

PCCSL's 10th anniversary International Conference ends in optimism

Call for respect of self-regulation, enactment of RTI, repealing of Press Council Act

Respect for self-regulation, enactment of Right to Information (RTI) legislation and repealing of the Press Council Act were among the main recommendations from a three-day conference held to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) this week.

The conference titled “Self-Regulation and Ethical Reporting” was held from 13th to the 15th January at the Sri Lanka Press Institute with the participation of both local and international media personnel, professionals and academics. These included representatives from Press Councils (both statutory and voluntary) of India, Norway, Denmark, Myanmar, Bhutan and a number of activists and editors from Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The keynote speaker at the inauguration of the conference at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, Prof. Savithri Goonesekere, Emeritus Professor of Law and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, applauded the media profession and its leaders for the efforts taken to withstand the attempts to muzzle the press and push for media law reforms through the establishment of institutions that focused on the social responsibility of the media by regulating themselves.

She also highlighted the importance of establishing proper guidelines and code of ethics by which the journalists can be governed.

“It is important that guidelines on responsible reporting are clear and commitment to broader values of the profession are stimulated, which would ultimately become the bulwark of democratic governance in the country and in the process, set practice guidelines that are not too hard to follow but also do not undermine the very core,” she said.

Prof. Goonesekere emphasized the “press had an enormous obligation to foster inclusive growth and respect for human rights, tolerance, dissent and the legitimacy of criticism.”

A call for the enactment of a RTI Act was a key issue highlighted throughout the sessions. Taking the example of India, panelist Ms. Nandini Sahai of the International Centre in Goa highlighted the role of the media in pushing forward to demand access to government held information and spoke of the important role of civil society and the general public in advocating for such a law.

Both local and international panelists highlighted the need to strengthen the powers of the PCCSL, with wider support from publishers and owners while also welcoming the timely

revisions of the existing professional code of practice by which journalists of the country should be bound.

Panelists, Manik De Silva, Member of the Board of Directors of the PCCSL, and Dr. Ranga Kalansooriya, former Director General of the Sri Lanka Press Institute highlighted the need for the establishment of better working conditions for journalists such as better remuneration, safe working environment and professional independence (of journalists).

The working sessions included discussions on the RTI, self-regulation, codes of practice, skills improvements for journalists, especially in the local language media, cyber news and social media and its ramifications.

The proceedings concluded with the resolution to work towards achieving the recommendations highlighted by the conference.

The United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) partnered with the PCCSL in hosting the conference.