



The World Press Freedom Day

Summary of Main Recommendations



Government of Nepal



Election Commission,
Nepal



Federation of
Nepali Journalists



EUROPEAN UNION



United Nations
Development Programme
Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Press
Freedom Day

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the conference and in this report are not necessarily shared by the organizers.

On 3 May 2019, Nepal marked World Press Freedom Day with the theme, “Media for Democracy and Peace: Journalism and Elections in the Age of the Internet.” Nepal’s Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCIT), the Election Commission Nepal (ECN) and the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), together with the European Union (EU), UNESCO Nepal and UNDP, organized a one-day national conference to celebrate this occasion. The recommendations from the proceedings have been included here. The opinions expressed in the conference and in this summary are not necessarily shared by the organizers.

1. New Opportunities and Challenges for the Integrity of Nepal’s elections in the Digital Age

The session on new opportunities and challenges for the integrity of Nepal’s elections in the digital age was led by former Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel. His presentation emphasized the importance of understanding how election processes are being reshaped in the digital age.

Recommendations:

- Media should act independently and fairly and maintain oversight to support the process of election to maintain electoral integrity.
- The Election Commission should enhance its engagement with the media not only during elections but during the entire electoral cycle.
- Media must provide impartial information, which will help contribute to independent and fair elections.
- There is a need for better collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders in the pursuit of credible elections.
- This event should serve as the starting point for the discussions around electoral integrity in the digital age.

2. Media and its Role in Supporting Peace and Democracy

The session on media and its role in supporting peace and democracy was led by Mr. Binod Bhattarai, Media Expert. This session emphasized that the media have typically been in favour of democracy and peace and sought to understand how the role of the media contributes to both.

Recommendations:

- There should be an enabling legal and policy environment for media to work freely.
- Media should honour its professionalism and should be unbiased in their reporting. It should abide by the Code of Conduct.
- Election commission shall facilitate media in collecting and disseminating news during the electoral process.
- Government bodies at all tiers need to have information officers to facilitate easy access to information.

3. Voter Education through Mass Media (Increasing People’s Access to Information)

Mr. Neelkantha Uprety, former Chief Election Commissioner, led the session on voter education through mass media and increasing people’s access to information. His presentation emphasized the need to use the digital media technologies as well as traditional media to our advantage to reach voters and citizens.

Recommendations:

- Mass media should be used to impart voter education.
- Voter education should be a continuous process and should not only be prioritized during the elections.
- Inclusive content for voter education needs to be designed: it needs to take into account the various marginalized groups as well as people living with disabilities to ensure they too have easy access to the materials.
- ECN needs to work with various media to distribute free educational materials through their communication platforms.
- ECN should also explore the possibility of having a full-time staff for civic and voter education, instead of relying on secondary school social studies teachers who are unable to devote adequate time for this important task.

4. Social Media Policies and Practices

Mr. Ujjwal Acharya, social media researcher, led the session on social media policies and practices, which sought to examine the relationship between social media and journalism. The session discussed the practice of using social media, disinformation through social media, and the experience from the last elections.

Recommendations:

- Journalists should be very careful about disinformation in social media and should not publish or broadcast news without proper verification.
 - ECN should upload and archive its content so people can easily access it.
 - Social media is a tool that can both spread as well as fight disinformation.
 - FNJ should finalize the social media guidelines for journalists and share it with other media houses as a reference.
 - ECN should issue a social media code of conduct for the general public and political parties during the elections.
 - The Nepal Police should remain vigilant and act to ensure that trolling and hate speech is discouraged, especially on females and activists.
 - The state must protect and promote social media as a public accountability tool, and act upon any complaints received through social media.
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5. Digital Media – Portrayal of Gender and Social Inclusion

Former Election Commissioner, Ms. Ila Sharma, facilitated the session on the portrayal of gender and social inclusion in digital media. The panel discussed how women and disadvantaged groups are often marginalized in digital media

Recommendations:

- Newsrooms must be inclusive to represent an accurate picture of the country.
 - Women participation in journalism is still low and FNJ needs to work on this through capacity building of women journalists. Moreover, women must be encouraged to cover topics other than those that are stereotypically seen as covered by female journalists.
 - Women and the marginalized need to be portrayed in a more empowering light through the digital media. This can help empower women and marginalized voters as well as candidates.
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6. Media Policies Conducive to Peace and Democracy

Ms. Babita Basnet, Media Expert, led the session on media policies conducive to peace and democracy. She examined the role that media can play to support peace and democracy, reminding the audience that the media has been a reliable supporter of elections, democracy and peace.

Recommendations:

- All the media laws that will be brought up by the federal, provincial or local governments must honour the Constitution of Nepal.
 - The laws and policies should be based on the international standard of press freedom in democratic countries.
 - Media laws should be focused on making media self-regulatory rather than controlling them. Press Freedom must be protected.
 - UN Plan of Action in context of Nepal should be implemented.
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There was a general consensus on the need to adapt to digital technologies, more so in light of the upcoming 2022 elections in Nepal. The event served as a catalyst for discussions about the impact of technology in the digital age and how it influences elections, the electoral cycle and, ultimately, peace and democracy. The general recommendations from the event include:

- Increase ECN capacity to use social media for outreach, but not neglect “traditional” media.
 - Analyze the potential threat to credibility of next elections.
 - Adapt code of conduct and legislation accordingly, without curtailing fundamental freedoms.
 - Increase ECN capacity to detect and respond to disinformation and other threats, both within ECN and through partnerships.
 - Regularly review the situation in order to be prepared for emerging challenges.
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