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Myanmar Lawyers' Workshop Focuses on Freedom of Expression

On 25 July 2015, the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) and the Myanmar Media Lawyers' Network (MMLN), with the support of International Media Support (IMS), carried out a workshop for lawyers on defamation law and restrictions on freedom of expression in the name of national security. The workshop, which involved 25 lawyers from Yangon, is the latest in a series of events arranged by the MMLN, a network of lawyers dedicated to promoting freedom of expression which was founded in 2014.

The topics were chosen due to their relevance to Myanmar's ongoing democratic transition. Over the past week, two editors from the *Myanmar Herald* were convicted of criminal defamation for an interview they published which criticised President Thein Sein. Their lawyer, U Zaw Linn, was among the speakers.

"Criminal defamation laws have no place in a democratic country and they certainly should not be used to stifle criticism against the Head of State," said CLD Executive Director Toby Mendel.

The workshop also discussed the Bi Mon Tae Nay case, in which five journalists, editors and publishers were charged with making statements which "alarmed the public" after their journal erroneously reported that Aung San Suu Kyi had formed an interim government, a subject which, according to international standards, does not touch on national security.

"It is important for Myanmar's legal community to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our country's laws, particularly where they impact on important human rights," said Than Zaw, Secretary of the Myanmar Media Lawyers' Network.

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