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<th>AMIC-TAF Seminar on Constitutional Law, the Media, and the Electoral Process In ASEAN: 18-20 April 1990, Singapore: [group reports]</th>
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Group Reports
GROUP REPORT: MASS MEDIA GROUP

Members

Nita Swandika, Indonesia
H. Anwar Bey, Indonesia
Mong Hay Lao, Kampuchea
Shad Faruqi, Malaysia
Zainon Ahmad, Malaysia
Paulynn Sicam, Philippines
Martin Soong, Singapore
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Knowledge of the Constitution and of the philosophic, economic and political values on which the constitutional edifice is built cannot grow overnight.

It has to evolve a period of time assisted though it can be (and should be) by the country's mass media.

In the ASEAN context it is imperative that media practitioners participate vigorously in disseminating knowledge of the Constitution and laws and in strengthening constitutional values in society. They have a duty to bring the Constitution closer to the people and to reduce the wide gap between the theory of the Constitution and the practices of society. They have a duty to generate discussion on the great constitutional issues of the times and, thereby, to assist in the decision-making of society.

Such an activist role envisages knowledge and understanding of constitutional fundamentals within the journalistic community. These are, unfortunately, lacking.

To improve awareness of constitutional values within society it is hereby proposed that:

1. All journalists should receive instruction in the laws of the Constitution both from a local and comparative perspective. The comparative perspective can be strengthened by bringing Asean journalists together for periodic regional seminars.

2. Universities and Colleges involved in training students for careers in mass communication should strengthen the law component of their curricula and give special emphasis to the study of constitutional law.

3. Space allocated to the 'Letters to the Editor' column in papers should be expanded. This column should be improved by editorial initiative in inviting readers' comments on specific issues chosen by the Editor. A number of diverse views on the
topic could be printed contemporaneously. This will permit focus on a particular topic as well as expression of a variety of views.

4. Radio and TV should disseminate alternative points of view by having more 'round table discussions' on legal and social issues of concern to the public. It is important, however, that the interviewers and interviewees should be persons who can command the interest and respect of society.

5. There must be more investigative reporting on constitutional issues. Analytical pieces on constitutional questions can help to arouse interest in the Constitution; put theory face to face with reality and introduce possibilities of constitutional reform in areas where these are necessary.

6. On appropriate occasions 'Special Supplements' on the laws and institutions of the country should be published in the major newspapers. These occasions could be: the approach of an election, the summoning, prorogation or dissolution of Parliament, the coronation of a King or Sultan, a constitutional amendment or independence day.

A 'Constitution Day' should be celebrated by all newspapers.

7. On important issues the electorate's views should be tapped by commissioning opinion polls or conducting opinion polls through the newspaper itself.

8. The government should be requested, in those countries where there is no such course, to introduce a special course on The Country's Constitution or The Rights and Duties of Citizens at the primary or secondary level.
GROUP REPORT: COMMUNITY MEDIA GROUP

Members

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Suggestions / Recommendations:

I. The press should urge the government to have teachers trained to teach the basic principles of the Constitution and the election process.

(The Press could recommend, for example, the passing of an enabling law integrating the teaching of the Constitution into the teacher-training curriculum.)

II. The media should carry both the negative and positive sides of the politics and policies of government.

III. National and/or community information agencies of the government should be used to conduct information drives on the basic rights of the people under the Constitution.

(This is to supplement as well as complement the efforts of other groups like NGOs engaged in public education campaigns on the law and human rights.)

IV. Require as a condition for the grant of licenses and/or franchises for the operation of media facilities, the provision of free, regular time / space for the enlightenment of the people of their obligation and rights under the Constitution.

(This is particularly applicable in ASEAN countries where the government exercises control over the media. The concept is similar to the grant of franchises to public carriers and utilities; the idea is to balance the objective of making some money from the operation of the carrier, with the objective of rendering a public service.)
V. Encourage local government councils to pass ordinances and/or local laws geared towards the promotion of awareness of the local residents of their political rights under the Constitution.

VI. AMIC and/or The Asia Foundation could be asked to provide training to at least one person from each ASEAN country on the art of teaching and putting across to the people the workings of the Constitution and the electoral process in the simplest form through the media.

(This could take the form of a seminar-workshop on how to cover, report on, and popularize the Constitution through the media.)
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