

**Media Statement – 07 July 2017**

**Draft Act on Independent Council for News Media Standards – A clarification from the Free Media Movement**

A contentious situation has arisen in the country on the draft Act on Independent Council for News Media Standards, where the name of the Free Media Movement (FMM) is also being brought up in the debates. Therefore, it is necessary to make the position of the FMM clear regarding some of the issues that are being discussed.

In one of his statements, Director General of the Government Information Department, Dr Ranga Kalansooriya had implied that FMM has been involving to the drafting of the above Act since its beginning, which is a half-truth.

The then Convener of the FMM, Ms. Seetha Ranjaneer had participated in an initial meeting called in order to discuss issues related to journalists and a committee appointed to look into the matters in which she became a member. Mr. Wijayananda Jayaweera was appointed as the head of the Committee. Various media groups were invited for a few discussions and finally Mr. Wijayananda Jayaweera was given the task of drafting an Act.

After the first meeting that was called to present the draft, either Ms. Seetha Ranjaneer or the FMM was unaware of the sequence incidents. We became aware of the fact that the Cabinet approval was granted for a public consultation on the draft, through newspapers. We believe that the awareness of the many other media organizations were not much better than this.

Therefore, we believe that the participation of the media community since the initiation of the draft Act as well as its transparency has been problematic. It is unfortunate that these circumstances make it difficult to create an open discussion on the contents.

However, FMM has been lobbying for a process of broader media reforms including regulation for ethical media usage, for a long period of time. Today, it has become a prominent need. We believe that it should be done through a broader discussion and the participation of media community. We have distributed the above draft Act which we received later among our membership and other interested parties, with the sole purpose of creating such dialogue.

Nevertheless, as an organization, we are still studying the draft Act and willing to declare our position too. But we firmly emphasize the fact that such process will not be successful, unless it can gain the participation and the conviction of the media community including media organizations of the country.



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