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Sri Lanka: Statement by International Mission

The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) participated in the International Media Assessment Mission to Sri Lanka from 8 to 14 May. The aim of the Mission was to assess the media freedom situation in Sri Lanka and to make recommendations regarding media reform needs going forward. The Mission welcomed the positive changes in the environment for media freedom since the new government came into power on 8 January 2015. But it also noted that there is a need for structural and institutional changes to anchor those changes and to create a more robust framework for media freedom.

“We had a very good discussion with the Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, and he supported almost all of the suggestions we put forward and also welcomed our support in taking them forward”, said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“The challenge now will be to deliver on those promises.”*

A Joint Statement was issued at the end of the Mission setting out findings and recommendations, including the following key recommendations for the government:

- To adopt comprehensive legislation on broadcasting which would, among other things, establish an independent regulator and recognise public service, commercial and community broadcasters.
- Transform the State broadcasters into public service broadcasters.
- Adopt and then implement a strong right to information law.
- Create an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate past killings of and attack on journalists.
- Abolish the Press Council Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and adopt legislation to codify the rules on contempt of court.
- Undertake a broad consultation to determine the best way forward in terms of enhancing academic and training opportunities for media workers.

CLD urges the government to keep to its promises to move forward with this important media freedom reform agenda and we offer our support to help it do so.

The Joint Statement is available at: www.law-democracy.org/live/sri-lanka-statement-by-international-mission.

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