

International Conference on Promoting Freedom of Expression and Marginalized Voices in the Media

9-10 October 2017,

Kathmandu Declaration

The International Conference on Promoting Freedom of Expression and Marginalized Voices in the Media held on 9-10 October 2017 in Kathmandu and attended by delegates from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the UK, discussed several issues that the media is facing in this region. After two days of rigorous discussions on the independence of media and enhancing marginalized voices, the conference would like to make the following declarations:

1. The conference has concluded that the ability of journalists and media outlets in the South Asian region to work independently and freely is challenged by the vested interests of different sectors including corporate and politicians, as well as the political and ideological biases of the journalists themselves. This situation is not satisfactory and has led to self-censorship within the media. We pledge to take the necessary measures to minimize this through collaboration within the region.
2. The conference recognizes and appreciates the existing constitutional provisions protecting freedom of expression, but has serious concern about the regressive attitude of governments and political forces towards press freedom and freedom of expression, evident in their policies and actions. The conference stresses the need to combat this in a united fashion, through mutual cooperation and common agendas.
3. The conference calls on governments to introduce policies that is friendly towards small and local media, especially alternative media which are online and rely on new technologies to ensure the voice of the voiceless.
4. The conference is concerned about inequality and lack of inclusiveness in the newsroom as well as lack of diversity in media content in the region. Delegates pledge to work together towards making the newsrooms and media content more inclusive.
5. The conference has concluded that corporate control over media outlets in the region curtails their editorial independence and that the region's media outlets are increasingly serving corporate interests in the name of media survival. This conference urges the

media houses to respect media freedom and guard it through proper policies and joint effort by all the journalists in the region.

6. The conference pledges to be involved in developing strong mechanisms for the protection of journalists, media infrastructure and equipment during times of disaster. We also pledge to develop emergency preparedness guidelines as an alternative mechanism, maintain regular communication and coordination among the stakeholders at local, national, regional and global levels, to protect the journalists and the media institutions physically, and to enhance our professional skills to work during disasters.
7. The conference resolves that media houses and practitioners should honor their non-discriminatory policies, treating everyone equally regardless of race, caste, class, gender, disability and religion, in order to make the newsroom and media content inclusive.