

## Nepal: Withdraw Media Council Bill and ensure press freedom

(Kathmandu/Bangkok, 14 May 2019) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) expresses grave concern over the Media Council Bill proposed by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCIT) on 10 May 2019. The Bill was registered in the Parliament of Nepal for further processing. FORUM-ASIA believes that the restrictive measures of the Bill will curtail media freedom and urges the Government to withdraw the Bill.

The Bill proposes that Nepal Media Council will replace the existing Press Council and will be able to recommend authorities to take actions against media organisations if they violate press ethics as defined by the Government.<sup>1</sup> It will also allow Nepal Media Council to impose an exorbitant pecuniary fine between Rs 25,000 and Rs one million to media personnel or media house. Suspension of press pass of media persons and downgrading of the classification of print media outlets are the other proposed punitive measures. FORUM-ASIA believes that the proposed Media Council Bill will further curtail press freedom guaranteed in the Constitution of Nepal.

The Government's continuous efforts to restrict press freedom is criticised by the media houses and civil rights activists in the country. They claimed that the Bill was drafted without any meaningful consultation with the stakeholders and the public. A recent Freedom Forum report pointed out that the Government of Nepal is increasingly using legal measures to stifle freedom of the press.<sup>2</sup> In the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, Nepal had fallen six places from 100 in 2017 to 106 this year. Due to the restrictive laws such as the Information Technology Bill and other criminal procedure codes, journalists in Nepal are reportedly facing more restrictions for uncovering the truth.

FORUM-ASIA firmly believes that press freedom is essential for freedom of expression and opinion, and imposing restrictive measures to media will negatively impact the very fundamentals of democracy. To uphold democracy in Nepal, guaranteeing ultimate freedom of the press is indisputable.

FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of Nepal to immediately withdraw the Media Council Bill from the Parliament and to fully implement the constitutional provisions of press freedom in compliance with international standards.

### About FORUM-ASIA:

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 81 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

### For further information, please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2019-05-13/journalists-group-begins-struggle-against-media-council-bill.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2019-05-01/threats-to-press-freedom-have-only-increased-in-nepal-says-report.html>