

## **Ground-breaking Asia Media Forum Backs EJM Campaign**

Media leaders from 17 countries have adopted a comprehensive action plan to strengthen ethical journalism in Asia and at the same time they are challenging Asian governments who try to control media.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Bali Media Forum, held under the theme Ethical Journalism and Citizen Media: Giving People a Voice, called on the 73-country Bali Democracy Forum meeting nearby to lift pressure on journalism and to recognise that all forms of self-regulation in media must be free of political influence.

The message made its way into the final declaration issued by the governments giving a boost to the Forum which has outlined a strategy to improve ethical journalism, to strengthen good governance of media and to support self-regulation through a new regional alliance of press councils.

The Forum was organised by the Thomson Foundation, the Indonesian Press Council and the Institute for Peace and Democracy in partnership with the Ethical Journalism Network and included journalists from across the region.

Presentations were made by media leaders from new democracies where journalism is emerging from the shadows of political control – such as Myanmar and East Timor – who shared experience with journalists from countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and China where self-regulation suffers from a mix of political influence and corporate indifference.

More encouraging stories were told by regional press councils in Hong Kong, Indonesia and Thailand and others from Australia and Norway.

Inevitably, the discussion turned to the challenge of self-regulation in online and social media, but the Forum noted the distinction between “online activism” and journalism and agreed that the ethics of traditional off-line journalism should apply to the work of journalists whether they are posting on the internet or Twitter.

One highlight of the meeting was the presentation by Azhar Abbas the Managing Director of GEOTV, Pakistan’s biggest media outlet, who spoke about the company’s ground-breaking ethics and governance strategy [GEOAsool](#) which he said represented a new social contract with the audience. This campaign was launched three months ago and was developed after extensive consultation inside Pakistan and with international advisors including the EJM.

The Forum’s conclusions have also endorsed key points of the EJM campaign for ethics, good governance and self-regulation including:

- The launch “as a priority” of an Alliance of Press Councils for the Asia Pacific region, which will establish a common standard for independent regulation of journalism across all media platforms;
- Preparation of report on the state of ethics, governance and self-regulation in the Asia-Pacific region as well as a pilot research project to prepare a global report on the state of self-regulation around the world;
- A series of training programmes on ethical journalism and good governance for media targeting working journalists, online reporters and also media managers.

The Forum organisers hope that its programme will help unify the international community of press councils which has been divided for years because of political interference. They say the work of press councils and self-regulation becomes impossible when members of a press council are appointed by political bodies.

This principle of political independence was also underlined by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide who spoke on the role of media in reporting minorities and challenging intolerance. He told the Forum: “The right of journalists to decide themselves how best to communicate information and ideas to the public should be respected.”

In order for media to fulfill their role of providing society with accurate facts, he said, “a return to ethical journalism is required.” He said this was why Norway supports the Ethical Journalism Network.