



## The Centre for Law and Democracy

The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) is an international human rights organisation (i.e. non-profit NGO) based in Halifax, Canada, which was founded at the beginning of 2010. Being based in Canada, the Centre aims to take advantage of the positive environment for rights in this country, and to supplement the otherwise rather limited pool of international human rights organisations based here.

Thematically, it focuses on those rights which are foundational to democracy (democratic rights), including the right to access information held by public bodies (the right to information), as well as the rights to freedom of expression, to vote and participate, and to freedom of association and assembly.

Founded by veteran human rights campaigner, Toby Mendel, CLD specialises in providing legal and policy expertise on democratic rights. Geographically, CLD aims to work globally on the rights it promotes. Since being founded in January 2010, it has already undertaken work in countries in most regions of the world, including Indonesia, Paraguay, South Africa, the Maldives, Canada, Mozambique, Kyrgyzstan, Bermuda, Jordan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Brazil, Pakistan, Mongolia, Iraq, Sierra Leone and Thailand. As this list demonstrates, the focus of its work is on developing countries, although it also occasionally works in developed countries, including Canada.

A central philosophy of CLD is to work in partnership with local groups when promoting human rights in different countries. This allows it to match its legal and policy expertise with local knowledge about priorities, strategies, networks and key contacts. This approach also promotes synergies, allowing it to take advantage of local organisational resources without needing to maintain a local presence. Thus, for example, when CLD organises a workshop abroad to raise awareness about democratic rights, it will provide international expertise on these rights, while its local partner(s) will look after local logistics, ensure that relevant people attend the workshop and provide input into the agenda to make sure it addresses local priorities.

CLD undertakes a wide range of activities to promote democratic rights. A key activity is providing analyses of draft laws to help ensure that they conform to international human rights standards. So far, just in the area of the right to information, CLD has analysed drafts laws in Sierra Leone, Bermuda, Paraguay, the Maldives and Pakistan. It has also analysed the draft Public Communications Policy of the Asian Development Bank (ABD). This latter activity was undertaken with the

Global Transparency Initiative (GTI), a global network of organisations promoting openness at the international financial institutions, of which CLD is a member.

In some cases, CLD works directly with the authorities to draft legislation. It has, for example, assisted the Mongolia National Broadcaster to draft a new broadcasting law for the country. It also participated in the Group of Experts on Access to Information advising the Organization of American States (OAS) to prepare its Model Inter-American Law on Access to Information, which is intended to provide guidance to countries in the Americas in drafting national right to information laws.

CLD undertakes a number of activities to raise awareness about democratic rights and to build the capacity of its partners and others to promote these rights. This includes undertaking research and publishing papers on various national rights issues. For example, CLD has published reports on media ownership rules in South Africa, a paper on international rules on hate speech for a Macedonian publication and a report on ICT development in the Maldives. CLD representatives have also given presentations at a large number of seminars, workshops and conferences in different countries, with a view to raising awareness about democratic rights.

In addition to its country-level activities, CLD works internationally to promote democratic rights. For example, in February 2010, CLD worked with the four specialised international mandates (Special Rapporteurs) on freedom of expression at the UN, OAS, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and African Commission to produce a Joint Declaration outlining the 10 key threats to freedom of expression over the next decade. CLD is also taking part in a series of expert meetings hosted by the UN Special Rapporteur to develop principles on freedom of expression and the Internet. These global activities are supplemented by an active programme of research, which includes reports (published or upcoming) on restrictions on freedom of expression, amendments to right to information laws, and self-regulation versus legal rules.

Some major upcoming activities by CLD include:

- Launching a methodology to provide a comparative rating of right to information laws against other such laws.
- Publishing a report on a project testing budget openness in 84 countries (including Canada), in partnership with the International Budget Partnership and a number of other international NGOs.
- Commencement of a major project in Indonesia assisting in the implementation of their right to information law, which came into force in May 2010.

In terms of support, CLD relies on funding from donors rather than selling services to clients. So far, CLD has attracted only limited funding, and has done much of its work on a pro bono or short-term funding basis, although this is set to change soon. To deliver the work, CLD relies on a number of international experts and short-term staff; and, longer-term funding will enable the Centre to hire permanent staff. Many

of the opportunities CLD has come from Mendel's extensive network of contacts and working experience, gained from nearly 20 years of work in the human rights field.

Structurally, CLD is a company limited by guarantee (i.e. a non-profit company), with a board of directors which includes, in addition to Mendel, academic Dawn Russell of Dalhousie law school, practising human rights lawyer Lee Cohen, and the head of Amnesty International Canada, Alex Neve.

For more information about the Centre for Law and Democracy and its activities, visit [www.law-democracy.org](http://www.law-democracy.org) <<http://www.law-democracy.org>>.

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