

"New mindset" over media accountability, future of journalism - IFJ

Building public trust in journalism is critical for democracy and development and requires a "new mindset" about media accountability says the International Federation of Journalists.

In a statement to the 36-country Bali Democracy Forum, sponsored by the Government of Indonesia which concluded earlier this month, participants at an IFJ workshop on media accountability said that governments must give top priority to creating conditions "that ensure free media and independent journalism, without any form of legal or political pressure."

The workshop, held in the shadow of the Philippines massacre of 31 journalists and others, called for government action to protect journalists. It also supported demands for self-rule in journalism and for a new approach to media accountability based upon partnership between journalism and civil society.

"It's time to get away from the idea that media accountability is only about policing the work of journalists," said Aidan White, IFJ general secretary. "We need a new mindset, one in which partnership between the public and media becomes central. Government must help by supporting principles of self-rule in media and by encouraging more citizens' voice in public affairs."

The conclusions of the media workshop, which was organised in the framework of the IFJ global Ethical Journalism Initiative, were welcomed by the governments meeting at the second Bali Democracy Forum.

Journalists' unions, media experts, and press council representatives from 18 countries attended the workshop which provided a case study on the work of the Indonesian Press Council. Besides mediating problems between the media and the public, the Indonesian Council is a major campaigner for media freedom in the country and also drives public education on the role of independent journalism in Indonesian society.

"The challenge for the future is to build structures for dialogue with media that people can trust and that will encourage journalism of high standards," said White.

The workshop called on governments to support new forms of co-operation between civil society and media. Participants supported the idea of forms of media accountability that can campaign for press freedom and good governance in media, contribute to media education, and promote citizens' access to information.

"Governments must support this work and self-rule in journalism," said White. "They should avoid the temptation to regulate journalism. Their role is important - to protect and nourish the rights of media and the information rights of citizens and journalists - but they must not interfere in editorial work."

The workshop was held with the support of the Norwegian and Indonesian governments and was a follow-up activity of the Global Inter-media Dialogue held between 2006 and 2008.

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