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For the Myanmar Press Council, Legitimacy Requires Independence

The military regime running Myanmar recently hosted members of the new Myanmar Press Council (MPC) at a much-vaunted ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw. But the new MPC, appointed by the military after former members resigned following the February coup, does not have the independence needed to act as a legitimate media regulatory body.

The MPC, as provided for in the 2014 News Media Law, should be an independent body which is responsible for resolving disputes regarding the media. It is meant to serve as an alternative to legal action, such as criminal charges.

“Prior to the February coup, the Myanmar Press Council acted independently to affirm media freedom and to promote media professionalism in Myanmar,” said Toby Mendel, Executive Director of CLD. *“Sadly, due to military interference, it can no longer be relied upon to act as an independent institution.”*

International standards call for media to be regulated via a professional, independent oversight body. If a media regulator is established by law, the following principles apply:

- The entity should be strictly independent from the government and political parties
- Members should be experts appointed with limited government influence
- The body should support media freedom

These principles are not respected in the current arrangements regarding the MPC. The new Council’s leadership has strong military ties. The military has also shown it improperly expects the MPC to serve as an enforcer of government messaging. In February, it directed the Council to tell journalists to avoid certain “incorrect words” about the coup.

CLD has prepared a short Note on international standards governing media regulatory bodies and the situation of the Myanmar Press Council. It is available in English and Burmese at: <https://www.law-democracy.org/live/for-the-myanmar-press-council-legitimacy-requires-independence/>

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