



**International Federation of Journalists & Friedrich Ebert Foundation**

## **SOUTH ASIAN MEDIA SOLIDARITY NETWORK**

### **DECLARATION**

We, the representatives of member organisations of the South Asian Media Solidarity Network, meeting in Kathmandu on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2007, reaffirm our belief in free media institutions as an essential part of each of our country's effort to build a truly democratic and representative political order. As working journalists, media practitioners and organisers, we are committed to the fostering of a democratic and professional media culture with a responsibility to the public interest. We believe in professional freedom not as a privilege but as a responsibility, embodying respect for the truth and the right of every individual citizen to know.

We believe that access to information is the right of every individual and that we as media practitioners should seek through our professional endeavours to fulfil this right in every possible manner. We believe that all journalists and media staff have the right to work in conditions of safety and security. They have the right to freedom of association and to collectively bargain for wages and appropriate working conditions.

We as members of SAMSAN pledge our commitment to working together as a cohesive network to support each other in our common aspiration to improve and assert press freedom and the rights of journalists in the South Asia region.

We, as members of the SAMSAN, agree to:

- Continue the ongoing exchange of information about attacks on press freedom, freedom of expression and journalists' rights and to systematically document these using all appropriate media, especially, though not limited to, the resources of the internet and information technology
- Provide information for the annual report on press freedom in South Asia published by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
- Encourage coordination between journalists' unions, press freedom organisations and human rights bodies at a local, national and regional level
- Develop and implement a training program to build capacity in each country and across the network to support this work
- Seek to convene regular meetings of the network on a biennial basis as well as additional meetings when opportunities arise
- Appoint a country convenor for each representative country to be responsible for follow up support and to issue country protests and communicate relevant issues, particularly from conflict affected regions
- Stand together as a network of committed professionals in mutual solidarity and contribute to each others' struggles
- Utilise the secretariat facilities of IFJ offices in Sydney and Delhi to enhance coordination and solidarity among member organisations.

Plan for further action:

We further agree to adopt the following four part framework and elements for an urgent programme of action and assistance to the media:

1. A Fair Workplace

- **To unify** the profession through structural support and political recognition of the need for genuine journalists' associations and trade unions;
- **To promote** trade union and organisational development in each country, to seek minimum standards of social protection and service conditions, and to ensure that all journalists and media staff are adequately paid for their work.
- **To demand** that governments involve genuine journalist unions in accreditation processes
- **To facilitate** the regional and international exchange of experience and best practice on trade union building, organising, recruiting, campaigning and management.
- **To build** the capacity of trade unions and journalists' association including membership, communication and administrative systems and democratic representative structures.

2. Human rights, diversity and editorial independence

- **To launch** broadly-based campaigns supported by coalitions of groups within civil society and journalism in defence of media freedom;
- **To share experiences and stand in mutual solidarity** in campaigns involving the right to know; to fight jointly against laws that abridge professional freedoms, such as defamation laws and anti-terror laws that target the media;
- **To develop** joint initiatives of journalists' organisations and other groups in civil society in support of fundamental human rights;
- **To continue and expand** professional training programmes covering conflict reporting and tolerance as developed by the IFJ, its unions and other media interest groups which should also promote the values of citizenship and diversity in media;
- **To examine** new ways and methods of working on the issue of journalism and conflict in order to widen the scope of reporting which will create new options for reporters and editors and ensure professional access to all relevant sources of information and interests involved;
- **To promote** common standards of editorial independence and minimum editorial statutes in state-owned, public and private media in the region through joint initiatives involving the IFJ and its member organisations;

- **To develop** and strengthen independent systems of self-regulation under the jurisdiction of media professionals which can act as monitors paying particular attention to issues of diversity in the media and violations of press freedom;
- **To encourage** journalists organisations to adopt codes of ethics, of which an illustrative example is the IFJ Code;
- **To recognise** outstanding journalism in the area of conflict, diversity and tolerance through an annual journalism award for journalists in the region;
- **To promote** policies of gender equality in the media, including within journalists' associations and trade unions, in order to encourage decision making and leadership by women.

### 3. Journalists under pressure

- **To work for** a safe environment for journalists in the region, including through safety training, and the translation and adaptation of safety materials into major languages;
- **To campaign** for the inclusion of safety training and insurance in collective agreements;
- **To look** at new ways of uniting journalists and others into national and regional networks to support press freedom;
- **To urgently respond** to challenges to journalists' rights in individual countries through international missions, global days of action, and other relevant mechanisms and processes of regional and international solidarity;
- **To support and assist** journalists in need;
- **To continue to develop** means of highlighting press freedom infringements and alerting the region and the world to these attacks.

### 4. Solidarity

- **To build on** the structures for cross-border co-operation and regional networks of media centres, training institutes and journalists' unions and associations, including through national and regional e-groups;
- **To organise** meetings for journalists' organisations and media in each country to promote co-operation and solidarity among media professionals;

### 5. Follow-up work

- **To insist** that a comprehensive plan of action for the support and development of media and independent journalism in South Asia is included within the international programmes being developed for the region including the allocation of substantial funding to achieve these aims.

- **To begin** discussions towards the adoption at an early date, of national media charters for each of the countries represented in SAMSN, on the lines of the Sri Lankan model adopted at Tholangamuwa on September 11, 2005 and the Afghan model adopted at Kabul on July 31, 2007.
- **To harmonise** the principles of these national charters into an agreed charter for SAMSN as a standing body committed to the ideals stated in this declaration.
- **To agree** at the next meeting of SAMSN on a formal constitution for the body with wide and inclusive membership in the South Asian region and to lay out a program of action for advancing the collective objectives of the body.