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Myanmar: Civil Society Workshop Stresses Importance of Right to Information

Representatives of 80 different NGOs, from all regions of Myanmar, met in Yangon on Wednesday with the support of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) and International Media Support (IMS) to discuss the importance of the right to information (RTI) to the country's democratic transition. The workshop, which was organised by a working group of local NGOs, aimed to raise awareness among civil society about the importance of the right to information and what makes a strong RTI law.

“Civil society in Myanmar needs to have a good understanding of the key principles underlying the right to information so as to be able to engage effectively to promote a strong law,” said CLD Executive Director Toby Mendel. *“The involvement of civil society in the development of such legislation is also central to its democratic credentials.”*

The workshop's 193 participants heard from international experts and local stakeholders about the benefits of the right to information and participants strongly endorsed the need to adopt such legislation in Myanmar. There was also agreement on the need to build a broad coalition to work on this issue, involving NGOs and media organisations, among others. There was, in particular, agreement that advocacy efforts will be more effective if civil society speaks with one voice.

“All stakeholders in Myanmar have an interest in the right to information being safeguarded. Citizen engagement and input into the process of formulating ways to ensure that government is open and transparent will be crucial, and this workshop was an important first step,” said Esben Harboe, Programme Manager, IMS.

The workshop was held as part of a broader discussion on Myanmar's interest in joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Adoption of an RTI law is an essential step towards Myanmar's eligibility to join the OGP.

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