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Myanmar: Workshops on Media Freedom and the Right to Information

Over the past few days, the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), with support from International Media Support and FOJO Media Institute, hosted a series of workshops with its partners, the Myanmar Media Lawyers' Network (MMLN), Pyi Gyi Khin (PGK), the Civil Society RTI Technical Working Group and the Myanmar Press Council (MPC). The workshops focused on the right to information and content restrictions in various Myanmar laws. The latter was particularly timely as senior representatives of the Eleven Media Group were taken into custody on allegations of having breached the defamation provisions in the 2013 Telecommunications Law while a CLD sponsored workshop on this was taking place.

“Myanmar has made significant progress in reforming its media laws,” said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“But there is still an urgent need to reform the content restrictions in other laws and to adopt a right to information law.”*

The workshops provided opportunities for legal experts, senior journalists, leading civil society organisations and members of the MPC to discuss the need for further law reform efforts. Article 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, which criminalises not only defamation but also a range of other often vague types of statements disseminated via a “telecommunications network”, was a particular focus due not only to the current arrests but also because of the number of other cases which have been launched in recent months.

An ever increasing number of civil society groups are also embracing the idea that Myanmar needs to adopt a strong right to information law giving individuals a right to access information held by public bodies and generally making government more transparent. There has been little official action on this front since the Ministry of Information released a draft Right to Information Act in February 2016 and held a consultation on it the following month.

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