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Workshop on Media Regulations for New Times :
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**WORKSHOP ON MEDIA REGULATIONS FOR NEW TIMES
BANGKOK, THAILAND APRIL 15 – 17 1998**

The arrival of the newer services such as the Internet, digital and interactive TV, as a result of convergence has opened a wide debate about how media should be regulated. This workshop on "Media Regulations for the New Times", organised by AMIC, has considered the current state of that discussion in several Asian countries and has formulated the following recommendations.

The crucial role of media in fostering democratic structures and development of the Asian region, leads us to reiterate that the newer services should be considered as an important opportunity for the development of the media and any action which stimulates access to the new technologies should be encouraged. A characteristic of Asia, being a diversity of languages and cultures, the rich possibilities offered by these technologies should be harnessed to enrich these cultures.

If regulation is considered to be necessary, it should conform to the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and the rule of law. When regulation is enacted full accountability of the implementation and enforcement of those regulations must be established.

Freedom of information should be an essential aspect of the relationship between governments, media and the citizens. New technologies, such as the WWW can allow public information more widely and at a lower cost, therefore we recommend that governments desist of perceiving these technologies as a threat but instead treat them as powerful tools of good governance.

While the newer technologies may offer an increased range of services, pluralism remains essential. It must inform the ownership of media and greater diversity of content.

The fast pace of technological developments throw up a complex gamut of regulatory challenges to society. This can best be addressed by self regulation which should therefore be considered as the preferred model for regulation.

Although convergence is taking place, we recognize that there is still a need for tailoring regulation to the particular requirements of different media. We therefore recommend the following:

Print Media

Acknowledging that the right to publish is an aspect of freedom of speech and as such a fundamental right for every citizen, we recommend that:

- a simple procedure of registration should be sufficient for the press
- self regulatory mechanisms should be in place such as Press Councils to deal with complaints against unfair practices of the press.
- where press and media laws inhibit and stifle this fundamental principle, these should be reviewed and liberalised to promote a free press.
- Press Councils and similar bodies, should have sufficient powers and resources to enable efficient and effective enforcement of their decisions.
- given the public service nature of the press, efforts should ensure the effective representation of diverse sections of the community in the Press and similar Councils.
- legislation should be enacted to ensure maximum transparency to avoid abuses of ownership and control.

- wherever there is an attempt to devalue the independence and the role of the editor and the editorial staff by any means, efforts should be made to monitor and discourage such practices by Press Councils and other bodies.
- monitoring of press coverage by media watch groups is crucial to ensure fairness about the patterns and priorities of such coverage.
- efforts should be made to encourage and promote grassroots and specialised journalism.

Radio and TV

Given the crucial importance of these media in reaching the poor and the illiterate, and their transnational impact we propose that measures be taken to:

- expand audience choices
- enhance open competition and transparency in the licensing process
- strengthen professionalism and ethical standards in broadcasting
- promote greater regional co-operation in the sector
- build regional consensus on content regulation.
- Encourage technologies which facilitate a more efficient use of scarce resources such as the broadcast spectrum.

The Internet

In formulating an Internet policy, governments should set clear priorities, which should be as follows:

- Laws and policies should facilitate and encourage the development of the technological infrastructure and institutions related to the Internet.
- Attempts should be made to promote local hosting of information. Steps should be taken to develop national and regional networks of high bandwidth; to train programmers and users and to encourage the spread of local languages on the Net alongside English.
- A holistic and flexible approach towards regulation must be developed based on a mature understanding of the issues involved in a rapidly changing environment.
- Efforts should be made to clear obstacles to e-commerce given the importance of trade and commercial communications in the global market.

MEDIA REGULATIONS FOR NEW TIMES
April 15-17, 1998, Bangkok, Thailand

Completion Report

Twenty five senior media practitioners, policy makers and academics from eleven countries participated in the three-day workshop that discussed the state of media regulations covering the print, broadcasting and the Internet in Asia. They highlighted desirable changes in media regulations to ensure better opportunities for media development and encourage access to new technologies.

Stefaan Verhulst, professor of Oxford University keynoted the workshop and shared his insights on the current and future role of regulation and law within a converging media environment. He cautioned against suggestions to scrap existing regulatory arrangements developed in the old world of a limited number of media outlets and services. He also argues for continuing regulations of competition aspects of the industry and for a behavioral rather than structural regulation.

Nine country papers covering India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were presented, providing information on the state of development of new media in these countries and the difficulties of updating regulations. Other countries represented were United Kingdom, North Ireland and Japan.

Working groups sessions were also held to discuss recommendations to improve media regulations covering in the region. The result was a two-page list of recommendations on regulations relevant to the print, broadcasting and the Internet industries. The underlying principles covering these recommendation state that technologies should be harnessed to enrich Asian culture, that when regulations are necessary, they should allow for pluralism, and conform to the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and the rule of law,

The inputs from the workshop will form part of a book on media regulations that will be published by AMIC this year.

The delegates thanked AMIC and the sponsors for efficiently organizing a workshop on such an important topic and said that they look forward to the publication of the book on media regulations. The Faculty of Communication Arts of Chulalongkorn University was AMIC's local partner in organizing the workshop while the Swedish International Development & Cooperation Agency (SIDA) provided the funding resources.