely together to continue to build their skills in this area.

“The media development conference held on 20-21 May reaffirmed that journalists in Myanmar are experiencing an unprecedented level of freedom to exercise their rights. As these changes become more rooted, it will be important to ensure that journalists and media outlets have access to good legal advice if they need it,” said Jesper Højberg, Executive Director of International Media Support (IMS).

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